

Notes from the Underground: key ideas guiding this PhD

### Common Sense

"None of us is able to build the world of significations and meanings from scratch; each of us enters a 'prefabricated' world, in which certain things are important and others are not; in which the established relevances bring certain things into focus and leave others in the shadow. Above all, we enter a world in which an awful lot of aspects are obvious to the point of not being consciously noticed any more and in need of no active effort, not even spelling them out, to be invisibly, yet tangibly present in everything we do – and thereby endowing our actions, and the things we act upon, with the solidity of 'reality'" (Bauman, 1997, p. 8).

### Tourists

"An ever growing number of postmodern men and women, while by no means immune to the fear of being lost and every so often carried away by the recurring waves of 'homesickness', find the open-endedness of their situation attractive enough to outweigh the anguish of uncertainty. They revel in the pursuit of new and untested experience, are willingly seduced by offers of adventure, and on the whole prefer keeping options open to all fixity of commitment. In this change of mood they are aided and abetted by a market organized entirely around consumer demand and vitally interested in keeping that demand permanently unsatisfied and thus preventing the ossification of any acquired habits and whipping up the consumers' appetite for ever more intense sensations and ever new experience" (Bauman, 1997, p. 13).

### Vagabonds

"Since the criterion of purity is the ability to partake in the consumerist game, those left outside as a 'problem', as the 'dirt' which needs to be 'disposed of', are *flawed consumers* – people unable to respond to the enticements of the consumer market because they lack the required resources, people unable to be 'free individuals' according to the sense of 'freedom' as defined in terms of consumer choice. They are the new 'impure', who do not fit into the new scheme of purity. Looked at from the now dominant perspective of the consumer market, they are redundant – truly 'objects out of place'" (Bauman, 1997, p. 14).

### Tourists & Vagabonds

"The tourists stay or move at their hearts' desire. They abandon the site when new untried opportunities beckon elsewhere. The vagabonds, however, know that they won't stay for long, however strongly they wish to, since nowhere they stop are they welcome: if the tourists move because they find the world irresistibly *attractive* the vagabonds move because they find the world unbearably *inhospitable*" (p. 92).

"The tourists travel because they want to; the vagabonds – because they have *no other choice*" (p. 93).

"A word of warning: tourists and vagabonds are the *metaphors* of contemporary life. One can be (and often is) a tourist or a vagabond without ever travelling physically far..." (Bauman, 1997, p. 93).

### Postmodern Art

"Let me repeat: postmodern art is a critical and emancipatory force in as far as it compels the artist, now bereaved of binding schemas and foolproof methods, and the viewer / listener, now left without canons of seeing and the comforting uniformity of taste, to engage in the process of understanding / interpreting / meaning-making which inevitably brings together the questions of objective truth and the subjective grounds of reality. By doing so, it liberates the possibilities of life, which are infinite, from the tyranny of consensus, which is – must be, cannot but be – foreclosing and incapacitating. The meaning of postmodern art, I propose, is to open wide the gate to the arts of meaning" (Bauman, 1997, p. 111).

### The Death of the Author

"Yet the beginning of the distinctly postmodern era coincided with the proclamation of the 'death of the author'; from Roland Barthes through Michel Foucault to Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard, all the most perceptive observers of the convolutions of contemporary culture and the suppliers of its most influential self-interpretations point to the anonymity of the self-evolving texts, to which the authors lost their once cherished *privileged access*, forfeiting on the way their past monopoly of meaning-making and interpretation" (p. 160).

"The most pensive and philosophically acute postmodern artists, when they struggle to represent the spirit and the tendency of their era in their work and in the techniques with which the works are executed, more than anything else portray and express the absence of the 'original'. ...[T]hey and many others quote, collate, reposition, recombine, and above all copy and multiply the already authored icons, floating the question of authorship and originality, and seeing to it that the question cannot be raised again in any meaningful way" (Bauman, 1997, p. 160).



### The Postmodern Mind

"[T]he postmodern mind is altogether less excited than its modern adversary by the prospect ... of enclosing the world in a grid of neat categories and clear-cut divisions. We are somewhat less horrified today by the nasty habit of things of spilling over their definitional boundaries, or even by the premonition that the drawing of such boundaries with any degree of lasting reliability defies human resources. We are also learning to live with the revelation that one cannot articulate all one knows, and that to understand – to know how to go on – does not always require the availability of a verbalized precept" (Bauman, 1997, p. 167).