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# Utopia with no topos

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

## ABSTRACT

To measure the life 'as it is' by a life 'as it might or should be' is a defining, constitutive feature of humanity. The urge to transcend is nearest to a universal, and arguably the least destructible, attribute of human existence. This cannot be said, however, of its articulations into 'projects' – that is, of cohesive and comprehensive programmes of change and of visions of life that the change is hoped to bring about – visions that stand out of reality, adumbrating a fully and truly different, alternative world. For the constantly present transgressive urge to be articulated into such projects, some less common conditions must arise. Utopia is one of the forms such uncommon articulations may take. This article explores the conditions that defined that form – those of modernity in its initial 'solid' stage, a form that was marked and set apart from other articulations of the transgression urge by two remarkable attributes: territoriality and finality. It is concluded that in the transgressive imagination of 'liquid modernity' the 'place' (whether physical or social) has been replaced by the unending sequence of new beginnings, inconsequentiality of deeds has been substituted for fixity of order, and the desire for a different today has elbowed out concern with a better tomorrow.

*Key words* finality, liquid modernity, territoriality, topos, utopia

To measure the life 'as it is' by a life as it *should* be (that is, a life *imagined* to be different from the life known, and particularly a life that is better than and would be preferable to the life known) – is a defining, constitutive feature of humanity. Human being-in-the-world means being-ahead-of-the-world. The

'human' in 'human being' is what 'sticks out', runs ahead from the rest of being – while 'the world' is that rest which has been left behind. 'The world' stands for limits – the limits that exist, though, in (and through) the process of being broken and transcended.

The urge to transcend is a nearest to universal, and arguably the least destructible attribute of human existence. This cannot be said, however, of its articulations into 'projects' – that is, of cohesive and comprehensive programmes of change and of visions of life that the change is hoped to bring about – visions that stand out of reality, adumbrating a fully and truly *different*, alternative world. For the constantly present transgressive urge to be articulated into such projects, some less common conditions must arise.

Utopia is one of the forms such uncommon articulations may take. The conditions that defined that form were those of modernity in its initial 'solid' stage. That particular form was marked and set apart from other articulations of the transgression urge by two remarkable attributes: *territoriality* and *finality*.

## THE SEDENTARY IMAGINATION

The first attribute is captured in the name itself, coined by Thomas More but subsequently adopted as a family name for a long series of articulations that punctuated the historical itinerary of the modern era. 'Utopia' refers to *topos* – a 'place'. However imagined, visions of a different and better life portrayed in the description of utopias were always territorially defined: associated with and confined to a clearly defined territory.

No wonder; the world of 'solid modernity' was sedentary – a blatantly and self-consciously territorial world. All identities, as well as differences, contradictions and antagonisms, were *glebae adscripti*. They all brandished, whether as a badge of honour or a brand of shame, fixed and registered addresses, themselves inventions of the emergent modern idea of (also territorial) administration. In that idea, 'running things' meant arresting and holding things in their 'natural' places, or uprooting and transporting them to more suitable places 'where they belonged'. Power and sovereignty were measured and evaluated with the help of spatial metaphors such as 'scope' and 'volume', and defined by their physical/geographical boundaries.

In that sedentary and 'solid' phase of modernity there was an intimate correspondence between space and power. Power was a spatial notion, inscribed into the realm of sovereignty. And vice versa: the space was divided, and its divisions were circumscribed, according to the powers that ruled over it. 'States' that replaced the dynastic realms with the advent of modernity as the seats of supreme authority were territorial entities. It was over its territory that the state *superiorem non recognoscens*.

State power was measured by the size of its territory and supposed to grow (or diminish) in parallel with territorial acquisitions (or losses). As Roberto Toscano aptly puts it<sup>1</sup> – ‘territory means resources, population, and strategic control. Territory constitutes the very body of the state, so that every loss is perceived as a mutilation, every gain as vital growth (or, more often, recovery of previously detached limbs).’ Given the way the integrity of state-owned territory is seen and felt – ‘the insignificant paring of a fingernail’ tends to be represented as ‘the painful mutilation of an arm’.

The extent of territory was coeval with the extent of sovereignty. ‘Sovereignty’ (according to Carl Schmitt’s synthesis of modern practice, as recently re-examined by Giorgio Agamben<sup>2</sup>) was all about the power to include or exempt. The sovereign is he *who decides on the state of exception*. But let us note that it is precisely the *territoriality* of power that makes of the capacity of exemption such an awesome weapon of the sovereign authority – indeed the constitutive factor of its ‘materiality’. The sovereign is a sovereign in as far as he or she controls the admission to the House of Law. Whoever happens to be bodily present inside the territorial boundaries of the sovereign state, falls under that control. Inside a territory in which every subject is allocated its rightful place, an entity exempted from allocation and so denied a place of its own is stripped of rights – carries no rights that other subjects have the obligation (state-imposed and state-policed) to respect. Among the subjects all dressed in uniforms sewn of legal categories, it is *la vita nuda*, a ‘bare’, purely corporeal life denied all legally woven significance. A ‘sovereign territory’ is the artefact of its own map: an impression left on the physical space filled with human bodies by the tightly woven canvas of legal categories.

As long as it is armed with the ultimate sanction of exemption, sovereign power makes its law into a cage, the exit from the cage into a fate feared, shunned and far too horrifying to be contemplated as an acceptable price of freedom, and the entry to the cage into a privilege that needs to be earned and, once earned, cherished. The captives have every reason to view the cage as (uncomfortable maybe, yet secure) shelter. This is a cage to which most would-be internees clamour to be admitted and of which those refused entry dream as the ultimate redemption. ‘The Rights of Man’, as Hannah Arendt observed, ‘supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable . . . whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state.’<sup>3</sup> A social, all-too-social, *puissance*, *potenza* or *Macht*<sup>4</sup> was obviously needed to endorse the humanity of humans. And throughout the modern era, such ‘potency’ happened to be, invariably, the potency: to draw a boundary between human and inhuman, in modern times disguised as the boundary between citizens and foreigners.

It was inside the cage of law that the sovereign’s subjects’ life was to flow; the whole of it, from the cradle to the grave. Having left no alternative, except a life imposed for the stateless asylum-seekers but fit solely (as Aristotle

warned) for beasts or angels, to the subjects who were neither, the sovereign could count on the subjects' obedience. The few daring enough to fancy themselves godlike could be easily certified out into invisibility or censored off into inaudibility, while most that-be and would-be subjects would resent the plight of beasts and prefer the security of a cage to the hazards of wilderness.

Sovereignty being territorial, the wilderness most resented and feared by those many born in or the few let in was that exception-generated one *inside* the cage: wilderness as an individual or a categorial lot, conjured up by the law's power to forbear its rule, and particularly the responsibility that comes with the rule. The stateless inside the state, the *sans-papiers* among passport holders, were to be the modern incarnations of *homo sacer* – the forcefully de-socialized and de-ethicized, adiaphorized 'bared body', exempt from human and divine law, a body that can be destroyed with impunity and whose destruction would have neither human nor divine significance.

The presence of the sovereign despot was taken for granted by all concerned with the building and preservation of order; the question how to enlighten (read: tame and domesticate) the despot naturally followed. At the heart of the idea of the 'enlightened despot' was a state of affairs in which the sovereign will hardly ever – only in truly exceptional circumstances – resort to his or her power of exception. The sovereign could not forbear the potency of exclusion without forfeiting his or her sovereignty. But its awesome powers could be held in check in a roundabout way: through the subjects' steering clear of such transgression as carried the penalty of exclusion. Whatever conditions of enlightened power could be conceived of, all and any of them were to bind the sovereign and the subjects alike. All visions of well-tempered human cohabitation assumed the *permanent mutual engagement* between the rulers and the ruled and the capacity of each side to circumscribe and cut down the range of options the other side might be tempted to choose from.

Like the rest of the thought of the time, utopian thought took the territoriality of all order, also of the 'good order' it struggled to model and engrave onto social reality, for granted. For all practical intents and purposes, good life meant a life lived in good society, while 'good society' translated in turn as the population inhabiting a territory plotted and mapped, and then projected upon the physical space, by the wise and benevolent powers of a good state.

Utopian imagination was essentially architectural and urbanistic. Most attention of the model builders was devoted to plotting and mapping, leaving the job of projection of the map over the territory (or more to the point the job of remaking reality in the likeness of the map) to the rulers of the *topos*. The purpose was to design a spatial arrangement in which there would be a right and proper place for everyone for whom a right and proper place would have been designed. In the sketching of anticipatory maps of Utopia, both (inseparable, as it were) edges of the power sword were adumbrated. The

construction of good order was, invariably, an exercise in inclusion and exclusion: in unconditionality of law and unconditionality of its exemptions.

The exemption built into the master-plan of the Utopia, however, was envisaged on the whole as a one-off act. Once the right places had been allocated to everyone inside, and once those for whom no place was reserved had died out, left of their own accord or been forced out of the city – no further exercise of the power of exemption would be needed. The sword of power would be kept permanently in its sheath, preserved for the illumination of the new happy generations as mostly a museum piece, relic of bygone ‘pre-good-society’ times.

This hope has been, one may guess, the main reason for which the term ‘utopian’ acquired in the course of modern history the semantic flavour of a fanciful, perhaps inane pipe-dream and found itself in modern thesauruses in the company of such terms as ‘figmental’, ‘chimerical’, ‘impractical’ or ‘dreamy-eyed’.

## THE TRANSFIXING IMAGINATION

And so we come to the second of the two ubiquitous attributes of utopian thought: finality.

As if taking a hint from the schoolman Anselm’s admittedly faulty proof of God’s existence (some beings are better than others, so there must be a being better than *all* other beings – the perfect being that cannot be bettered: God), the draftsmen of utopia took it for granted that the long series of improvements on social reality was bound to reach at some point its natural conclusion: not just a better society, but the best society conceivable, the *perfect* society, society in which any further change could be only a change to the worse. Passage from any ‘really existing reality’ to the perfect society will constitute a gigantic leap and a truly formidable change, *but no more leaps will need to be made after that* and no change, with its usual vexing accompaniment of risk, apprehension and discomfort no less painful and harrowing for being ‘transitional’, will be called for or desired. Utopia was the *topos* that rewarded the hardship of the travellers: the end of the pilgrimage that would (albeit retrospectively) make the past trials and tribulations worth the pains they once brought and the exertions needed to fight them back and overcome.

At the time when the blueprints of utopias were penned down, the world seemed to have entered a state of permanent revolution. The most harrowing adversities and setbacks of the modern order-building were the perpetual, seemingly no-end dislocations, resembling earthquakes following volcanic eruptions and followed by tornadoes. The crumbling of familiar landscapes, cutting the bonds of friendship, care and mutual support, made the customary

ways and learning them useless, while the new and untried ways, for the reason of being new and untried, appeared treacherous, risky and untrustworthy. Utopia was to put an end to all that.

Utopia was to be the fortress of certainty and stability; a kingdom of tranquillity. Instead of confusion – clarity and self-assurance. Instead of caprices of fate – steady and consistent, surprise-free sequence of causes and effects. Instead of the labyrinthine muddle of twisted passages and sharp corners – straight, beaten and well-marked tracks. Instead of opacity – transparency. Instead of randomness – a well-entrenched and utterly predictable routine.

In the nutshell: the sufferings of modern revolution caused by the vexing inconstancy and seeming randomness of the modernized and modernizing life it brought in its wake, derived from the unfamiliar state of exhilarating/frightening freedom carrying the fears of the unknown together with the joys of novelty. Utopias were the anticipated end-products of the skilful deployment of both the plasticity of the world and the new (genuine or supposed) freedom to remould human conditions for the purpose of construing a world free from the bane of uncertainty and insured against all further re-moulding: a world resistant to all further change.

In other words, utopias were blueprints for the routine hoped to be resurrected. But the routine that for a change will be immune to crosswinds and earth tremors that shook and devastated and prevented from rebuilding the routines of yore. Utopias were visions of a life in which freedom was but the *necessity understood and obediently, willingly, and gratefully accepted*; thanks to the absence of clash between the possible and the real, between the desired and the feasible, no occasion would then arise to experience necessity as a burden or an oppression. Once the desires are gratified, nothing will be coveted except what can be obtained. In the utopian world of the perfect balance between the 'ought' and the 'must', life will be accident-free and all the deviations from the expectable and the regular will be but momentary irritants, easy to isolate and repair. Utopias were visions of a closely watched, monitored, administered and daily managed world. Above all, visions of a pre-designed world, a world in which prediction and planning would have staved off the play of chances. Utopia had to be a world of tight and intimate, day-in day-out engagement between the rulers and the ruled: stern yet benevolent rulers and their obedient yet happy subjects. And the world of sages – whose job was to secure the benevolence of the rulers and the happiness of the ruled.

Utopia was the product of the *age of engagement and commitment*. Tripartite engagement – between the princes, the people, and men of knowledge. Engagement in the territory – jointly, continually and for a foreseeable 'forever' inhabited by all three. Commitment to a purpose – the purpose being the establishment and the preservation of the accident/risk/uncertainty-free, ultimate order of perfect society.

## THE NOMADIC IMAGINATION

It was not always like that – nor, once it came about, were it to last for long. Squeezed between the two periods of much greater longevity, the engagement/commitment era, that time of the sedentary and transfixing imagination and the ensuing utopian profligacy, seems increasingly to have been a brief interval; a momentary departure from the normal or prevalent historical tendency, rather than an overture to the things to come and stay. That brief episode was the time of nation-building and state-building, of the two mutually prodding and reinvigorating processes converging onto the most remarkable and fateful of modern social invention: the nation-state.

The two intertwined state-building and nation-building processes were set in motion by the growing inefficacy and imminent collapse of the *ancien régime*, with its powers-that-be construed in the likeness of gamekeepers rather than gardeners and studiously refraining from all managerial-style interference. The modern idea of a *designed* and *managed* order was born at the death-bed of such unselfconsciously, by default rather than by design, self-reproducing routine; the feeling of ‘without us, a deluge’ played the midwife’s role. The conception of a ‘good society’ run by friendly yet demanding, state-centred powers of the sharing/caring nation, and the prospect of bringing under daily control and management the erratic forces currently unchecked by either the dead hand of tradition or the armed hand of the police, were twin ideological glosses over that confluence of necessity and apprehension. Self-reliance and self-confidence resting on trust in unlimited powers of human reason and resolve, were to accomplish the feat that providence and the ‘blind forces of history’ evidently failed to conjure up. That change of guard was to be recorded subsequently, and so only retrospectively, as ‘the project of modernity’.

The desire of better life focused on the search for the model of good *society* – a setting for human life more solid, reliable and resistant to corruption than any other model could provide. Utopian blueprints were the findings of that search. In unison with the boisterous proclamations and bold undertakings of the nascent nation-states, they tried to explore the limits to which the nation-state could go if it traversed to the end the whole length of the trail blazed by human reason, and to find out where it might lead humanity orphaned by/emancipated from the ‘divine chain of being’, once believed to be tied up in the six-day-long Act of Creation with an (unfulfilled) mandate to last for eternity.

By now, however, with the nation-state in the double bind of pressures coming simultaneously ‘from above’ and ‘from below’, the bottom fell off the barrelful of utopian blueprints. Today, as Masao Miyoshi put it, having surveyed the world-wide developments of recent years,<sup>5</sup> the nation-state ‘no longer works; it is thoroughly appropriated by transnational corporations’.



Transnational corporations, in their turn, 'are unencumbered with nationalist baggage . . . They travel, communicate, and transfer people and plants, information and technology, money and resources globally.' 'They operate over distance.' They 'remain aliens and outsiders in each place, faithful only to the exclusive clubs of which they are members'. In Sheila Slaughter's summary of the neo-liberal credo of our times,<sup>6</sup> market forces that are 'impersonal, disembodied, and inexorable' supplant 'national economies with a global market', and the territorial nation-states are expected, and pressed, to free capital and corporations from regulation and allow them 'to operate unfettered'; 'the only acceptable role of the state is that of global police officer and judge, patrolling the edges of the playing field and adjudicating trading infractions and transgressions'.

We may say that the power to make and unmake, to alter and reforge the conditions of human life, has deserted the nation-state's controlling towers, having been carried off the limits of the state's sovereign territory and beyond the reach of the state's sovereignty, sealed in the securely locked briefcases of the new free-floating, extra-territorial, trans-national (or, as it prefers to call itself, flatteringly, 'multicultural') elite. The demise of the nation-state coincides and blends with the *expropriation* of old, local power elites that count now for little as long as they stay local, and the *secession* of a new global power elite that truly counts, and counts ever more, as long as it stays global; an elite that is not rooted in, and not fixed to or tied by, any of the nominally sovereign political entities.

Under the circumstances, the recent eruption of tribal sentiments in all their forms – of ethnicism, communitarianism or fundamentalism – is an expectable, if misguided reaction to the collapse of the nation-state as the site of meeting between the knowledge classes and 'the people' and of the kind of politics that construed such a state as a secure investment for the hopes of a better life.

Ethnicism is not 'the early-modern nationalism reborn'. It is, in fact, the opposition of nationalism – 'a kind of mirrored reflection' (as Makler, Martinelli and Smelser put it)<sup>7</sup> 'of the decline of the viability of nationalism as a political unifying force'. The self-assertive inter-ethnic wars, squabbles and reconnaissance sorties are loud, often gory manifestations of the withdrawal of trust from the nationalist projects; of the abandonment of early modern ambitions, of the loss of courage and confidence that courage, if guided by reason, may bear fruit. In Miyoshi's words, 'the fragmenting and fragmented' ethnicist movements 'are newly awaked agents not for the construction of autonomous nations but for the abandonment of the expectations and responsibilities of the politicoeconomic national projects'. Those movements are neither fit nor willing to take over the burden of responsibilities falling from the shoulders of nation-states. Most conspicuously, they are neither willing nor able to serve as new frames in which the self-confident ambitions

of rationally managed happiness could be inscribed and securely fixed. Utopian hopes tied closely to the era of state-and-nation-building are unlikely to obtain a second lease of life from the born-again tribes.

If the products of modern emboldened and self-confident imagination that came to be known as 'utopias' invoked the expectation of a perfectly orderly society and the trust in the sovereign territorial power of the nation-state as its vehicle, contemporary imagination fails on both accounts. Territorially confined powers look anything but sovereign and most certainly do not hold promise of designing, let alone effectively managing, any kind of stable order, while the very idea of finality of any arrangement of human togetherness has lost most of its past credibility together with its attraction and mobilizing power.

### THE DISENGAGED IMAGINATION

Whoever thinks of doing something about the plight of the world, of improving the current shape of the human condition, adding something to human possessions or altering the mode in which they are used – would rather look elsewhere. Focusing hopes and efforts on the extant, hopelessly local tools of joint action seems uncannily like a waste of time and energy. One better follows action to the place to which it has moved. The name of this place is no-place, no-land, no-territory. Unlike that orthodox space sliced into sovereign, border-poles erecting and border-passages guarding nation-states, the new trans-national and trans-state global space is (at least for the time being) 'whole and uniform', unmarked by legible signs and full of unanchored, floating meanings, vainly seeking (or keenly avoiding?) fixed locations. It is in such a space that the new powers reside.

Like the powers of yore, they demand loyalty and discipline. But the targets and condensation-points of loyalty are thoroughly stripped of all association with place; *their seductive/mobilizing power rests in their very out-of-placeness*. They symbolize the continuity of continuously inconclusive travel, not the finality of arrival. They invoke movement, and not 'being always there', 'since time immemorial and ever hence'. Identifying yourself with a commodity brand, a gadget, a globetrotting celebrity, a cult or a faddish life-style currently in the limelight, you are not taking an oath of loyalty to any of the political units of the globe. If anything, such acts of identification help you to shake off the locally focused obligations and feelings of indebtedness to the 'natives'.

The new global elite is floating, skating, surfing – often physically, but at all times spiritually. Its members do not 'belong' in the not-so-long-ago universal territorial sense. Their points of orientation are as mobile as they – bodily or spiritually – are, and as short-lived as their self-identifying loyalties. In the

cyberspace they inhabit there are no geographically fixed *topoi*, no borders and no border posts. Their addresses are registered in the internet-providers' servers (as extraterritorial as their owners), not in the files of local police precincts, nor in the rosters of state subjects. Membership of the global elite is defined by their *disengagement*, and by freedom from binding territorial commitments.

Members of the global elite meet mainly *each other* and communicate with *each other*. Their idiosyncrasies appear small and insignificant – amusing variations on a theme common to all, none of them affecting the easily legible tune. Such peculiarities do not impede mutual understanding; there is an expectation of reciprocity of perception and a willing, if temporary, retention built into every dialogue. Multi-culturalism, polyvocality, hybridity, cosmopolitanism are the verbal glosses through which members of the global elite struggle to grasp and convey that uncanny experience of variety as but so many little and shallow ripples on the uniform surface of common life-style, or as peculiarities of accents or styles that each jointly deployed language easily takes in its stride.

Unlike their ancestors of the nation-building era, global elites have no mission to perform; they do not feel the need or intend to proselytize, to carry the torch of wisdom, to enlighten, instruct and convert. Their earth-bound, and now left-behind compatriots, too deeply engrossed in their daily survival worries to ponder the wonders of polyculturalism and impotent to relish its joys, may have looked up to the globals as role models – but the globals hardly consider themselves as teachers and even less as the examples to be followed. Through their actions the global elite may shape up, more by default than by design, to the life conditions in which the rest is cast, their horizons, dreams and images of the good life – but the actions are not calculated to bring that effect and so the actors do not feel obliged to assume responsibility for the consequences their actions may have on others; particularly on such others as have failed to follow them so far, and are most unlikely to follow them in the future, onto the global circuits. *The present-day self-centred global elite has no managerial ambitions* and order-building is nowhere to be found on its agenda.

Imagination of the global elite is, like their own life-setting and conduct, disengaged and unattached – not territorially embedded, let alone entrenched, circumscribed or otherwise confined by locality. Fixity, durability, bulk, solidity or permanence, those supreme values of the sedentary mentality, have all been degraded and acquired an unambiguously negative flavour. They are all conditions to beware of and to avoid. It is not for their limitations but for their ambitions that the utopias of yore stand condemned in the new global elite *Weltanschauung* and life philosophy. Their two most crucial attributes – territoriality and finality – disqualify past utopias and bar in advance all future attempts to re-enter the line of thinking such utopias followed.

This devaluation of territorial engagement and resentment of all finality is manifested in the new mistrust of 'society' and in exasperation caused by all suggestions of society-bound, society-promoted and society-managed solutions to jointly or individually experienced human problems. Hopes and dreams have flown elsewhere; they are instructed to steer clear of societal harbours and on no account cast there their anchors.

### IMAGINATION PRIVATIZED

Our world, as Paul Virilio put it when interviewed by John Armitage,<sup>8</sup> 'is constantly on the move. Today's world no longer has any kind of stability; it is shifting, straddling, gliding away all the time.' Borders may be still in place, but they do not matter as much as they used to a mere half-century ago. Most certainly, they are not an obstacle for the drifting and gliding, skating and surfing, that fill the *Lebenswelt*. The messages, images, genuine or mock representations of places that fill the *Lebenswelt* have mostly an electronic or a cyber-spatial, not a geographic, address. Were there a 'society' in a sense of a self-enclosed and self-sustained totality, it would find it difficult to cut itself off and isolate itself, territorially, from the global whirlwind. Even totalitarianism, as Virilio caustically observed, can no more be credibly adumbrated as a localized phenomenon. We live in the era of *globalitarianism*, when there are no more plots left to which one could escape and in which one could hide. Distance is no defence. One is under watch and on beck and call everywhere, obediently carrying in one's pocket the imponderables of one's captivity in the form of cellular telephones, portable internet-connected computers, or credit cards.

For the utopia draftsmen of the solid-modern era, imagining a far-away *topos* not yet found, penetrated, ingested and assimilated by the rest of the *oikoumene* was the easiest part of the task. It was also the most plausible and convincing, 'realistic' part of the story, however fantastic the rest of the story might have appeared. Maps of the continents and the oceans were spattered by numerous blank spots, while many of the already mapped mountain ranges, rainforests, deserts and swamps defied the endurance of all but a few most courageous and adventurous travellers.

If the good life was to be a new beginning, it seemed obvious that it called for a new *place*. All known, good or bad forms of life were 'territorial', as had to be, in consequence, all schemes of their improvement. Politics, the activity aimed at designing, guarding, correcting and repairing the conditions under which people pursue their life-purposes, derived its name from the Greek term meaning the 'city' – and whatever else the city might have been, it was always a *place*. Human identities, human rights and obligations, as well as the routines to follow, the bonuses from following them and the penalties for

breaking them, were all territorial. Through thick and thin and apparently till death them do part, the fates of politics and of the territories were linked; indeed, inseparable.

In our fast-globalizing world the territory is equally fast losing its importance, though acquiring a new significance: symbolic and casting a ghostly shadow of the gravity lost. No wonder that 'grounded politics' of past ages rapidly runs out of substance, even if, like the territory bereaved by its past importance, it gains in spectacularity and emotional value. Territorial powers offer no secure, reliable, trustworthy supports for rights and obligations. As Virilio put it in conversation with Chris Dercon<sup>9</sup> – these days 'a state of rights is not connected with a state of place, to a clearly determined locality'.

The globe is full. There are no as yet undiscovered places left and no places where one could hide from the order (or for that matter disorder) ruling (or for that matter misruling) in places already known and mapped, crisscrossed by beaten tracks, administered and managed. In this world, there is no more 'outside'. Each *polis* is but a pale shadow of the old sovereign realm, but *il n'y a pas hors de cité* anywhere on the planet. 'Utopia' – in its original meaning of a *place* that does not exist – has become, within the logic of the globalized world, a contradiction in terms. The 'nowhere' (the 'forever nowhere', the 'thus-far nowhere', and the 'nowhere-as-yet' alike) is no more a place. *The 'u' of 'utopia' bereaved by the 'topos', is left homeless and floating, no more hoping to strike its roots, to 're-embed'.*

In the globalization era, the frontier-land – the warehouse of opportunities, the greenhouse of dreams and the plot singled out as a building site of happiness – is not a place either. Frontier-land cannot these days be plotted on any map; it is not a geographical notion anymore. It is 'the whole life', lived as it is from one project to another, each of them aimed at expanding the range of similarly one-off and short-lived projects and none of them aimed at terminating the obsessive search for projects that has become the updated, liquid-modern version of the solid-modern frontier-land.

The utopian model of a 'better future' is out of question. It fails on two accounts. First, on accounts of its fixity. Whatever else the 'better' as imagined by our contemporaries may be, it cannot be *fixed*, 'once for all', determined to last eternally – and utopian models, tying their vision of happiness to a settled population of a geographically defined, unmovable city, present precisely such a concept of the 'better future'. Secondly, the by-now old-fashioned utopias fail to excite on account of their tendency to locate the secret of happy life in social reform – an operation to be performed on the society as a whole and resulting in a 'steady state' of the life-setting. They propose an improvement meant to put paid to all further improvement – a gigantic leap forward perhaps, but redolent with the cadaverous odour of *stasis*.

A third factor acting against the old-style utopias may be named: the undefined 'future' itself. Liquid modernity detached trust from the future – by

detaching the faith in progress from the flow of time. The passage of time is no more measured by the movements from an inferior to a superior state – but by the passing out, the vanishing, of the chances of improvement, which each moment of time entails in an essentially similar quantity and which sink into the unrecoverable past together with that moment. With the early-modern ‘delay of gratification’ decisively out of fashion and at odds with ‘rational choice’ and with credit cards replacing saving books as weapons of self-assertion, came the shift of seductive power from the indefinite series of ‘tomorrows’ to the fully tangible, securely within reach, ‘today’. Happiness and more happiness are desired now as they used to be in the bygone times of utopia-writing; but *happiness means now a different today rather than a more felicitous tomorrow*, as it did in the past.

And so happiness has become a *private affair*; and a matter for *here and now*. The happiness of others is no more – or better be no more – a condition of one’s own felicity. Each moment of happiness is, after all, lived through in a company that may still be around, but more likely will not be, when the next moment of happiness arrives. The settings in which moments of happiness are staged are not to be cultivated after the pattern of cornfields that bring ever more profuse crops the longer they are tended to, ploughed and fertilized. The paradigm of the search for happiness is mining, rather than agri- or horti-culture. The mines are emptied of their useful contents and then promptly abandoned – when the deposits have been exhausted or when their further exploitation becomes too cumbersome or costly.

Unlike the utopian model of good life, happiness is thought of as an aim to be pursued individually, and as a series of happy moments succeeding each other – not as a steady state. If places appear in that thinking, they do so mostly in the capacity of sites where the succession of happy moments is believed to acquire velocity and density unattainable in other sites. This capacity is not related (not necessarily at any rate) to previous investment in the place. On the contrary, as the novelty of a place wears off and the pleasures it offers turn tediously familiar, the ‘law of diminishing returns’ begins to operate and each next moment of happiness may require an increased investment of time and effort – a waste of resources, considering the profusion of the yet unexplored places and yet untested excitements. Hence the attraction of a modicum of happiness known to be on offer in the already visited and familiar places needs to compete with the magnetic power of ‘virgin lands’ and ‘new beginnings’ whose promises are all the more believable and seductive for having been untested – and more often than not the old faithful and trusty sites do not emerge from that competition victorious. Whatever attraction prevails, though, one option looks definitely unappetizing: the prospect of ‘fixity’, of the chance of mobility being cut out and of alternative sites where happier sensations could be sought being declared out of bounds.

In the transgressive imagination of liquid modernity the 'place' (whether physical or social) has been replaced by the unending sequence of new beginnings, inconsequentiality of deeds has been substituted for fixity of order, and the desire of a different today has elbowed out concern with a better tomorrow.

## NOTES

- 1 Toscano (2001: 50).
- 2 See Agamben (1998). Here quoted from Heller-Roazen's (1998) translation.
- 3 Arendt (1986: 300, 293).
- 4 See the translators' note in Agamben (2000: 143).
- 5 Miyoshi (1996).
- 6 Slaughter (1996: 52).
- 7 Makler *et al.* (1992: 26–7).
- 8 In Armitage (2001: 40).
- 9 In 1986. Here quoted after Armitage (2001: 80), in Daphne Miller's translation.

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ZYGMUNT BAUMAN's first academic appointment was at the University of Warsaw in 1954. Forced for the second time to leave his native Poland he moved first to the University of Tel Aviv in 1968 and then to the University of Leeds in 1972 where he was the first Professor of Sociology and also Head of Department. He is Professor Emeritus at both the Universities of Leeds and Warsaw. He was awarded the Amalfi European Prize in 1990 and the Adorno Prize in 1998. His most recent books are *Liquid Modernity* (Polity Press, 2000), *Society under Siege* (Polity Press, 2002) and *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Polity Press, forthcoming).

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