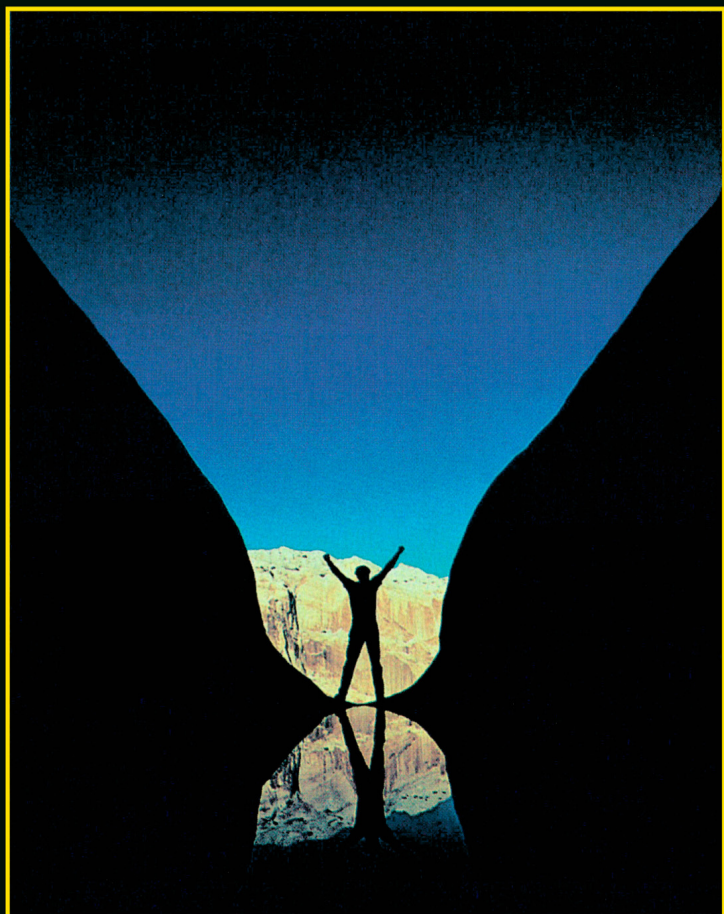


ZYGMUNT BAUMAN



POSTMODERNITY  
— AND ITS —  
DISCONTENTS



## Postmodernity and its Discontents



# Postmodernity and its Discontents

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Washington Square, New York

Copyright © Zygmunt Bauman 1997

The right of Zygmunt Bauman to be identified as author of  
this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright,  
Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in 1997 by Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

*Editorial office:*

Polity Press  
65 Bridge Street  
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

*Marketing and production:*

Blackwell Publishers Ltd  
108 Cowley Road  
Oxford OX4 1JF, UK

*Published in the USA by*

Blackwell Publishers Inc.  
238 Main Street  
Cambridge, MA 02142, USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

ISBN 0-7456-1790-5

ISBN 0-7456-1791-3 (pbk)

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library  
and the Library of Congress.

Typeset in 10 on 12 pt Garamond  
by Best-set Typesetter Ltd., Hong Kong  
Printed in Great Britain by TJ Press Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

# Contents

Introduction: Discontents – Modern and Postmodern	1
1 The Dream of Purity	5
2 The Making and Unmaking of Strangers	17
3 The Strangers of the Consumer Era: from the Welfare State to Prison	35
4 Morality Begins at Home: or the Rocky Road to Justice	46
5 Parvenu and Pariah: the Heroes and Victims of Modernity	71
6 Tourists and Vagabonds: the Heroes and Victims of Postmodernity	83
7 Postmodern Art, or the Impossibility of the Avant-garde	95
8 The Meaning of Art and the Art of Meaning	103
9 On Truth, Fiction and Uncertainty	112
10 Culture as Consumer Co-operative	127
11 On the Postmodern Redeployment of Sex: Foucault's <i>History of Sexuality</i> Revisited	141
12 Immortality, Postmodern Version	152
13 Postmodern Religion?	165
14 On Communitarianism and Human Freedom, or How to Square the Circle	186
Afterword: The Last Word – and it Belongs to Freedom	199
Notes	209
Index	218

# Introduction: Discontents – Modern and Postmodern

In 1930 a book called first *Das Unglück in der Kultur*, and later renamed *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, appeared in Vienna. Its author was Sigmund Freud. Almost simultaneously, the English translation appeared – for which Freud suggested a title *Man's Discomfort in Civilization*. As Freud's English editor James Strachey informs us, Joan Riviere, the book's English translator, played instead for a time with the concept of *malaise*, but chose finally the title *Civilization and its Discontents*. It is under this title that Freud's provocative challenge to the folklore of modernity entered our collective consciousness and in the end framed our thinking about the consequences – both intended and unintended – of the modern adventure. (We know now that it was the story of *modernity* which the book told, even if its author preferred to speak of *Kultur* or civilization; only modern society thought of itself as of an activity of 'culture' or 'civilization', and acted on such self-knowledge, with the results Freud set out to explore; the phrase 'modern civilization' is, for this reason, a pleonasm.)

You gain something, but usually you lose something in exchange: so went Freud's message. As 'culture' or 'civilization', modernity is about beauty ('this useless thing which we expect civilization to value'), cleanliness ('dirtiness of any kind seems to us incompatible with civilization') and order ('Order is a kind of compulsion to repeat which, when a regulation has been laid down once and for all, decides when, where and how a thing shall be done, so that in every similar circumstance one is spared hesitation and indecision'). Beauty (that is, whatever gives the sublime pleasure of harmony and perfection of form), purity and order are gains not to be played down and certainly not likely to be given up without an outcry, breast-beating and remorse. But neither are they to be had without paying a heavy price. Nothing predisposes humans 'naturally' to seek or preserve beauty, to keep clean and to observe the routine called order. (If they seem here and there to display such an 'instinct', it must be a contrived and acquired, *trained* inclination, the surest sign of a civilization at work.) Humans need be forced to respect



and appreciate harmony, cleanliness and order. Their freedom to act on their own impulses must be trimmed. Constraint is painful: defence against suffering generates sufferings of its own.

‘Civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct.’ In particular – so Freud tells us – civilization (read: modernity) ‘imposes great sacrifices’ on man’s sexuality and aggressivity. ‘The urge for freedom, therefore, is directed against particular forms and demands of civilization or against civilization altogether.’ And it cannot be otherwise. The pleasures of civilized life come in a package deal, so Freud insists, with sufferings, satisfaction with discontents, submission with rebellion. Civilization – the order imposed upon naturally disorderly humanity – is a compromise, a trade-off, continually challenged and forever nudged to be renegotiated. The pleasure principle is here cut down to the measure of the reality principle and the rules spell out that reality which is the measure of the realistic. ‘Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security.’ However well justified and realistic may be our attempts to improve on specific flaws of the present-day solutions, ‘perhaps we may also familiarize ourselves with the idea that there are difficulties attaching to the nature of civilization which will not yield to any attempt at reform’.

Of that order which was the pride of modernity and the cornerstone of all its other accomplishments (whether appearing under the same rubric of order or hiding under the code-names of beauty and cleanliness), Freud spoke in terms of ‘compulsion’, ‘regulation’, ‘suppression’ or ‘forced renunciation’. Those discontents which were the trade-mark of modernity arose from the ‘excess of order’ and its inseparable companion – the dearth of freedom. Security from the triple threat hidden in the frail body, the untamed world and the aggressive neighbours called for the sacrifice of freedom; first and foremost, the individual’s freedom to seek pleasure. Within the framework of a civilization bent on security, more freedom meant less discontent. Within the framework of a civilization that chose to limit freedom in the name of security, more order meant more discontent.

Ours, however, is the time of deregulation. The reality principle has today to defend itself in the court of justice in which the pleasure principle is the presiding judge. ‘The idea that there are difficulties attaching to the nature of civilization which will not yield to any attempt at reform’ seems to have lost its pristine obviousness. Compulsion and forced renunciation has turned from an irritating necessity into an unwarranted assault launched against individual freedom.

Sixty-five years after *Civilization and its Discontents* was written and published, individual freedom rules supreme; it is the value by which all

other values came to be evaluated, and the benchmark against which the wisdom of all supra-individual rules and resolutions are to be measured. This does not mean, though, that the ideals of beauty, purity and order which sent men and women on their modern voyage of discovery have been forsaken, or lost any of their original lustre. Now, however, they are to be pursued – and fulfilled – through individual spontaneity, will and effort. In its present, postmodern version, modernity seems to have found the philosophers' stone which Freud dismissed as a naive and harmful fantasy: it set out to smelt the precious metals of clean order and orderly cleanliness straight from the ore of the human, all-too-human bid for pleasure, ever more pleasure and ever more pleasurable pleasure – a bid once decried as base and condemned as self-destructive. As if unscathed, perhaps even strengthened, by two centuries of concentrated efforts to keep it in the iron glove of reason-dictated rules and regulations, the 'invisible hand' regained trust and is once more in favour. Individual freedom, once a liability and a problem (perhaps *the* problem) for all order-builders, became the major asset and resource in the perpetual self-creation of the human universe.

You gain something, you lose something else in exchange: the old rule holds as true today as it was true then. Only the gains and the losses have changed places: *postmodern men and women exchanged a portion of their possibilities of security for a portion of happiness*. The discontents of modernity arose from a kind of security which tolerated too little freedom in the pursuit of individual happiness. The discontents of postmodernity arise from a kind of freedom of pleasure-seeking which tolerates too little individual security.

Any value is a value (as Georg Simmel long ago observed) only thanks to the loss of other values one must suffer in order to obtain it. But you need most what you lack most. The splendours of freedom are at their brightest when freedom is sacrificed at the altar of security. When it is the turn of security to be sacrificed in the temple of individual freedom, it steals much of the shine of its former victim. If dull and humdrum days haunted the seekers of security, sleepless nights are the curse of the free. In both cases, happiness goes by the board. Listen to Freud again: 'We are so made that we can derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very little from a state of things.' Why? Because 'what we call happiness . . . comes from the (preferably sudden) satisfaction of needs which have been dammed up to a high degree, and it is from its nature only possible as an episodic phenomenon'. And so: freedom without security assures no more steady a supply of happiness than security without freedom. A different arrangement of human affairs is not necessarily a step forward on the road to greater happiness – it only seems to

be such at the moment it is being made. Re-evaluation of all values is a happy, exhilarating *moment*, but the re-evaluated values do not necessarily guarantee a *state* of bliss.

There are no gains without losses, and the hope of a wondrous purification of gains from losses is as futile as the proverbial dream of a free lunch – but the gains and losses specific to any arrangement of human cohabitation need to be carefully counted, so that the optimal balance between the two can be sought even if (or rather because) the hard-won sobriety and wisdom prevents us, postmodern men and women, from indulging in a daydream about a balance sheet that has only a credit side.

This book is intended as a collection of small, and partial, contributions to this task.

This book has a special significance for me, since for the first time in the last quarter of a century some of its chapters were originally written in Polish, my native language, and presented to, as well as discussed with, Polish academics and students. My links with my Alma Mater, the University of Warsaw, have been restored. And so too has been the enlightening and stimulating exchange with my friends and colleagues, Polish sociologists and philosophers, all insightful and perceptive, sharp and challenging, too numerous to be mentioned by name, to whom I am in debt for clarifying and polishing many of the ideas this book contains.

My special thanks go to Anthony Giddens: without his continuous interest in my work, his gentle yet relentless, friendly yet determined pressure, this book would never have been put together.

And, as with each successive work of mine for ten years now, I wish to thank my editor, David Roberts. I guess no author could wish for a better understanding with his editor; we both struggle for the same purpose – which, as Roberts himself put it, is to produce a text ‘demanding that the reader should look at things s/he would rather leave unexamined’, the role of the editor being ‘to remove unnecessary impediments to the reader’s understanding without depriving the author of his individual voice’. And no one I know makes these words into flesh more capably than David Roberts.

# 1

## The Dream of Purity

Great crimes often start from great ideas. Few great ideas prove completely innocent when their inspired followers try to make the word flesh – but some can hardly ever be embraced without the teeth being bared and daggers sharpened. Among this class of ideas, pride of place belongs to the vision of purity.

‘The German Final Solution’, observed the American writer Cynthia Ozick, ‘was an aesthetic solution; it was a job of editing, it was the artist’s finger removing a smudge; it simply annihilated what was considered not harmonious.’<sup>1</sup> The German psychologist Klaus Dörner calls his readers ‘die Nazis auch als Bürger zu sehen, die genauso wie die Bürger vor und nach, ihre Antwort auf die Soziale Frage gesucht haben’<sup>2</sup> – the ‘social question’ to which they sought the answer being the question of ‘pollution’, of the stubborn presence of people who ‘did not fit’, who were ‘out of place’, who ‘spoiled the picture’ – and otherwise offended the aesthetically gratifying and morally reassuring sense of harmony. In the early years of the modern era, as Michel Foucault reminded us, madmen were rounded up by the city authorities, loaded into *Narrenschiffen* and sent to sea; madmen stood for ‘a dark disorder, a moving chaos . . . which opposes the mind’s luminous and adult stability’; and the sea stood for water, which ‘carries off, but does more: it purifies’.<sup>3</sup>

Purity is an ideal; a vision of the condition which needs yet to be created, or such as needs to be diligently protected against the genuine or imagined odds. Without such a vision, neither the concept of purity makes sense, nor the distinction between purity and impurity can be sensibly drawn. A forest, a mountain range, a meadow, an ocean (‘nature’ in general, as distinguished from culture, the human product) is neither pure nor impure – that is, until it is spattered with the leftovers of a Sunday picnic or infused with the waste of chemical factories. Human intervention does not just soil nature and make it filthy; it introduces into nature the very distinction between purity and filth, it creates the very possibility of a given part of the natural world being ‘clean’ or ‘dirty’.

Purity is a vision of things put in places *different* from those they would occupy if not prompted to move elsewhere, pushed, pulled or goaded; and it is a vision of *order* – that is, of a situation in which each thing is in its rightful place and nowhere else. There is no way of thinking about purity without having an image of ‘order’, without assigning to things their ‘rightful’, ‘proper’ places – which happen to be such places as they would not fill ‘naturally’, of their own accord. The opposite of ‘purity’ – the dirt, the filth, ‘polluting agents’ – are things ‘out of place’. It is not the intrinsic quality of things which makes them into ‘dirt’, but solely their location; more precisely, their location in the order of things envisaged by the purity-seekers. Things which are ‘dirt’ in one context may become pure just by being put in another place – and vice versa. Beautifully polished, shining shoes become dirt when put on the dining table; returned to the shoe-stack, they recover their pristine purity. An omelette, a mouth-watering work of culinary art when on the dinner plate, becomes a nasty stain when dropped on the pillow.

There are, however, things for which the ‘right place’ has not been reserved in any fragment of man-made order. They are ‘out of place’ everywhere; that is, in all places for which the model of purity has been designed. The world of the purity-seekers is simply too small to accommodate them. It won’t be enough to move them to another place; one needs to get rid of them once and for all – to burn them out, poison them, shatter them in pieces, put them to the sword. More often than not these are mobile things, things that will not stick to their assigned place, that change places of their own accord. The trouble with such things is that they will cross boundaries whether invited to or not. They control their own location, and thus deride the purity-seekers’ efforts to ‘put things in their place’, and in the end lay bare the incurable fragility and shakiness of all placements. Cockroaches, flies, spiders or mice, which at any time may decide to share a home with its legal (human) residents without asking the owners’ permission, are for that reason always, potentially, uninvited guests, and so cannot be incorporated into any imaginable scheme of purity.

The situation becomes yet more threatening and calls for yet more vigilance in the case of things which do not just move of their own accord, but do it moreover without drawing attention to themselves; they defy not just the model of purity, but the very effort of its protection, since without being aware of the invasion one does not know that the time of action has arrived, and one can be easily lulled into the illusion of security. Carpet mites, bacteria and viruses belong to that category of things from which nothing is safe, including the pursuit of safety itself. The writers of advertising copy for washing powders and detergent

products sense the difference very well – promising future customers that they will be able to smother and destroy ‘the dirt you see and the germs you don’t’.

We may gather from what has been said thus far that the interest in purity, and the associated interest in ‘hygiene’ (that is, keeping the dirt away) has more than an accidental relation to the fragility of order; to a situation in which we feel that we cannot rely on order taking care of itself, that we cannot expect order to survive our laxity, our doing nothing about it, by its own momentum. ‘Order’ means a regular, stable environment for our action; a world in which the probabilities of events are not distributed at random, but arranged in a strict hierarchy – so that certain events are highly likely to occur, others are less probable, some others virtually impossible. Only such an environment do we understand. Only in such surroundings (according to Wittgenstein’s definition of understanding) do we ‘know how to go on’. Only here can we select our actions properly – that is, with a reasonable hope that the results we have in mind will indeed be achieved. Only here can we rely on the habits and expectations we have acquired in the course of our being-in-the-world. We humans are endowed with memory and a capacity for learning, and for this reason we have vested interests in an ‘orderliness’ of the world. Learned abilities to act are powerful assets in a stable and predictable world; they would become downright suicidal, though, if the events were suddenly to break out of the causal sequences and thus defy all prediction and take us by surprise.

No one perhaps explained better what all this fuss about purity and fighting dirt is about than the great British anthropologist Mary Douglas, in her eye-opening book *Purity and Danger* (first published in 1966). Dirt, Douglas suggested,

is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt; it exists in the eye of the beholder . . . Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment . . .

In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea. There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt-avoidance: it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience . . .

To conclude, if uncleanliness is matter out of place, we must approach it through order. Uncleanliness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained.<sup>4</sup>

From Mary Douglas’s analysis, the interest in purity and the obsession with the struggle against dirt emerge as universal characteristics of human beings: the models of purity, the patterns to be preserved change

from one time to another, from one culture to another – but each time and each culture has a certain model of purity and a certain ideal pattern to be kept intact and unscathed against the odds. Also, all concerns with purity and cleaning emerge from that analysis as essentially alike. Sweeping the floor and stigmatizing traitors or banishing strangers appear to stem from the same motive of the preservation of order, of making or keeping the environment understandable and hospitable to sensible action. This may well be so; but the explanation in such universal, extratemporal and species-wide terms does not go far towards evaluating various forms of purity-pursuits from the point of view of their social and political significance and the gravity of their consequences for human cohabitation.

If we focus our attention on the latter, we will immediately note that among the numerous incarnations of the pattern-sapping ‘dirt’ one case, sociologically speaking, is of a very special, indeed unique, importance: namely, the case of when it is *other human beings* who are conceived of as an obstacle to the proper ‘organization of environment’ – when, in other words, it is other people, or more specifically a certain category of other people, who become ‘dirt’ and are treated as such.

The founder of phenomenological sociology, Alfred Schütz,<sup>5</sup> made us aware of the characteristics of human life which seem obvious the moment they are pointed out: that if we humans may ‘find our bearings within our natural and socio-cultural environment and to come to terms with it’, it is thanks to the fact that this environment has been ‘preselected and preinterpreted . . . by a series of common-sense constructs of the reality of daily life’. Each of us, in our daily activities, and without much thinking about it, uses a tremendous number of products of that preselection and preinterpretation, which combine into what Schütz calls the ‘stock of knowledge at hand’. Without such knowledge, living in the world would be inconceivable. 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’.

Among the tacit, yet indispensable ingredients of the ‘stock of knowledge at hand’, that commonsensical wisdom which all of us receive, to use Schützian terms, as a gift from the ‘intersubjective world of culture’,

from that 'treasure house of ready-made pre-constituted types' – pride of place belongs to the assumption of 'reciprocal perspectives'. What we believe without thinking (and, above all, as long as we do not think about it) is that our experiences are *typical* – that is, that whoever looks at the object 'out there' sees 'the same' as we do, and that whoever acts, follows 'the same' motives which we know from introspection. We also believe in the 'interchangeability of standpoints'; to wit, if we put ourselves in another person's place, we will see and feel exactly 'the same' as he or she sees and feels in his or her present position – and that this feat of empathy may be reciprocated.

This assumption seems pretty straightforward and innocuous; perhaps even deeply moral in its consequences, since it postulates the essential similarity of human beings and assigns to the others the qualities of subjects just like our own subjectivity. And yet, to hold fast, this assumption of 'reciprocal perspectives' must rest on a still deeper presupposition: that it is not just me who assumes reciprocity of perspective and behaves accordingly – but that this assumption of reciprocity is itself reciprocated. If a suspicion arises that the latter is not the case then the rock-solid construction of daily security falls to pieces. 'I am able to understand other people's acts', says Schütz, 'only if I can imagine that I myself would perform analogous acts if I were in the same situation, directed by the same because motives, or oriented by the same in-order-to motives – all these terms understood in the same restricted sense of the "typical" analogy, the "typical" sameness . . .'<sup>6</sup> The undetachable corollary of this ability to imagine myself in the situation of the other is, of course, the ability to imagine the other in my own position: the expectation that, if cast in my situation, the other would think and behave just as I do . . . In other words, the idea of the essential unity between me and the other, which the assumption of the reciprocity of standpoints ostensibly promotes, precedes rather than follows this assumption. I must first be able to accept unproblematically our mutual similarity, the readiness of the other to think and behave along lines identical with my own, for the assumption of our reciprocity of standpoints to hold.

The recipes attached to routine situations I am likely to encounter in the course of daily life combine in what Max Scheler called the *relativ-natürliche Weltanschauung*. Armed with these recipes, I feel secure. For most things I do, and all things I do routinely, they offer a reliable and sufficient guidance. They have all 'the appearance of a *sufficient* coherence, clarity, and consistency to give anybody a reasonable chance of understanding and of being understood'. But they boast this salutary and wondrous quality only because they are 'evident', accepted matter of



factly, without much reflection – and this happy-go-lucky situation may exist only as long as no one around begins to question them, ask about their grounds and reasons, points out the discrepancies, lays bare their arbitrariness. This is why the arrival of a Stranger has the impact of an earthquake . . . The Stranger shatters the rock on which the security of daily life rests. He comes from afar; he does not share the local assumptions – and so ‘becomes essentially the man who has to place in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group’.<sup>7</sup> He ‘has to’ commit this damaging and deplorable act because he has no status within the approached group which would make the pattern of that group look ‘natural’ to him, and because even if he tried his best, and successfully, to behave outwardly in the fashion that pattern requires, he would not be accorded by the group the credit of reciprocating the group’s standpoint.

If ‘dirt’ is an element which defies the purpose of the ordering efforts, and the self-acting, self-moving and self-directing dirt is an element which defies the very possibility of effective efforts, then the Stranger is the very epitome of the latter. No wonder the locals of all times and places, in their frenzied efforts to separate, confine, exile or destroy the strangers compared the objects of their exertions to vermin and bacteria. No wonder either, that they compared the meaning of their own action to hygienic routines; they fought the ‘strangers’, convinced that they defended health against the carriers of disease.

This is what ‘the locals’ (who, to be sure, could think of themselves as ‘locals’ and constitute themselves into ‘locals’ only in as far as they opposed themselves to the ‘strangers’ – that is, to some other people who were not ‘locals’) did, let me repeat, at all times and places. But in certain situations the preoccupation with Strangers assumed a particularly important role among many activities involved in the daily care of purity, the daily reproduction of an inhabitable, orderly world. This happened once the work of purifying, or ‘order-making’, had become a conscious/purposeful activity, when it had been conceived as a *task*; when the objective of cleaning, instead of keeping intact the way in which things were, became *changing the way* in which things used to exist yesterday, *creating* a new order that challenged the present one; when, in other words, the care of order meant the introduction of a new and, by the same token, *artificial* order – making, so to speak, a *new beginning*. This momentous change in the status of order coincided with the advent of the *modern era*. Indeed, we can define modernity as the time, or the way of life, in which order-making consists of the dismantling of the ‘traditional’, inherited and received, order; in which ‘being’ means a perpetual new beginning.

Each order has its own disorders; each model of purity has its own dirt that needs to be swept away. But in a durable, lasting order which pre-empt the future and also involves, among other prerequisites, the prohibition of change, even the cleaning and sweeping pursuits are parts of order. They belong to the daily routine, and like everything routine they tend to be repeated monotonously, in a thoroughly habitualized fashion that renders reflection redundant. It is not so much the dirt-eliminating routine, as the prevention of an occasional, unusual *interruption* of the routine, that reaches the level of consciousness and arouses attention. The care for purity focuses not so much on fighting the 'primary dirt', as on the fight against the 'meta-dirt' – against slackening, or altogether neglecting, the effort to keep things as they are . . . The situation changes drastically, though, when ordering means the dismantling of the extant order and replacing it with a new model of purity. Now, keeping purity cannot be reduced to the maintenance of daily routine; worse still, the routine itself has the awesome tendency to turn into 'dirt' which needs to be stamped out in the name of the new purity. All in all, the state of 'perpetual beginning' generates ever new, 'improved' targets of purity, and with each new target cuts out new categories of 'dirt' – an unheard-of dirt and an unprecedented dirt. A new condition appears, in which even ordinary, boringly familiar things may turn into dirt at short notice or without notice. With models of purity changing too fast for the purifying skills to catch on, nothing seems secure any more; uncertainty and suspicion rule the day.

We may go a step further and say that the 'order-making' now becomes indistinguishable from announcing ever new 'abnormalities', drawing ever new dividing lines, identifying and setting apart ever new 'strangers'. Thoroughly familiar and unproblematic 'neighbours next door' may turn overnight into terrifying strangers once a new order is envisaged; a new game is devised which the neighbours-of-yesterday are unlikely to play placidly for the simple reason that the new order is about making them into strangers and the new game is about eliminating them – 'cleansing the site'. Doing something about the strangers moves into the very centre of ordering concerns. Strangers are no longer routine, and thus the routine ways of keeping things pure do not suffice. In a world constantly on the move the anxiety which condensed into the fear of strangers saturates the totality of daily life – fills every nook and cranny of the human condition.

In the modern world, notoriously unstable and constant solely in its hostility to everything constant, the temptation to arrest the movement, to bring the perpetual change to a halt, to install an order secure against all further challenges, becomes overwhelming and very difficult to resist.

Almost all modern fantasies of a 'good world' were deep down anti-modern, in that they visualized the end of history understood as a process of change. Walter Benjamin said of modernity that it was born under the sign of suicide; Sigmund Freud suggested that it was driven by Thanatos – the instinct of death. Modern utopias differed in many of their detailed prescriptions, but they all agreed that the 'perfect world' would be one remaining forever identical with itself, a world in which the wisdom learnt today will remain wise tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, and in which the life skills acquired will retain their usefulness forever. The world depicted in the utopias was also, expectedly, a transparent world – one in which nothing dark or impenetrable stood in the way of the eye; a world with nothing spoiling the harmony; nothing 'out of place'; a world without 'dirt'; a world without strangers.

No wonder that throughout the modern era there was a strict correlation between the scale and radicality of the 'new and final order' imagined, dreamt of and tried in practice, and the passion with which the 'problem of strangers' was approached, as well as the severity of treatment reserved for the strangers. What was 'totalitarian' about totalitarian political programmes, themselves thoroughly modern phenomena, was more than anything else the comprehensiveness of the order they promised, the determination to leave nothing to chance, the simplicity of the cleaning prescriptions, and the thoroughness with which they approached the task of removing anything that collided with the postulate of purity. Totalitarian ideologies were remarkable for their proclivity to condense the diffuse, pinpoint the elusive, make the uncontrollable into a target within reach and, so to speak, within bullet-range; the dispersed and ubiquitous anxiety exhaled by equally dispersed and ubiquitous threats to comprehension and to the sense of order were thereby squeezed and compressed so that they could be 'handled', and dealt with wholesale in a single, straightforward procedure. Nazism and communism excelled in pushing the totalitarian tendency to its radical extreme – the first by condensing the complexity of the 'purity' problem in its modern form into that of the purity of race, the second into that of the purity of class. Yet totalitarian cravings and leanings made their presence visible, albeit in a slightly less radical form, also in the tendency of the modern nation-state as such to underpin and reinforce the uniformity of state citizenship with the universality and comprehensiveness of national membership.

For reasons which I have analysed elsewhere<sup>8</sup> and which are too complex and numerous to be spelled out here, the tendency to collectivize and centralize the 'cleansing' activities aimed at the preservation of purity, while by no means extinct or exhausted, tends in our time to be

ever more often replaced with the strategies of deregulation and privatization. On the one hand, we note in many places a growing indifference of the state to its past task of promoting a singular as well as a comprehensive model of order, and the unprecedented equanimity with which the co-presence of a variety of such models is contemplated by the powers that be. On the other hand, one can discern the waning of the 'forward push' so crucial to the modern spirit, the relaxation of the modern war of attrition waged against received tradition, the lack of enthusiasm for (even resentment of) all-embracing schemes of decreed order that promise to put and fix everything in its place – and, indeed, the appearance of *sui generis* vested interest in the continuing diversification, under-determination, 'messiness' of the world. An ever growing number of postmodern men and women, while by no means immune to the fear of being lost and ever 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.

The consequence of that sea-change, most relevant to our topic, has been well captured by Georges Balandier: 'Aujourd'hui, tout se brouille, les frontières se déplacent, les catégories deviennent confuses. Les différences perdent leur encadrement; elles se démultiplient, elles se trouvent presque à l'état libre, disponibles pour la composition de nouvelles configurations, mouvantes, combinables et manipulables.'<sup>9</sup>

Differences pile up one upon the other, distinctions previously not considered relevant to the overall scheme of things and therefore invisible now force themselves upon the canvas of the *Lebenswelt*. Differences once accepted as non-negotiable are thrown unexpectedly into the melting pot or become objects of contention. Competitive charts overlap or clash, barring all chance of an 'official' and universally binding Ordnance Survey map. Yet since each scheme of purity generates its own dirt and each order generates its own strangers, making up the stranger in its own likeness and measure – the stranger is now as resistant to fixation as the social space itself: 'L'Autre se révèle *multiple*, localisable partout, changeant selon les circonstances.'

Does this augur the end of the Stranger's victimization and martyrdom

in the service of purity? Not necessarily, contrary to many enthusiastic eulogies of the new postmodern tolerance, or even its assumed love of difference. In the postmodern world of freely competing styles and life patterns there is still one stern test of purity which whoever applies for admission is required to pass: one needs to be capable of being seduced by the infinite possibility and constant renewal promoted by the consumer market, of rejoicing in the chance of putting on and taking off identities, of spending one's life in the never ending chase after ever more intense sensations and even more exhilarating experience. Not everybody can pass that test. Those who do not are the 'dirt' of postmodern purity.

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'.

The job of separating and eliminating that waste of consumerism is, like everything else in the postmodern world, deregulated and privatized. The shopping malls and supermarkets, the temples of the new consumerist creed and the stadiums where the game of consumerism is played, bar entry to the flawed consumers at their own expense, surrounding themselves with surveillance cameras, electronic alarms and heavily armed guards; so do the neighbourhoods where lucky and happy consumers live and enjoy their new freedoms; so do the individual consumers, viewing their homes and their cars as ramparts of permanently besieged fortresses.

These deregulated, privatized, diffuse concerns with guarding the purity of consumerist life also come together in two contradictory, yet mutually reinforcing political demands directed towards the state. One is the demand to further enhance consumer freedoms of free consumers: to privatize the use of resources by 'rolling back' all collective intervention in private affairs, dismantling politically imposed constraints, cutting taxes and public expenditure. Another demand is to deal more energetically with the consequences of the first demand: surfacing in the public discourse under the name of 'law and order', this second demand is about the prevention of the equally deregulated and privatized protest of the victims of deregulation and privatization. Those whom the expansion of consumer freedom deprived of consumer skills and powers need to

be checked and kept at bay; being a drain on public funds, and therefore indirectly on 'taxpayers' money' and the freedom of free consumers, they need to be checked and kept at bay at the least possible cost. If waste-disposal proves to be less costly than waste-recycling, it should be given priority; if it is cheaper to exclude and incarcerate the flawed consumers to keep them from mischief, this is preferable to the restoration of their consumer status through thoughtful employment policy coupled with ramified welfare provisions. And even the ways of exclusion and incarceration need to be 'rationalized', preferably subjected to the severe discipline of market competition: let the cheapest offer win . . .

In his eye-opening study of the ways in which the 'defence of law and order' is today carried on in the affluent countries, Nils Christie draws the following nightmarish picture of where the present tendency, if unchecked, is likely to lead:

There are no natural limits. The industry is there. The capacity is there. Two thirds of the population will have a standard of living vastly above any found – for so large a proportion of a nation – anywhere else in the world. Mass media flourish on reports on the dangers of the crimes committed by the remaining one third of the population. Rulers are elected on promises to keep the dangerous third behind bars. Why should this come to stop? There are no natural limits for rational minds . . .

The worst nightmare will never materialize. The dangerous population will not be exterminated, except for those killed by capital punishment. But the risks are great that those seen as core members of the dangerous population may be confined, warehoused, stored away, and forced to live their most active years as consumers of control. It can be done democratically, and under the strict control of the legal institutions.

'And the theoreticians in criminology and law', Christie observes gloomily, 'are there with a helping hand. Nobody believes in treatment any more, but incapacitation has been a favourite . . .'<sup>10</sup> The present-day concern with the purity of postmodern enjoyment expresses itself in the ever more pronounced tendency to criminalize its socially produced problems.

That every order tends to criminalize resistance to itself and outlaw its assumed or genuine enemies is evident to the point of triviality. What is less obvious, yet seems to emerge from our brief survey of the forms which the pursuit of purity has taken in modern and postmodern times, is that the object of particularly zealous and intense outlawing flurry are the radical consequences of the order's own constitutive principles. Modernity lived in a state of permanent war against tradition, legitimized by the urge to collectivize human destiny on a new and higher level, to substitute a new, better order for the old, jaded and outlived. It had

therefore to purify itself of those who threatened to turn its inherent irreverence against its own principles. One of the most vexing 'impurities' in the modern version of purity was the *revolutionaries*, which the modern spirit could not but generate: revolutionaries were, after all, nothing but zealots of modernity, the most faithful among the believers in modern revelation, eager to draw the most radical lessons from the message, and push the order-making effort beyond the boundary of what the order-making mechanism was able to sustain. Postmodernity, on the other hand, lives in a state of permanent pressure towards dismantling of all collective interference into individual fate, towards deregulation and privatization. It tends to fortify itself therefore against those who – following its inherent tendency to disengagement, indifference and free-for-all – threaten to expose the suicidal potential of the strategy by pushing its implementation to the logical extreme. The most obnoxious 'impurity' of the postmodern version of purity is not revolutionaries, but those who either disregard the law or take the law into their own hands – muggers, robbers, car-thieves and shoplifters, as well as their *alter egos* – the vigilantes and the terrorists. Again, they are but the zealots of postmodernity, avid learners and pious believers in the postmodern revelation, keen to bring the life-recipes which the lesson suggests to their radical conclusion.

The pursuit of modern purity expressed itself daily in punitive action against dangerous classes; the pursuit of postmodern purity expresses itself daily in punitive action against the residents of mean streets and no-go urban areas, vagabonds and layabouts. In both cases, the 'impurity' at the focus of the punitive action is the extremity of the form promoted as pure; the stretching to the limits of what should have been, but could not be, kept in bounds; the waste-product that is but a disqualified mutation of the product passed as meeting the standards.