Zygmunt Bauman ■

Local Orders, Global Chaos

Things are orderly, if they behave as you've expected them to; that is, if you may safely leave them out of account when planning your actions. This is the main attraction of order: security which comes from the ability to predict, with little or no error, what the results of your own actions will be. You may go after whatever you are going after, concentrating on what you yourself need to do and fearing no surprise: no obstacles which you could not, with modicum of effort, anticipate and so include in your calculation. To put it in a nutshell: things are in order if you do not need to worry about the order of things; things are orderly if you do not think, nor feel need to think, of order as a problem, let alone as a task. And once you start thinking of order, this is a sure sign that something, somewhere, is out of order: that things are going out of hand and so you must do something to bring them back in line.

Once you start thinking of order, you'll find out that what you are missing is clear and legible distribution of probabilities. There would be order, if not everything could happen, at least not everything could happen with equal probability; if some events were virtually bound to happen, some others were quite likely, some other yet utterly improbable, and all the rest were completely out of question. Were this is not the case and instead – as far as you can tell – there is a fifty-fifty chance of any event happening, you would say that there is chaos. If the possibility to predict and so to control the outcomes of your actions is the main attraction of order, the apparent lack of any link between what you do and what happens to you, between 'doing' and 'suffering', is what makes chaos odious, repugnant and frightening.

The less equal are the chances of the responses to your actions, the less random are your actions' effects – the more order, you would say, there is in the world. Any attempt to 'put things in order' boils down to *manipulating the probabilities of events*. This is what any culture does, or at least is supposed to do. Pierre Boulez said of art, that it transforms the improbable into the inevitable. What he said about art, applies to all sectors of culture. In the 'natural', culturally un-processed conditions, egg meeting bacon would be an event extremely rare and so improbable, almost a miracle; in England, however, in the 'good old times' when things stayed in place and everyone knew his or her place among them, the meeting of egg and bacon on the breakfast plate used to be all but inevitable, and only fools would put their bets on the meeting not happening.

The manipulating of probabilities and so conjuring up order out of chaos is the miracle daily performed by culture. More precisely: it is the routine performance of that miracle that we call culture. We speak of a 'cultural crisis' if the routine comes to be defied and is breached too often to be seen reliable, let alone be taken for granted.

Culture manipulates probabilities of events through the activity of *differentiating*. We all remember Claude Levi-Strauss' assertion that the first 'cultural act' in history was the splitting of the population of females – however uniform they could be in their reproductive potential – into women eligible for sexual intercourse and such as were not. Culture is the activity of making distinctions: of classifying, segregating, drawing boundaries – and so dividing people into categories interna11y united by similarity and externally separated by difference; and of differentiating the ranges of conduct assigned to the humans a11ocated to different categories. As Frederick Barth famously pointed out, what culture defines as difference, a difference significant enough to justify the separation of categories, is the *product* of boundary-drawing, not its *cause* or motive.

Unclarity about the range of the legitimately anticipated conduct is, I suggest, the substance of that 'danger' which Mary Douglas discovered in the mixing of categories; the danger which people of all times and places tend to associate with humans and things 'sitting across the barricade', with beings which bear traits that should not appear together if the classifications were to retain their predictive, and so reassuring value. Their vexing habit of falling between, rather than fitting in categories, reveals conventionality, and so fragility, where 'objective reality', and so steadfastness, are assumed to reside. The very sight of what Mary Douglas, fol1owing Jean-Paul Sartre, dubbed 'slimy' beings, those stubborn 'in-betweens' that play havoc with the orderliness of the world and contaminate the purity of its divisions, is a keyhole-glimpse into the chaos which underlies every order and threatens to engulf it. The discovery of chaos beefs up the ordering zeal and the passions that surround the practice of order-building, order-repairing and order-protecting. The differentiating/segregating labours of culture would have brought little gain to the feeling of security, to that understanding which Ludwig Wittgenstein defined as the 'knowledge how to go on', unless complemented by the suppression of 'sliminess' – that is, of all things of uncertain origin, mixed status and unclear denomination: of ambivalence.

Since no attempt to accomodate the complexity of the world in neat and comprehensive divisions is likely to succeed, ambivalence is unlikely to be defeated and stop haunting the seekers of security. The opposite, rather, is on the cards: the more intense is desire for order and the frenzier are the efforts to install it, the greater will be the volume of ambivalent leftovers and the deeper the anxiety they will generate. There is little chance that order-building may ever reach its conclusion, being a self-prope11ing and self-intensifying concern which rebounds in a self-defeating activity.

Because of their unsavoury yet intimate connections with the state of uncertainty, the 'impurity' of classifications, the haziness of borderlines and the porousness of borders are

constant sources of fear and aggression inseparable from order-making and order-guarding exertions. Not the only source of conflict, though. Another was revealed by Michel Crozier in his eye-opening study of the 'bureaucratic phenomenon': that other source is *the use of the absence of order, of chaos, as the major weapon of power in its bid for domination*. The strategy of power struggle is to make oneself the unknown variable in the calculations of other people, while denying those others a similar role in one's own calculations. In simpler terms, this means that domination is achieved by removing the rules which constrain one's own freedom of choice, while at the same time imposing as many restrictive rules as possible upon the conduct of all the others. The wider is my range of manoeuver, the greater is my power. The less freedom of choice I have, the weaker are my chances in the power-struggle.

'Order' emerges from this analysis as an agonistic and 'essentially contested' concept. Inside the same social setting the conceptions of order differ sharply. What is 'order' to people in power looks uncannily like chaos to the people they rule. In power-struggle it is always the other side which one would wish to make more 'orderly', more predictable; it is always the steps taken by the other side that one would want to routinize, to strip of all elements of contingency and surprise, while leaving to oneself the right to disregard routine and move erratically. Given the power-struggle, the order-building must be a conflict-ridden process.

Crozier's discovery, made in the context of what one may call 'closed systems' of bureaucratic institutions, reveals its full (and by the time of his study unanticipated) import in the conditions currently described under the rubric of 'globalization'. Let me remind you that the concept of 'globalization' has been coined to replace the long-established concept of 'universalization' once it had become apparent that the emergence of global links and networks had nothing of the intentional and controlled nature implied by the old concept. 'G1obalization' stands for the processes seen as self-propelling, spontaneous and erratic, with no one sitting at the control desk and no one taking planning, let alone taking charge of the overall results We may say with little exaggeration that the term 'globalization' stands for the disorderly nature of the processes which take place above the 'principally coordinated' territory administered by the 'highest level' of institutiona1ized power, that is sovereign states. In his insightful study of the 'New World Disorder' Kenneth Jowitt noticed the demise of the 'Joshua discourse' which overtly or tacitly assumed the law-abiding and essentially determined and pre-ordained universe, and its replacement with the 'Genesis discourse', which instead casts the world as a site of instability, change devoid of consistent direction, spontaneity and perpetual experimentation with uncertain and essentially unpredictable outcomes; in short, as the very opposition of the image of order.

'The new world disorder' dubbed 'globalization' has, however, one truly revolutionary effect: *devaluation of order as such*. Such eventuality could be glimpsed from Crozier's analysis, or indeed anticipated in view of the notorious self-undermining tendency of all

order-building – but only now it can be observed in all its many ramifications. In the g1o-balizing world, *order becomes the index of powerlessness and subordination*. The new global power structure is operated by the oppositions between mobility and sedentariness, contingency and routine, rarity and density of constraints. It is as if the long stretch of history which began with the triumph of the settled over the nomads is now coming to its end... Globalization may be defined in many ways, but that of the 'revenge of the nomads' is as good as if not better than any other.

The strategy of power-struggle recorded by Michel Crozier, just like Jeremy Bentham's panoptical model of social control, assumed mutual engagement of the rulers and the ruled. Imposition of norms and execution of normative regulation tied the controllers and the controlled to each other and made them inseparable. Both sides were, so to speak, tied to the ground: reproduction of power hierarchy required constant presence and confrontation. It is this reciprocal dependency, this perpetual mutual engagement which the new techniques of power which come to the fore in the era of g1obalization have rendered redundant. The new hierarchy of power is marked at the top by the ability to move fast and at short notice, and at the bottom by the inability to slow down, let alone to arrest the moves coupled with own immobility. Escape and evasion, lightness and volatility have replaced the weighty and ominous presence as the main techniques of domination.

No more is the 'normative regulation' necessary to secure domination. Those aspiring to rule could give a sigh of relief: normative regulation was a cumbersome, messy and costly technique, primitive and economically irrational and ruinous by contemporary standards. Its redundancy is felt as emancipation and is experienced by the global elite as the command of reason and a sign of progress. Lack of constraints, deregulation and flexi-bility seem a gigantic leap forward when compared with the costly and laborious methods of disciplining drill practiced in modern panopticons.

Thanks to the new techniques of disengagement, non-commitment, evasion and escape now at the disposal of the elites, the rest may be held in check, disabled and so deprived of its constraining power simply by the utter vulnerability and precariousness of their situation, with no need to 'normatively regulate' their conduct. The emp1oyees of a Ford-type factory could exercise their 'nuisance' power and force the managers to negotiate a bearable modus vivendi and to compromise as long as all sides gathered at the negotiation table knew that they as much as their counterparts have nowhere else to go and must see the bargain through. The owners and the shareholders depended for their income on the good will of the workers as much as the workers depended for their livelihood on the jobs they offered. This is no more the case; one side (but not the other) is painfully aware that the negotiation partners may leave the table at any moment; one more push and the mobile partners may simply take their belongings elsewhere and there will be no one left to negotiate with. For those in the handicapped and weaker position, the sole method to keep the mobile managers and volatile shareholders in place (and so to keep own jobs a bit longer) is to entice them to come and stay by a

convincing display of their own weakness and lack of resistance. Uncertainty in which the new mobility of the global elite has cast the multitude dependent on the elite's willingness to invest, has a self-perpetuating and a self-enhancing capacity. The rational strategies prompted by this kind of uncertainty deepen the insecurity instead of mitigating, and accelerate the disintegration of the normatively-regulated order.

'Précarité est aujourd'hui partout', concluded Pierre Bourdieu. Partly a result of the deliberate policy of 'precarisation' initiated by the supranational and increasingly exterritorial capital and meekly carried by the little-choice-left territorial state govern-ments, and partly the sediment of the new 1ogic of power-bids and self-defense, pre-cariousness is today the major building block of g1obal power-hierarchy and the main technique of social control. As Bourdieu pointed out, claims on the future are unlikely to be made unless the claimants have a firm hold on their present; and it is precisely the hold on the present that most of the inhabitants of the g1obalizing world most conspicuously lack.

They lack the hold on the present because the most important of factors which decide on their livelihood, social position, and the prospects of both are out of their hands; and there is pretty little or nothing that they can do, singly or severally, to bring these factors back under their control. The localities inhabited by them and other people in a similar plight are but airfields on which magnificent flying machines of the global fleet land and take off according to their own, unknown and inscrutable, flight schedules and itineraries; and it is that capricious air-traffic on which they have to rely for survival. And it is not just survival that is at stake, but the way they live and the way they think of their living.

Autonomy of the 1ocal community of Ferdinend Tönnies' canonical description was based on the enhanced density of communication accompanied by intensity of daily intercourse. When information could travel **the end of geography** only together with its carriers and the transportation of both was slow, proximity offered advantage over distance and the goods and the news originated in close vicinity had a distinct privilege over those travelling from afar. The boundaries of local community were drawn in no uncertain terms by the volume and speed of mobillty, determined in its turn by the available means of trasportation. Space, to put it in a nutshell, mattered. But now it matters less; Paul Virilio, announcing 'the end of geography', has suggested that it does not matter at all: its past significance as an obstacle or even the limit to communication has been now cancelled.

The news circulated in the framework of daily face-to-face interaction do not have a greater chance of reinforcement-through-repetition than the electronically transmitted and disseminated information does; on the contrary, they are in a handicapped position when it comes to gaining attention. Even if they succeed, the odds are that they will be dwarfed, stifled and stripped of their interest and authority by the globally produced and globally circulated information which beats them hands down in terms of spectacularity, authority of numbers, and power of conviction. Even the interpretation of the ostensibly 'local'

affairs tends to be derived mostly from the same exterritorial sources. As for the locally born and promoted views – in order to level up with the electronic information, be treated seriously, trusted and grip the minds, they need first to be electronically recorded and 'seen on TV', and so surrender or forfeit their asset of the distinct community-link. The chances to form autonomous homemade, community 'opinion' deploying the resources under autonomous community control are dim or nil.

Electronic transmission of information is now instantaneous and demands no more than a plug in a socket; communal exchange trying to ignore the electronic media would have to rely, like it always did, on the orthodox media of gatherings and conversations whose speed has 'natural limits' and costs are high and – at least in comparative terms – rising. The result is the *devaluation of place*. The physical, non-cyber space where non-virtual communication takes place is but a site for the delivery, absorption and re-cycling of the essentially exterritorial, cyber-space information. Charging the access to the cyber-space at the local call tariff sounded perhaps the death knell of communal autonomy; it was at any rate the communal autonomy's symbolic burial. The cellular telephone offering independence even from wired networks and sockets delivered the final blow to the claim the physical proximity might have had on spiritual togetherness.

The rising 'other-directedness' of locality portends hard times to the orthodox form of the community, that form wrapped around the core of dense web of frequent and lasting interactions, the basis of long-term investment of trust. As Ricard Sennett pointed out in bis *Corrosion of Character*, 'No long term

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is a principle which corrodes trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment', but nowadays 'a place springs into life with the wave of a developer's wand, flourishes, and begins to decay all within a generation. Such communities are not empty of sociability or neighbourliness, but no one in them becomes a long-term witness to another person's life'; under such conditions, 'fleeting forms of association are more useful to people than long-term connections'.

The degradation of locality rubs off upon the 'locals' – people who are not free to move and change places for the lack of necessary resources – the circumstance which makes all the difference between the welcome tourists-in-search-of-pleasure or business-travellers-in-search-of-business-opportunities and the resented 'economic migrants' in-search-of-livelihood. The degree of immobility is today the main measure of social deprivation and the principal dimension of un-freedom; the fact symbolically reflected in the rising popularity of prison-confinement as the way to deal with undesirables.

On the other hand, the speed of mobility, ability to act effectively regardless the distance, and freedom to move offered by absence or facile revocabllity of localised commitments, are nowadays the major stratifying factors on the g1obal as much as on the local scale. The emergent hierarchy of power is akin more to the usages of nomadic than

sedentary societies; sedentariness, and particularly no-choice-sedentariness, is fast turning from asset into liability.

Not that long ago Michael Thompson published a study of the respective social significance of transience and durability – demonstrating the universal and permanent tendency of privileged classes to surround themselves with durable possessions and to make their possessions durable, and a similar tendency to associate social weakness and deprivation with things short-lived and transient. This correlation which held for most, perhaps all known societies of the past, is in the process of being reversed. It is the sign of privilege to travel light and to avoid lasting attachment to possessions; it is the sign of deprivation to be 1umbered with things that outlived their intended use and to be unable to part with them.

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The entry ticket to the new global elite is the 'confidence to dwell in disorder' and ability to 'flourish in the midst of dis1ocation'; the membership card is the capacity of 'positioning oneself in a network of possibilities rather than paralyzing oneself in one particular job'; and the visiting card is the 'willingness to destroy what one has made' – 'to let go, if not to give'; all the features gleaned by Richard Sennett in his character study of Bill Gates, the emblem and model-figure of the new cyber-age elite. What makes such features into the principal stratifying factor – indeed, the meta-factor, factor that endows with significance and sets in motion all other paraphernalia of social position – is that these features exert quite opposite effects on life depending on the circumstances of their bearers. The traits of character which beget exuberant and joyful spontaneity at the top turn 'self-destructive for those who work 1ower down in flexible regime'.

Indeed, the new freedoms of the contemporary reincarnation of absentee landlords make the life-regime of 'those 1ower down' more flexible by the day (and so increasingly uncertain, insecure and unsafe); if not by design, then in the unintended yet all the same inevitable effects. As Roger Friedland quipped, those on the top 'celebrate what others suffer'. The enchanting and willingly embraced lightness of being turns into the curse of cruel yet indomitable fate once it moves down the social ladder.

Chaos has ceased to be enemy number one of rationality, civilization, rational civilization and civilized rationality; no more is it the epitomy of the powers of darkness and unreason which modernity swore and did its best to annihilate. True, the governments of nation-states and their court scribes go on paying lip service to the rule of order, but their daily practices consists in the gradual, but relentless dismantling of the last obstacles to the 'creative disorder' eagerly sought by some and placidly accepted by others as verdict of fate. 'Rule of order' in political parlance of our time means little more than the disposal of social waste, the flotsam and jetsam of new 'flexibility' of livelihood and life itself. For the rest, it is more flexibility, more precariousness and vulnerability, the very opposite of the rule of order, which are in store.

When power flows, and flows globally, political institutions share in the deprivation of all those who are 'tied to the ground'. 'Territory', now disarmed and by no stretch of imagination self-contained, has lost much of its value, attraction and magnetic power to those who can move freely, and becomes ever more elusive target, a dream rather than reality, for those who, themselves immobilized, would wish to slow down or arrest the moves of the exquisitely mobile mesters of the vanishing art. For the mobile, the tasks of territorial management and administration look increasingly as a dirty job which ought to be avoided at all costs and ceded to those further down in the hierarchy, too weak and vulnerable to refuse the chores even if they know how idle and ineffective their efforts are bound to be. And since all commitment to a place and all engagement with its inhabitants is seen as a liability rather than an asset, few 'multinational' companies would agree today to invest in the locality unless bribed – 'compensated' and 'insured against risks' – by its elected authorities.

Time and space have been differentially allocated to the rungs of the global power-ladder. Those who can afford it live solely in time. Those who cannot live in space. For the first space does not matter, As to the second, they struggle hard to make it matter.

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