Global Solidarity

Zygmunt Bauman

"The real need of the moment," says Michael Lerner, "is for a fundamental rethinking of the way we are running our world. In this battle of fear against hope," he says, we need to "focus our energies on building trust, love, and goodness in the world.... We need to think hard about what it is in the way we are living, organizing our societies, and treating each other that makes violence seem plausible to so many people." A central step in this process, Lerner suggests, " is to reorganize ourselves as part of the Unity of All Being." One could hardly say it better.

The world is full. There is no place to hide.

After September 11, one can no longer go on pretending that the truth of our world has not been displayed for all to see. Although it has been unnoticed, ignored, or played down by most of us, the truth is that the world is full. The great dream of the West, the dream that there is always a new place to discover, a new land to colonize, has dissolved. The great hope that a nation could wall itself off from the others is likewise over. The era that started with the building of the Chinese or Hadrian Walls, proceeded through the Maginot Line, and ended with the Berlin Wall, is at an end. There is no empty place, if there ever was one. There is no society that can subsist apart from the rest of us. There is no sector off the grid.

The French have a good way of putting this—"*il n'y a pas hors du monde*"—there is no "outside" to the world, no escape route or place to shelter, no alternative space to isolate and hide. And this phenomenon is not just geographic but social and psychological. When I say the world is full I mean that there is nowhere that one can say with any degree of certainty to be "*chez soi.*" There is no place for oneself where one is free to follow one's own ways, pursue one's own goals and be oblivious to all the rest as irrelevant. Nowhere (however tightly sealed and heavily fortified that spot may be) where one can shut oneself up in one's own affairs, oblivious to their effects on those left outside. The world is full.

You know that fullness from the inside. That fullness is not just another item of information. You feel that fullness, you live it daily, and whatever you do or may yet do, that experience of fullness won't go away. Woe to those who try to forget it or feel conceited enough to trust their power to opt out. The awakening may be devastatingly cruel, just like that morning of September 11 was for those New Yorkers who might have believed that things that happened "out there," on the other side of the well-protected border, did not and would not affect their well-being, that all the pencils needed to draw the boundary between good and bad fortune could be found on this side of the border, and that soon the state-of-the-art anti-missile shield would make the sealing of that border complete and foolproof.

"Globalization" is the term commonly used to account for this uncanny experience of the "world filling up." With the velocity of transmission approaching its limit—the speed of light—the near-instantaneity of the cause-and-effect succession transforms even the largest of distances into proximity—and in the end for all practical purposes dissolves the cause-effect distinction itself ... we are all now in the close, indeed intimate, vicinity of each other.

Because it involves drawing speed to its limits and reducing distance to an ever more negligible factor in the calculation of action, globalization is unlike any other territorial expansion of the past. As Paul Virilio put it, "we live in a world no longer based on geographic expanse but on a temporal distance constantly being decreased by our transportation, transmission and tele-action capacities." "The new space is speed-space; it is no longer a time-space." Virilio suggests that speed is no more a means, but a milieu; one may say that speed is a sort of ethereal substance that saturates the world and into which more and more of action (and particularly of actions that truly count) is transferred, acquiring in the process new qualities that only such substance makes possible—and inescapable. The new speed renders the action momentary and thus virtually unpreventable, but also potentially un-punishable. And the mirror reflection of the action's impunity is the potentially unbound and incurable vulnerability of its objects.

One of the most consequential effects of that new situation is the endemic porosity and frailty of all boundaries and the in-built futility, or at least the provisional nature and revocability, of all boundary drawing. All boundaries

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have become tenuous, frail and porous. Boundaries share in the new facility of disappearance; they are effaced as they are drawn, leaving behind—as the Cheshire cat its smile—only the (similarly volatile) memory of drawing. Geographical discontinuity matters no more, as speed-space, that envelops the totality of the globe's surface, brings each place into nearly the same speed-distance from each other and makes all places mutually contiguous.

More than two centuries ago, in 1784, Immanuel Kant, in his *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, recorded a prophetic vision of the world to come: "*die volkommene bürgerliche Vereinigung in der Menschengattung*"—a "perfect unification of human species through common citizenship." That would be, Kant noted, the fulfillment of "*was die Natur zur höchsten Absicht hat*"—of "the supreme Nature's design." Unification must have been Nature's design from the start, thought Kant, since the globe we inhabit is a sphere. Because, on such a sphere, you cannot increase your distance without ultimately cancelling it, the surface of the globe on which we live bars "infinite dispersion." In the end, we must all be neighbors simply because we have nowhere else to go. The surface of the Earth is our shared property; none of us has more "right" to occupy it than any other member of the human species.

Such a time must have finally arrived. Let's return to the time of Kant (and to the time of little provincial towns like Kant's Königsberg), to catch a glimpse of how this happened. Kant's near contemporary, Alexis de Tocqueville, wrote about the Ancien Regime that ruled France before the Revolution. This regime was a collection of localities—villages, townships, parishes. The ruling dynasty zealously creamed off of their surplus product, but otherwise expressed little interest in, and refrained from the running of, their daily affairs and seldom interfered with their self-propagating routines.

That regime was replaced after the French Revolution with a new kind of power that introduced a law uniform for all, replacing the variegated collection of burdens and privileges. This power intended to level up the differences between regional usages and standards of life, but above all interfered in the way the production and distribution of (now seen as national) wealth was conducted. We may say that the French Revolution initiated integration of society on a new supra-local level of the state, wielding or struggling to obtain a power that reached the parts which former powers could not and did not wish to reach. That process took Europe at least a century to accomplish, and other continents a century more.

The effort started by the French Revolutionary governments was in response to the inability of municipalities, guilds, and other forms of local government to contain and control powerful economic forces that rose above the local level and moved beyond local control—the only control then in operation. Entrepreneurs of the time complained and fulminated against "silly local constraints" that cramped economic initiative and arrested progress—just as today's multinationals complain against "economically absurd" national attempts to keep watch on, monitor, and correct economic activity on their territory and to put brakes on some of the wilder side-effects of the unbridled pursuit of gain. To express their dissatisfaction these entrepreneurs of the eighteenth century used a vocabulary strikingly similar to that known to us, both from the writings and speeches of the prophets and from today's advocates of the emancipation of global economic forces "of progress" from the "retrograde parochiality" of nation-states.

Just like then, our current institutions of democratic, political, and ethical control, territorially confined and tied to the ground as they are, are no match for the increasingly extraterritorial and free-flowing forces of finance, capital, and trade. Just like then, our task now is to create such institutions of effective political action as could match the size and the power of the already global economic forces and bring them under political scrutiny and ethical supervision. The alternative is the continuing—and deepening—of the disastrous effects of venture capital: the growing inequality and polarization of the globe, massive destruction of livelihoods, impoverishment of entire lands and populations, and revival of tribal sentiments and animosities with all their murderous, often genocidal, consequences.

The first step in creating a political sphere sufficient to regulate these economic forces is to realize that, in this globalized world of ours, we all live closer to each other than ever before. We share more aspects of our daily life than ever before. We have the opportunity to know more about each other's customs and preferences than ever before. And

At the Festival of Booths

Every house on earth a broken house.

Every city a ruined city.

Ploughed under by that slow disaster, time.

If ever redeemed to us, then by the same.

Your walls will fall, are falling, have fallen.

Your roof is open to the countless stars.

—Nan Cohen

since our weapons have become ever more murderous and have reached already the power to destroy the planet—there is more than ever before reason, for all of us, to put talking to each other above fighting each other. Let us take up this unique chance that globalization itself offers.

But to engage in such a dialogue, we need all feel secure, have our dignity recognized and our ways of life respected—looked upon seriously, with the attention they deserve. Above all, we need to feel that we are all given an equal chance in life and the equal possibility to enjoy the fruits of our shared achievements. Most of those conditions are either missing or suspected to be missing in that "new world disorder" that is emerging out of the "deregulated," one-sided process of globalization. And so there is a temptation to resort to violence rather than negotiation; to wage endless "reconnaissance wars" in order to find out how far the "adversaries" can be pushed back, how much they can be forced to give away.

Globalization is, among other things (perhaps above all) an ethical challenge.

Sooner or later, served daily with the evidence of our interdependence, we will have to realize that no one can claim the Earth, or any part of the Earth, as one's own indivisible property. In view of our interdependence, "solidarity of fate" is not a matter of choice. What does depend on our choice is whether that shared fate will end up in mutual destruction, or generate solidarity of feelings, purposes, and action. Regardless of our diverse, often sharply distinct and sometimes hotly antagonistic political or religious creeds, we all wish to live in dignity, to not be humiliated, to be free from fear, and to be allowed to pursue happiness. This is a wide and solid enough common ground on which to start building solidarity of thought and action.

Reforging solidarity of fate into solidarity of purpose and action is one case in which the verdict "there is no alternative," so often abused in the case of other choices, can be legitimately pronounced. Either we draw the proper conclusions from our global interdependence and turn it to the benefit of all, or it will turn itself, with our overt or tacit support, into a catastrophe after which few if any people will be around to count the merits and demerits of any one of the conflicting ways of life. The choice is, as Hannah Arendt warned already forty years ago, between solidarity of common humanity and solidarity of mutual destruction. No rhetoric and labeling exercise will chase that choice away.

On this planet, we are all dependent on each other, and nothing that we do or refrain from doing is indifferent to the fate of everyone else. From the ethical point of view, this makes us all responsible for each other. Responsibility "is there," put firmly in place by the global network of interdependency—whether we recognize its presence or not and whether we take it up or not. Whenever we deny its presence we assume the attitude of "bystanders"—people who see evil and hear evil (as we all, courtesy of the world wide web and worldwide television network, do now—and do in real time), sometimes speak of evil, but do nothing at all or not enough to arrest it, to thwart, and to frustrate it. But in the new frontier-land of the full planet, evil—any instance of evil, wherever it is gestated and whoever may be its intended or "collateral" victim—affects us all.

A global world is a place where, for once, the desideratum of moral responsibility and survival coincide and blend. Globalization is, among other things (perhaps above all) an ethical challenge. It is now up to us—all of us—to take this challenge up; to take, one may say, responsibility for our responsibility. And the greater power we have, the mightier our weapons and our resources, the fuller our warehouses and the more efficient our factories—the greater the responsibility we need to carry. For once, the ethical duty of care for the other and the survival instict point in the same direction and suggest the same action. To quote Michael Lerner once more: "If we really want to protect ourselves, we need to create a world which no longer dehumanizes others, no longer tolerates oppression, no longer imagines that we can live our own private lives and find our own private solutions while closing our ears to the suffering of others."

It is not just a question of insuring ourselves against the vengeance of the disinherited and humiliated others. It is also a question of defending ourselves against the endemic frailty of our own civilization, of keeping alive and re-asserting the values which that civilization which we cherish and are proud of is meant to embody. George Monblot of *The Guardian* (Nov.15, 2001) warns that in the popular reaction to the rout of Taliban, "the bugles sounding victory for civilized values are also sounding a retreat. [I]t seems that in trying to shut the terrorists out, we have merely imprisoned ourselves." Monblot refers to the amazing—and horrifying—facility with which the American Congress, and soon afterwards the British Secretary for Interior Affairs, pushed aside our countries' hard-won liberties and allowed the suspension of basic human rights (including the right to be seen as innocent until proved guilty). Referring to Colin Powell's efforts to have Al-Jazeera, the only truly free and independent major broadcasting company in the Arab world, banned, Monblot concludes that "free speech and dissent have now joined terrorism as the business of 'evil-doers.' If this is a victory for civilization, I would hate to see what defeat looks like."

If peaceful coexistence on Earth is our objective, this is a false start, as is the tendency to re-cast the cause of justice as the task of winning a war. We must not confuse "justice being done" with the replacement of one set of barbaric tribal chiefs offering shelter to terrorists by another set as yet having no shelter to offer but trying hard to obtain one.

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POST-TRAUMATIC LOVE SYNDROME *(from page 11)*

Thus external ruin can be psychologically liberating precisely because it creates temporary conditions of safety in which people can experience and express the part of themselves that hungers for community but which is normally kept under wraps because of the potential dangers of rejection or guilty compliance.

What We Can Do

How can a social movement, then, committed to creating a new bottom line of caring and community, make use of these insights? First and foremost, we have to understand that even the language of our movement—"caring," "community," "love," "mutual recognition," and "spirituality"—will stir up resistance in people because such language puts into words longings that they have suppressed or cynically dismissed in themselves or in others because of the dangers of rejection and exploitation. By understanding how catastrophes bring people together, we can see how powerfully entrenched the fears of such connectedness must be. The world has to practically collapse around us before we can feel safe enough to come together. This understanding should help us feel compassion toward people who are dismissive or contemptuous of our ideas, as well as toward ourselves for not being able to sufficiently live them out.

This leads us to the centrality of addressing the issue of cynicism itself as part of our political work. In their heart of hearts, most people don't want to be cynical. They want to feel like they're part of something bigger than themselves while maintaining their freedom to realize their private ambitions. Their cynicism is a defense against the dangers of rejection and exploitation. Therefore, we should find ways to talk to people—in our literature, our conferences, our political proposals, and in the various social movements in which we participate—about the dynamics of cynicism. In particular, we should talk to people about how our political leaders continuously promote a cynical attitude toward idealism of any kind, how the mass media insidiously reflects the notion that everyone has dark and ulterior motives, and how our religions and communities often recreate the same sense of spiritual emptiness. We should find ways to remind people of movements like the civil rights and women's movements which were genuinely idealistic and rejected the cynical belief that the way things were was the way they were destined to be.

All the while, it's crucial to call people to their true longings for connectedness and to systematically confront the psychological dangers that keep people from hearing that call. We need to try, in words and deeds, to make it safe for people to experience more of the interdependence that they secretly desire and to rebel against the institutions that tell them that such mutuality is shameful. We shouldn't need a catastrophe to open our hearts to each other and to feelings that are aching to be expressed. ❑

GLOBAL SOLIDARITY *(from page 14)*

War on terrorism, to bring any lasting and secure effects, cannot be reduced to the war on terrorists; it needs to cut at the roots of the sinister meeting of desperation with the most modern and murderous weapons. That approach would require much more than sending bombers and launching missiles against terrorists already discovered and recorded.

Yes—ours is a divided, quarrelsome world of "gated communities," a world in which petrified stereotypes, ossified prejudices, and seething animosities bar clarity of thinking, a world in which barriers tend to erected and frontlines drawn in every corner of the globe and with accelerating speed. You may say that this is not a good point to start, if dialogue and mutual comprehension is the destination. So let me remind you of a wise Irish joke. To a driver's question "How to get from here to Dublin?", a passerby answers: "If I wished to go to Dublin, I would not start from here." I can sympathise with all those who would prefer to start on the way to the "Unity of All Being" from a world different from the one we inherited and helped to shape. But there is no other world except this sphere on whose surface we all jostle, rubbing each other's shoulders. For once, the all-too-often abused *ein breira*—"there is no alternative"—argument sounds all too credible. We can ignore it solely at our own, and everybody else's, peril. ❑

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