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Zygmunt Bauman and Edward Bond's Critical Thoughts on Postmodern Morality

Summary

This paper will examine the critical stances of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and British playwright Edward Bond. Their works are similar in the critical approach they take to the so-called civilized values of our time.

Zygmunt Bauman's *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (1995) examines the problem of professional ethics in the context of the XX century, both in the environment that produced and supervised Auschwitz, and in our neoliberal, democratic, globalized corporate world.

Edward Bond (in his plays, but also in his theoretical essays such as "Notes on Postmodernism", and other texts collected in *Hidden Plot: Notes on Theatre and the State*, 2000) examines the chances for survival of our humanity within societies based on obedience and continued belief in 'ethical' rationalizations which led to Auschwitz and Hiroshima in the past, and are likely to do so again.

Comparing the work of those two thinkers it is conceivable to find interesting connections in their approaches to the possible alternatives which could help us transcend postmodern morality – the dominant discourse which continues to promote old (and new) forms of violence, and generate unjust societies within the much advertised neoliberal New World Order.

Key words: humanity, morality, post-modernity, civilization, violence

Introduction

Postmodern morality, or life in fragments, as Zygmunt Bauman calls it in his eponymous book, makes human reality continuously divided – into social and personal good, professional and private ethics; into being 'realistic' in a socially-acceptable sense, and being moral in the sense of individual choices. It offers changeable political identities¹ and life styles, which make individuals incomplete, uninterested in others and without profound emotions. Contemporary man is face with moral choices that are often limited by the economic blackmail of the so-called free market, from which categories paramount for humanity are excluded – primarily equal rights for all. Through various applications of 'the shock doctrine' and other strategies of fragmentation, humanity is forced into constant commotion and unrest: in the increasingly precarious world (depicted brilliantly in the films of the Belgian filmmakers brothers Dardenne), we are torn between what society expects us to become, and what we feel we are as inherently moral beings. The categories of good and evil in

¹ In his book *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*, Cambridge, Polity, 2004, p. 85, Bauman writes: "(...) you'll never know for sure whether the identity you are currently parading is the best you can get and the one most likely to give you the most satisfaction'.

postmodern reality are conceived as arbitrary and adiaphorous. In practice this means that in the democracies of a globalized world, global ethics is confined to, and processed solely through activities undertaken in defence of human rights. Human rights are defined, and in every possible way controlled, by the most powerful countries, They are used as an excuse to legitimize the violence they perpetrated in the name of spreading democracy and preserving security and peace. The result of this Orwellian paradox are the so-called *legitimacy wars* waged outside the borders of Western Europe and the United States.

Two great thinkers of our time, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and British playwright Edward Bond, tackled these paradoxes in their works using different terminology and from different standpoints. Both have mercilessly criticized new forms of barbarism produced under the assumed good intentions of the civilized world. This paper will attempt to define the concerns they share and the issues they address – one in academic circles, the other in theatre, the stages all over the world, where his plays are being performed. As we assess their work it is important to keep in mind that five wars are being waged at the moment, but also that a large number of anti-war texts and studies have been written, in favour of peace and a more just life on the planet. It is unfortunate that a true change in the globalized society has not occurred, and that wars continue, and multiply. Bauman and Bond help us see better the roots of this predicament so that, after so much has been written, something effective can also be done, in time.

This paper will primarily rely on two studies, namely Bauman's *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* and Bond's *The Hidden Plot: Notes on Theatre and the State*. It will also, however, deal with the works of critical thinkers such as Howard Zinn, Pierre Bourdieu, Terry Eagleton, Russell Jacoby, George Ritzer, and others.

1. Bauman and Bond on the role of intellectuals in unjust and unequal societies

Speaking about violence caused by coercion used in the course of the so-called 'civilizing process', in the chapter of his book titled "Violence, Postmodern", Zygmunt Bauman says:

Modernity legitimizes itself as a 'civilizing process' – as an ongoing process of making the coarse gentle, the cruel benign, the uncouth refined. Like most legitimations, however, this one is more an advertising copy than an account of reality. At any rate, it hides as much as it reveals and what it hides is that only through the coercion they perpetrate can the agencies of modernity keep out of bounds the coercion they swore to annihilate; that one person's civilizing process is another person's forceful

incapacitation. The civilizing process is not about the uprooting, but about the redistribution of violence.²

This is also one of the points Bauman makes in his essay “Scene and Obscene”, where he comments on Clinton’s civilizing mission to uproot the violence of the Serbs during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia (undertaken, we may add, not only to install US military bases in Kosovo, but also to legitimize and win praise for the future violence NATO planned to commit).³ Bauman observes that authoritative coercion is very often dressed *as defence of law and order*.

The question who legitimizes authorized violence is extremely significant. Bauman is not the only one who believes that huge responsibility for giving legitimacy to violence is borne by none other than the most learned individuals. Bauman notes that a society that produces a huge number of academics does not produce enough intellectuals who are *guardians of truth and objectivity*. The responsibility of the most learned individuals should be to bring new critical thought into the existing social structure, but not, however, to proclaim ideas of humanism which in practice they are not prepared to endorse, and which their society violates. Bauman expects that intellectuals:

By being the foremost practitioners of their own specialisms, by carrying exceptional public trust and esteem due to their specialist excellence, (...) are also experts in the general cultural values which transcend any single specialism and any particular social function. They have the *right*, therefore, to bring the enormous public deference in which they are held on account of their professional achievements to bear on their standing in public matters of general interest and concern: they have the right to speak with authority on questions not directly entailed in their specialist credentials.⁴

This right is often abused. Under the mask of defending social interests, public intellectuals coopted by the system (or instant-intellectuals, as Bourdieu calls them) use their authority to legitimize and normalize injustice by, in fact, denying equal justice to all.

When it comes to people who engage only in their own field of specialism, another type of aberration occurs. In *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* social critic and historian Russell Jacoby writes about intellectuals who not only take into consideration banal subjects, but also apply in their research banal ways of analysis. Jacoby finds that, besides the name-dropping they employ, such intellectuals most often have nothing illuminating to say. He underscores, for example, that by replacing the study of working class culture with the study of mass culture, cultural studies experts see themselves as less elitists than the biased scholars of the past. They do so even though their activities have nothing to do

² Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, “Violence, Postmodern”, Blackwell, 1995. p. 141

³ Bauman Zygmunt “Scene and Obscene”, *Third Text*, 5/summer 2000, p. 6.

⁴ Bauman Zygmunt, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, ‘Intellectuals in the Postmodern World’, Blackwell, 1995., p. 224

with true radicalism but enrich the corporate spirit of quasi-leftism, below which the old, reactionary, elitism of the privileged persists. To quote Jacoby:

The self-satisfied break with old elitism can be tolerated, perhaps even applauded; the incessant repetition of the new academic commonplaces, however, betrays the project. These are not gutsy scholars ploughing new ground, but cautious souls trimming their front lawns.⁵

Jacoby's criticism is echoed by Terry Eagleton. In his 2008 text "Death of the Intellectual" Eagleton, too, makes the distinction between academics and true intellectuals and, recalling his own days at Cambridge, says:

Academics spend their lives researching such momentous questions as the vaginal system of the flea (the title of a Cambridge PhD thesis I once spotted); intellectuals have the rather more arduous job of bringing ideas to bear on society as a whole. And universities, once upon a time, were where they were to be found in considerable numbers. (...) The real problem today is that universities have largely ceased to play their classical role as sources of critique. ... By and large, academic institutions have shifted from being the accusers of corporate capitalism to being its accomplices. They are intellectual Tescos, churning out a commodity known as graduates rather than greengroceries.⁶

The differences that exist in the world of scientists and intellectuals exist in the world of art and artists as well. In Bond's "Rough Note on Justice" the causes why innovative thinkers and artists are rare are explained in the following manner:

Powerful classes tend to decide what law is. In, say, feudal society, the powerful classes made laws for their own benefit. Is it different in democracy? The wide suffrage should ensure that it is. But power affects everything and clearly it has a large say in forming public opinion and so biasing elections. If I commit a crime power will imprison or execute me. If I am 'good' for a year, will it pay me a bonus or move me to a better neighbourhood? That would not be good for economy. It could be argued that power will enable me to move to a better place by earning more on the social market. But the social market deals only in power. Saints tend to be poor, in business, candour doesn't pay, **and innovative artists and thinkers are neglected unless power can use them to serve its own ends.** The economy rewards greed, cunning, acquisitiveness. Was conscious immoral promotion of tobacco for years in America worse than the suppression of Christianity in China? Were there more Chinese Christian martyrs than martyrs to the American tobacco industry? There is a difference between naked totalitarianism and democracy. But free market does not make a just society. In it people are not socially free or equal members of society or equal before the law. It is not that the economy is run by wicked men or that Christians are cynics. The trouble is that the economy attacks the virtues of the community.⁷

Bauman makes a similar point when he claims that today the very idea of independent thinkers is undermined by demands for narrow specialists in specific professional fields:

From the very start, (...) the concept of intellectuals was a militant, mobilizing concept, with its fighting edge turned against two adversary tendencies: the growing fragmentation of the knowledge class caused by the occupational specialization, and the declining political significance of the learned professions (and of the 'public' in general) at the time when politics was itself becoming a separate, full-time occupation confined to its own full-time practitioners. Though ostensibly forward-looking, the concept bore therefore a nostalgic flavour; it was a call to reassert and restore the unity and high public authority

⁵ Jacoby, Russell, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy*, "Mass Culture and Anarchy", Basic Books, 1999, p. 81

⁶ See <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/Death-of-the-intellectual>

⁷ Bond, *Hidden Plot: Notes on Theatre and the State*, "Rough Note on Justice", Methuen, 2000, pp. 61-62

of men of knowledge, once (truly or allegedly) enjoyed, but now assumed to be being eroded and about to be lost.⁸

One of the causes why intellectuals (but also all other productive citizens⁹) mind their own business solely, lies in the severity of the daily struggle to survive. Neoliberal order forces individuals to fight for themselves and to believe that struggle (not solidarity) is necessary and inevitable, calling every new unscrupulous lay-off a rationalization or flexibility, and every new atrocity committed under the excuse of preserving security and peace – collateral damage. In his essay “Language” (1995) Bond points out that in the New World Order:

The economy needs the poor who will fight to be rich, and the rich who are rich only because they have defeated the poor.¹⁰

In an interview for the Brazilian newspaper *O Globo*¹¹, Pierre Bourdieu (like Eagleton after him) speaks of ‘integrated intellectuals’, bribed or seduced by the order to learn how to be seen by the public as critics, or seeming leftists, when in fact their activities conform to demands of the order whose symbolic capital they represent. In his essay “Neo-liberalism, the Utopia (Becoming Reality) of Unlimited Exploitation’, collected in *The Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time*, Bourdieu analyzes the problem of the neoliberal order in the following manner:

(...) we see how the neoliberal utopia tends to embody itself in the reality of a kind of infernal machine, whose necessity imposes itself even upon the rulers. (...), this utopia evokes a powerful belief – the *free trade faith* – not only among those who live off it, such as financiers, the owners and managers of large corporations, etc., but also among those, such as high-level government officials and politicians, who derive their justification for existing from it. For they sanctify the power of markets in the name of economic efficiency, which requires the elimination of administrative or political barriers capable of inconveniencing the owners of capital in their individual quest for the maximisation of individual profit, which has been turned into a model of rationality. They want independent central banks. And they preach the subordination of nation-states to the requirements of economic freedom for the masters of the economy, with the suppression of any regulation of any market, beginning with the labour market, the prohibition of deficits and inflation, the general privatisation of public services, and the reduction of public and social expenses¹².

Bourdieu is very critical of the neoliberal ‘accountant’s view of the world (once one would have said “grocer’s”) which the new belief presents as the supreme form of human

⁸ Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, “Intellectuals in the Postmodern World”, p. 225

⁹ See the documentary *Herbert's Hippopotamus: Marcuse And Revolution In Paradise* on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzteKCwINes&p=9294CB834933FF0B&playnext=1&index=2>; In this film US Vice President Spiro T. Agnew (1969-1973) admonishes American universities and other institutions of higher education that ‘they should focus more on training young people to be ‘productive citizezce’, rather than free thinkers. N/A

¹⁰ Hidden Plot, ‘Language’, p. 8

¹¹ Bourdieu Pierre, *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time*, Polity Press, 1998. but also on <http://aquevedo.wordpress.com/pierre-bourdieu-entrevista-television-poder-y-dominacion/>

¹² Ibid, p. 100, by Pierre Bourdieu but also on <http://canadianobserver.wordpress.com/2006/11/19/utopia-of-endless-exploitation/>

achievement'.¹³ What he criticised (neo-liberal ideology becoming reality with the help of economic theory) is seriously promoted by others - Fukojama and the neo-cons - who see neoliberalism as the end, and fulfilment, of human history. Bond is with Bourdieu, and in the above-mentioned essay "Language", sees 'the misunderstood and misconstrued epoch we call postmodernism (or neoliberalism)' as regressive alchemy:

Medieval alchemy sought to turn base metal into precious metal, dross into gold. It failed because it did not observe natural law. Our alchemy succeeds: it turns everything into gold, into money and capital, but it turns all other values – our freedom, democracy and justice – into dross. And so our language ceases to be human.¹⁴

Bond does not see the fall of the Berlin Wall¹⁵ in terms of Fukoyama's celebration of the *End of History*. Rather, he sees it as the period of the return to reactionary and fatal ideologies of the past, and a road to extinction:

Our democracy is doing what fascism could not: it combines technology with alchemy and will produce an age of warlocks armed with nuclear weapons. We see the beginnings of this in post-modernism. What has been called the End of History is really the Vanishing of the Future. Post-modernism means the sound of dinosaurs. Every species before it becomes extinct enters into a state of post-modernism. There are signs that we no longer speak a human language. Our philosophers cannot tell us the meaning of things, our moralists cannot tell us how we should act, we are armed with weapons so powerful that peace brings us the dangers of wars, our media tell us of distant disasters to distract us from dealing with our own, our democracy cannot define freedom for us, our politicians do not understand what they are doing, our children walk away from us. Post-modernism is a turning point not yet an end. It is as if human life were a last dream flickering in the minds of the dead. Soon they will fall asleep for ever. For a while we can still hear the echoes on the walls of our prisons, madhouses, children's playgrounds, the derelict ghettos of our cities.¹⁶

When he comments on morality, which many have observed is often not in accordance with justice, Bond opens another field that intrigues Bauman, too: the discord between morality and goodness. In a world where the law defends the order, and not justice (slavery was legal in America until the second half of the 19th century, persecution of the Jews was legal in Germany in the first half of the 20th century, in 2009 the Pulitzer Prize was given to Douglas Blackmon for his study *Slavery by Another Name*¹⁷) Bond is right in saying:

¹³ Ibid. p. 105. The essay begins with the question: "Is the economic world really, as the dominant discourse would have us believe, a pure and perfect order ..."

¹⁴ *Hidden Plot: Notes on Theatre and the State*, „Language“, p. 8

¹⁵ "The Berlin Wall was not destroyed when it was pulled down. It was carried away in hands and pockets and unfreedom spread. Hunger, poverty, robbery, violence – these are bad. But worse is the philosophy which justifies them as the consequences of human nature", *The Hidden Plot*, 'William Shakespeare's Last Notebook', p. 99

¹⁶ *The Hidden Plot*, 'Language', p. 8

¹⁷ Blackmon, Douglas A., *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II*, Doubleday, 2008.

Moral persuasion will not make us just, because morality very easily becomes the support of injustice, and usually for very practical reasons. We will become just only by honouring our common innocence. The law and society cannot do that – they must speak the language of *what* and not of *why*.¹⁸

Identical thoughts can be found in Bauman's essays on post-modern morality, collected in the book *Life in Fragments*. Bauman observes that being moral does not always mean being good. The virtue ascribed to carrying out orders perfectly, often clouds the fact that the orders, given out by immoral but highly authoritative institutions, are unethical. Bauman shares with Bond the assumption that we are innately capable of ethical awareness:

We are, so to speak, ineluctably – existentially – moral beings: that is, we are faced with the challenge of the Other, which is the challenge of responsibility for the Other, a condition of *being-for*.¹⁹

Not acknowledging, not recognizing the responsibility towards the Other, leads to what we have - wars endorsed by governments, but humbly carried out by the inferior classes, deprived of any other mode of survival except - working for the military. In his autobiographical poem "A Writer's Story" (1997) Bond resorts to simple, even prosaic language, to explain what he calls *understanding our situation* which embraces all levels of society:

Those who govern do not know what a person is
And the governed do not know what a government should be
Instead the evil do evil and because there is no justice the good must also do evil
How else can they govern the prison they live in?²⁰

Still, Bauman believes that it is possible to be moral in an immoral society. In a very Shakespearean passage he claims that:

To be moral does not mean to be good but to exercise one's freedom of authorship and/or actorship as a choice between good and evil.²¹

Bond believes that the cause of the decline of moral responsibility lies in the fact that *Authority replaces human responsibility and initiative with conformity*²², while Bauman, in his paper "Scene and Obscene", speaks of the same process of erosion of moral responsibility by using as an example the behaviour of the *power elites*:

Globality of the élite means mobility, and mobility means ability to escape and evade. There are always places where local orders do not clash with the global market usages, or where the local guardians of order are glad and willing to look the other way in case a clash does happen. Commitments are short

¹⁸ *The Hidden Plot: Notes on Theatre and the State*, 'Rough Notes on Justice', Methuen, 2000, p. 68.

¹⁹ Bauman examines Emmanuel Levinas' term *Being-for* in depth. (A/N)

²⁰ Bond, *Hidden Plot*, 'A Writers Story', p. 2

²¹ Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, 'Introduction: In Search of Postmodern Reason', p. 2.

²² Bond, *Hidden Plot*, 'The Reason for Theatre', p. 119 See, also, the second episode of Adam Curtis' BBC program *The Century of the Self*, which documents the government's decision to teach conformity from the nursery schools on, in order to reduce (and hopefully irradicate) nervous breakdowns which afflicted 48% of U.S. soldiers sent to fight in WWII. M. L. King, who refused to conform and adjust to an unjust society, proposed instead the founding of an Institute for Creative Mal-Adjustment. N/A

term, undertakings are until further notice, and so rules are best embraced for the duration of the next step and abandoned when no more useful.²³

Bond puts his emphasis on the need to understand our situation in terms of moral choices, while Bauman sees the problem of society in the fact that it always faces individuals with moral **non**-choices (i.e. choices between two evils, two immoral things). In the introductory chapter of *Life in Fragments*, entitled 'In Search of Postmodern Reason', Bauman says:

(...) We faced the choice between good and evil...already at the very first, inescapable moment of encounter with the Other. This means in its term that, whether we choose it or not, we confront our situation as a moral problem and our life choices as moral dilemmas.

For Bauman the fact of moral responsibility may be only concealed, but not revoked. The complexity of *Being-for* (explored by Dostoyevsky in the Grand Inquisitor's encounter with Jesus) is for Bauman:

(...) permanent and incurable: it can be taken away only together with whatever is 'moral' in the moral condition. One is tempted to say that facing the ambivalence of good and evil (and this, so to speak, taking responsibility for one's own responsibility) is the meaning (the sole meaning) of being moral. This means, though, rubbing the salt of loneliness into the wound of ambivalence. Dilemmas have no ready-made solutions: the necessity to choose comes without a foolproof receipt for proper choice: the attempt to do good is undertaken without guarantee of goodness of either the intention or its results. The realm of responsibility is frayed on all sides: it is equally easy to underdo as it is to overdo what 'acting responsibly' may ideally require. Moral life is a life of continuous uncertainty. It is built of the bricks of doubt and cemented with bouts of self-deprecation.²⁴

Translated into Bond's terms this would read:

Education teaches you to lay bricks, but who will teach you whether you should build a hospital or a gas chamber.

Bauman also warns that, to paraphrase him, in the eyes of controlling society, following ethical rules could produce nothing but good only when 'good' is defined in unambiguous terms as obedience to the rules that have been set. The modern project postulates "a world free from moral ambivalence". But since ambivalence is the natural feature of the moral condition, by the same token the modern project postulates *the severance of human choices from their moral dimension*. This is what substitution of ethical law for autonomous moral choice amounts to in practice. The focus of moral concern, Bauman insists, has been shifted from the moral subject, to supra-individual agency endowed with exclusive ethical authority; from the self-scrutiny of the moral actor, to the philosophical/political task of working out the prescriptions and proscriptions of an ethical code.²⁵ Where there are rules, there is no moral ambivalence. Nothing to think about, only follow the instructions. This severance and shift within the "modern dream of freedom" make it possible for Bauman to claim that:

I propose that the study of postmodern morality(ies) must be a study in the context of postmodern life and postmodern life strategies. It is the guiding theme of these essays that the roots of postmodern moral problems go down to the fragmentariness of the social context and the episodicality of life pursuits. These are studies not so

²³ "Scene and Obscene", p. 4. See, also, the documentary film *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*, directed by Katarina Brown, (2008), where even after slavery had formally become illegal, the authorities looked the other way when the De Woolf family continued to carry on with its profitable slave trade (with the blessings of none other than Thomas Jefferson). N/A

²⁴ *Life in Fragments, Introduction*, pp. 2-3

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4

much in ‘unintended consequences’, as in the endemic and incurable ambivalence of the primal moral scene – the scene of moral choices and the scene of discovery of the morality of choices(...) 26

All of Edward Bond’s plays can be seen as such studies of the ambivalence of the primal scene of moral choices. For example, in his play *Lear* (1972), there is a scene where a young couple has to make a decision about Lear’s presence in their lives: if they help him (if they offer him hospitality), they risk their own safety. One of the paradoxes is that the safety of common people always depends on the class of the privileged, even when (like Lear in this case) they no longer have power. In the course of the play, Lear’s own daughters, who have become his political enemies, punish the two young people who have dared to help him. The compassionate couple take responsibility for their own responsibility (‘as the meaning of being moral’), but their punishment illustrates the social ambivalence towards good and evil. It turns out that Being-for the Other, being moral in an immoral society, is very dangerous. This is how the two young people argue their moral positions:

Wife I knew it! You’re going to ask him to stay!

Boy What else can I do? He can’t look after himself. He’s a poor old man – how can I throw him out? Who’d look at him then? I won’t do it!

Wife You’re fool! Can anyone come who likes? Don’t you have any sense of responsibility?

Boy Responsibility!²⁷

As this scene evolves, it becomes paradigmatic because it shows how the system never rewards an act of kindness, but only an act of unconditional obedience. It illustrates Bond’s thesis that authority replaces moral responsibility with consent, and shows the link with Bauman’s stance that, in relation to the moral self, “modernity offered freedom, complete with patented ways of escaping it”.²⁸

In the series of *War Plays* from the eighties (which brought to an end Bond’s cooperation with almost every single British theatre due to radically different views on drama, theatre, playwriting and the political statements he made in his works), Bond continued to write about the moral dilemma of his characters, who are always common people in situations of what he calls “total facts” (war, for instance, where moral law is suspended and only the struggle for naked survival remains). A good example of this is the scene in *Great Peace* (1986) where a soldier, who has an order to kill a baby in his own house, is shown in the process of

²⁶ Ibid. p. 9

²⁷ Bond, Edward, *Plays 2*, Methuen, London, p. 35

²⁸ Bauman, op. cit. p. 4

discovering his own humanness. The only chance to keep the neighbour's baby alive is – to kill, instead, his own baby-brother.

The same motif exists in Bond's play *Red Black and Ignorant*, also part of the *War Plays* trilogy. An unemployed young man in the play needs to decide whether to save a woman who has had a nuclear X-ray accident: if he saves her, he cannot take her job. He decides to save her, and then the only opportunity he has to find employment becomes a job in the army. This situation is global: the army is the only choice for unemployed working class boys, if they are unwilling to resort to crime, the other option available to them in our globalized, civilized world. In the military service Bond's hero has another moral dilemma: he has an errand - to kill someone from his neighbourhood because of food deficiency. After initial hesitation, his mother is preparing him to go and kill his old neighbour, but he, instead, chooses to kill his own father. In the "Commentary on the *War Plays*" Bond says:

The neighbour is a friend and the mother does not want him killed – that is text and subtext. But some things will only be in the metatext. Years ago, when the mother sent her son on errands, was she already training him in the obedience a soldier needs when he kills? In a way, when soldier kills, he is running an errand for his officers. That is a metatext question because it touches on the nature of society. The metatext of *Red Black and Ignorant* says that **it takes lot of culture to make us killers**. Suppose the soldier has a subtextual motive to kill – perhaps it's even why he joined the army, to be nearer to macho power. Is that the incident's meaning? If it is, why doesn't he kill the officer? The officer is far more like a father than the neighbour – the officer is strong and commanding, the neighbour weak. The soldier does not kill the officer because the officer is part of organized social power and the soldier would be punished if he did. And the order comes from society, anyway. So it is society that gives the motive its meaning.²⁹

Talking to a group of students about a workshop on his *War Plays* that he once held in Italy, Bond gave the following example to illustrate the moral paradoxes he explores in his plays:

When I devised the Palermo improvisation a new range of nuclear weapons was being installed in Sicily, with the agreement of most Italians. They knew the weapons could kill the children of other nations. The improvisation showed that rather than this they would even kill their own brothers or sisters or – like the Russian³⁰ guard – themselves. Surely to avoid such a monstrous choice they would refuse to have the weapons in their country? There is a great moral power hidden in the paradox which we could use, to make all of us more human. If social corruption makes it possible for us to avoid paradox, we must make it unavoidable. That is the purpose of art.³¹

In their criticism of our postmodern moral predicament, Bond and Bauman have similar things to say about the corruption of those who control the economy and the so called free market. The free market is, in fact, one of the patents used to limit all other kinds of freedom. For instance: the free market causes systemic impoverishment of once sovereign nations. The

²⁹ Bond, *Plays 6, The War Plays*, "Commentary on *The War Plays*", p. 314

³⁰ Ibid. Bond is referring to a real life incident when, in order to avoid carrying out an inhuman order – to kill his own brother – a Russian guard decided to kill himself. (A/N)

³¹ Ibid, p. 284.

process which was intended for the exploitation of third world nations solely had gotten out of control and is now affecting the West as well. Bauman points out why it is dangerous:

Robbing whole nations of their resources is (...) called 'promotion of free trade'; robbing whole families and communities of livelihood and the sole way of life they had been trained to pursue is called 'downsizing', 'outsourcing', 'flexibility', or just 'rationalisation'. Neither of the two has been so far listed among criminal and punishable deeds.³²

Bond is also adamant in his refusal to accept the commodification process, the transformation of everything - knowledge, resources and eventually people – into commodities. Bond claims that the term free market is not precise, and therefore not just.

The market is never free: the market forces of finance and technology drive out free will and substitute choice. Desire is replaced by appetite. The consumer is standardized by ideology and technological imperatives. And so in an age of consumerism the customers impose ideology on the rulers: entrepreneurs are the slaves of capitalism. The market, churches and prisons now serve the same purpose. Authority has lost its moral aura and justification. We apply our hand as witness to our own warrant of servitude or even death. And yet it is easier to give meaning to life in times of chaos than in times of rigid discipline. In the end absurdity is a failure of desire.³³

Bond is a playwright, and not a professional sociologist, because he believes that works of art, such as plays, can offer a way out of the existing social situation by “cleansing the doors of perception”, as Blake would put it, and helping us “see better” the situation we are faced with, to use Shakespeare’s terms. In his view, on two occasions in history (in Classical Greece and the Renaissance³⁴) drama managed to fulfil its promise and keep the human imagination free and active.³⁵ The possibility of using drama for this purpose exists even today. Bond believes that a modern writer, aware of the role drama can play, has only one subject to write about - justice. Bond has spent his entire life writing about unjust societies and the violence they generate. As an occasional director of his own plays, he has also developed a special method of stage directing and acting, with the aim of enhancing drama’s power to prevent the trivialization of truth in theatre, and prevent theatre from denying the truth and escaping into nihilism, arbitrariness, or trendy patterns of omnipresent entertainment:

Drama is not about what happens but about the meaning of what happens. We use values to judge. If an accident happens in real life we may try to establish the facts. But a judge, juror and witness will each have a different version of the accident, based on their social attitude to accidents and all other events.

³² Bauman, “Scene and Obscene“, p. 13.

³³ Bond, *Plays 6: The War Plays*, ‘Commentary on the War Plays’, p. 300; When Bond says that absurdity is a failure of desire, Blake’s successful use of arrows of desire (from the poem “Jerusalem”) should be remembered, as well as T. S. Eliot’s Edward, from *The Cocktail Party*, who complains to Celia that he cannot change because he has “lost the desire for what is most desirable”. (A/N)

³⁴ Bond says that “Greek drama changed the world twice – first in Athens and again in Renaissance Europe“. See Bond’s essay “Rough Notes on Justice“ from *Hidden Plot: Notes on Theatre and the State*, p. 68

³⁵ For Bond, imagination is not an escape into fantasy (escapism) but a path to a world of reason and liberation from the unreasonable official practices. (A/N)

Even non-trivial facts cannot be established without value judgment. Judging is as complex on stage as it is off it. Before theatre can distance itself from an event to examine it, it must change the story that 'contains' it.³⁶

The story is changed by revealing the meaning of what happens in the plot. Paraphrasing his own ideas of subtext and metatext Bond adds: "The actor's philosophy, not the character's psychology, gives the performance's meaning".³⁷

When he talks about Shakespeare, with whom he is often in dialogue³⁸, Bond notices that in Shakespeare's time (early modern era) "a class government administered class justice", and claims that "Shakespeare, like all other men, was too much part of his own time to fully understand". This view can be challenged. If, according to Bond, it is of utmost importance to understand our own situation, and with the help of the logic of the imagination fight for reason against the atrophy of an economically and politically blackmailed civilization, then Shakespeare understood very well the situation in Elizabethan England, but was not able to change the reality to a degree he wanted. Bond admits this, when he says:

He pursued his questions in many ages and countries, among many races and conditions of men. And although he could not answer his questions he learned to bear them with stoical dignity: this is at least an assurance that he was facing the right problems – otherwise his dramatic resolutions would have been sentimental and trite. Lear dies old, Hamlet dies young, Othello is deceived, Macbeth runs amok, goodness struggles and there is no good government, no order to protect ordinary men. Shakespeare cannot answer his questions but he cannot stop asking them.³⁹

In one of his recent interviews Bond commented that England once colonized India, but that "Hollywood has turned it into Bollywood, and that's much worse". He went on to say that "the most obscene thing" he had seen recently was *Slumdog Millionaire*.⁴⁰ In his essay "Scene and Obscene", Bauman uses the same word, and says something similar about winners and losers of the postmodern world, not however in the popular TV games and reality shows, but in the big political war-games and show-downs. He talks about the monopoly of coercion, and about those who give themselves the *right to be cruel*. If, for Bauman, obscene means *out of scene*, then Bond considers *Slumdog Millionaire* obscene because of what the film keeps 'out of scene'. In its ob-scene plot, there is no real moral dilemma about the society it portrays: the

³⁶ Bond, *Plays 6: The War Plays*, p. 300

³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 304-305

³⁸ Bond wrote the play *Bingo* (1973) about Shakespeare, as well as his own version of King Lear. His play *Tune* (very close to *Hamlet*) was written especially for young audience. (A/N)

³⁹ Bond, *Plays 2*, Introduction: 'Rational Theatre', Bond, *Plays 2*. p. ix

⁴⁰ See The Guardian, April 30, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/apr/30/edward-bond-interview-slumdog-millionaire>

loser hero becomes the lucky winner by playing a game of chance. The money that he wins makes possible his escape from poverty and crime. He changes his *personal* destiny, but the system remains the same, unjust and violent for the rest. In the film money brings freedom from exploitation. Bond, who dislikes the film, has repeatedly stated the opposite – that “only one thing may be bought with money: slavery”⁴¹. He asks: “Does it mean that, in a democracy such as India today, the only chance for dignity lies in becoming a winner of a quiz show, in a world that continues to produce moneyless losers everywhere?” In an earlier text, the foreword to his *Plays 7*, in the essay “The Cap”, (2002)⁴², Bond already states some interesting observations on what it is that makes most television programmes obscene:

Every consumer shares in the glory of the famous. (...) Now the barrier between classes is reduced to money, any winner might become a millionaire, or, perhaps soon, a billionaire. Now, on TV, people see themselves reflected in famous idols, or as ordinary holiday-makers and shoppers and prize-winners already taking part in the rainbow world of the famous. (...) Nothingness is no longer inscribed with the old idols – iconoclasm is sudden and ruthless. (...) And so, young people live in a paradox: on the one hand there is *joie de vivre* and on the other *joie de mourir*. Between those two extremes, there is no conceptual or practical understanding of life. The possibilities open to the young would have fulfilled their ancestors’ aspirations – but unlike the aspirations, the possibilities do not have in them the chance of a better society. **As more and more consumption less and less meets the self’s need for justice, society degenerates.** Even despair becomes inarticulate; soon the ultimate banalities will be reached. A company will provide a take-away suicide service.⁴³

Bauman has thought about TV shows as well, and analyzed a TV phenomenon perhaps even more important than quiz shows. In his book *Society under Siege* he compares George Orwell’s Big Brother with his ‘avatar’, the eponymous TV reality show, enormously popular in the postmodern media context. In his brilliant analysis Bauman notes that “Big Brother is a game of exclusion. Excluding others instead of being excluded oneself (that is, excluding others before your turn comes to be excluded) is the name of success.”⁴⁴

Bauman points out that the reality shows of this type exist in order to convey to their viewers not only *what* to think about, and *how* to think about it. If Bond says that the ability to ask the question *why* divided us from animals, then it is logical that this kind of question is not asked in postmodern reality shows such as *Big Brother*, or the quiz shown in *Slumdog Millionaire*.

⁴¹ *Hidden Plot*, “William Shakespeare’s Last Notebook”, p. 99

⁴² ‘The Cap’, written in January 2002 for the annual conference of The National Association of Teachers of Drama, published in Bond’s *Plays 7*, Methuen, 2003, p. xxx-xxxi

⁴³ Bond, *Plays 7*, xxx-xxxi (emphasis added).

⁴⁴ Bauman, *Society Under Siege*, ‘Global Politics: The Great Separation Mark Two’, Universities of Leeds and Warsaw, 2002, p.

(Or, we might add, in discussions of the wars of the 21st century, where the question why the Americans and NATO are in Afghanistan or Iraq is always omitted in the discussions concerned only with “How long...” or “How many ...”).

In the play *Red Black and Ignorant*, Bond creates a situation in which parents have to sell their boy to a buyer. The child, wrapped in a newspaper, is treated as an object, less important to the buyer than the hot pornographic image he sees on the child’s paper ‘wrapper’. The buyer snatches the newspaper sheet from the child and says:

BUYER I’ll just take page three
The nude has a dagger in her breast
Last Thursday they showed the moment when the hair
of blond with lovely smile which had been
drenched in petrol was being set alight by the winner
of the week’s lucky number

Bond’s idea that humanity must be recreated and cherished from generation to generation - because otherwise, he predicts, *the impossible will be inevitable* - can be linked with Bauman’s observation (in ‘The Intelligencia of the civilizational periphery’ in “Morality and Politics“, chapter six of *Life in Fragments*), that precisely the opposite is constantly being done. In the process of globalization humanity is *not* recreated or cherished. On the contrary: in the process of globalizing nations, ‘peripheral societies’ (uncivilized, relatively backward, late-developing, lagging behind) are first shut out from global society, and later, after a number of concessions, once again allowed to join in.

Eastern Europe is an excellent example of this contemporary adiaphorization. Together with all countries of the former Soviet Union they were forced to break up with all authentically good socialist practices of the past. In carrying out this ‘errand’ they were aided by their already globalized intellectual elites. Bauman calls the process (or act) of embracing foreign patters “*stimulus diffusion*”. What is meant by that is that ‘peripheral societies’ need a ‘superior’ social form to lead them towards the “advanced and evidently superior states” (superior because politically and militarily dominant). Before such a journey (or transition) could begin, the imperative requirement is that peripheral/’weaker’ societies break all bonds with old political and cultural forms, and build new ones. Intellectuals learn easily, and those who accept these propositions become promoted into trainers and instructors, creators of the New Man of the future, “fit to sustain and to live in the New Order. That is why the act of

embracing foreign patterns made those who embraced them into critics of their own society”.⁴⁵

What used to be a way of excluding certain ethnic groups and ideological opponents in the XX century (the Jews, the Roma, the Slavs, the communists, the homosexuals)⁴⁶ today, in Bauman’s sense of the term *adiaphorization*, has become a way of excluding entire nations, and sovereign states. Exclusion or adiaphorisation is today carried out most effectively through obscenity - separation from the scene. It implies bringing the excluded societies to the point where they have to stand pleading before the door of those in control of “the inclusion process.” For Jews, Slavs and the Roma, as well as for communists in the Second World War, there was no possibility of inclusion, only exclusion. Today, it is no longer important to simply exclude someone, but to create in the adiaphorized, above anything else, a desire to be included again, and fitted, regardless of the cost, into the system of leading, superior societies.

When it comes to adiaphorization of nations, the process is usually carried out by media misrepresentation and terror, systemic impoverishment through various sanctions (economic and cultural), accusations brought against targeted societies that they are not democratic but dictatorial, and by variously inferiority complexes they are expected to internalize. When all these methods are applied, if truth be told, the victims, indeed, do begin to feel inferior in relation to ‘the World’. At the end of the process, the excluded peoples do not reject their exclusion, as they used to, or show any resistance. They adjust.

If we were to use Bond’s terminology, such peoples no longer ‘understand their situation’; which, in fact, is the main goal of postmodern morality. The marginalized peoples do not recognise their situation as blackmail, but come to see it, and accept it, as just punishment for their so-called economic backwardness, political primitivism and cultural inferiority, or alleged criminality. There is no question about re-examining Western motives and the system of values on which the powerful nations are founded, because their version of the world has

⁴⁵ Bauman *Life in Fragments*, ‘Morality and Politics’, p. 229

⁴⁶ Methods of exclusion that were used included sending them to death camps or gulags, and in the case of the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki dropping atom bombs. In the case of Vietnam instead of nuclear weapons chemical poisons such as Agent Orange were used. All other potentially suspicious nations were intimidated and blackmailed by various new types of bombing operations carried out in numerous undeclared wars that followed in the wake of World War Two. (N/A)

become global society (*liquid world of fluid identities*⁴⁷), that calls itself free, but does not allow any alternatives.

Western modernist expansionism is today hidden under the postmodern neutral word – globalization. Seen from the perspective of the citizens of societies put under sanctions, bombed, invaded, looted, occupied, to be included in ‘the world’ becomes, for many, the same thing as ‘to exist’. Occasionally even banal reasons, such as travel facilitations, can be reason enough to convince them not to question the price that has to be paid for inclusion into ‘the World’. In response to the manipulative and deceitful use of this word, Professor Noam Chomsky often points out that the term “the World”, like the references to the “International Community”, actually mean Europe and US. The darker nations, even though they represent two thirds of the people on this planet, are not considered to be “the World”, and what they think about crucial issues is not considered relevant.⁴⁸ It is worth noting that in May of 2010 Chomsky delivered a lecture at Bourdieu’s College de France entitled “Power-hunger tempered by self-deception”, his well argued criticism of Neoliberalism. Postmodern neoliberal morality makes it possible for those who invade and destroy nations to see themselves not as vandals but liberators, proud to be freeing entire nations from dictatorships, while the vandalized are expected to embrace the role of the liberated, and feel not devastated, but exhilarated, to be ‘finally free’ and living in a democracy.

How is this deception, or delusion, perpetrated? When imposed economic sanctions are finally lifted and ‘the transition process’ starts, it may appear to the citizens of excluded societies that their nation is finally on a path of *progress* and in the process of being included into the European Union or some other bureaucratic organisation. Before the final goal can be reached, however, the neoliberal order has to prevail. The price of integration and ‘moving ahead’ is the relinquishing of one’s territory, privatization of publicly owned industries (tycoonization), rendering of entire industrial towns destitute, cuts in social benefits, the degradation of education and health care, social stratification, and so on. The most painful thing in this process is cultural impairment of new generations, the consequence of which is the loss of imagination, the withering of the ability to imagine anything different.

⁴⁷ Bauman Z, *Identity*, Polity Press, p.70

⁴⁸ See <http://www.zcommunications.org/noam-chomsky-talk-power-hunger-tempered-by-self-deception-by-y-brody> the recording of the lecture, Noam Chomsky at the College de France, Paris, 28 May 2010: “Power-hunger tempered by self-deception”.

Once the true causes which led to isolation and exclusion are forgotten, the excluded nation come to blame themselves and, overcome by guilt, allow postmodern morality to take its course completely. The ‘criminal’ past is denounced and, liberated from it, the citizens of the brave new world are free to begin new lives in which there will be no solidarity, but individuality, no sense of community, but personal struggle for survival in which every human being is seen as potential rival. Personal interest is placed before the interest of the ‘other’, and the fundamental moral and emotional intelligence replaced by permanent (pleasurable but not strenuous or serious) self-improvement.

That’s what the controlled do. Those who control the process, and decide who will be integrated into the world community and who will not, have the work done by choosing within the controlled peripheral societies, political, economic and intellectual elites who are to lead their countrymen from one stage of utter submission to another. Throughout the process of transition, there is constant uncertainty and relentless blackmail – either unconditional acceptance of externally imposed terms, or eternal political isolation and economic degradation. To give one example: unless Serbia accepts the independence of one portion of its sovereign territory, it will be excluded, or prevented from joining the EU; if it agrees to the independence of Kosovo-Metohija, its EU entry will still be postponed, while it will continue to be assured that its chances for rejoining Europe are increasing.

The obscenity produced by the process of identification with stronger nations triggers in excluded individuals an overwhelming desire to feel as citizens of the world, while their real needs are pushed aside. Bond says that when our desires replace our true needs, our imagination has already been turned into pure fantasy and we are further away from reason. In his “Notes on Postmodernism” he says:

Post-modern society is a society of wants. Wants cannot function in the threefold relationship as needs or be broken down into needs. The extraordinary consequence of this is that we can no longer have a utopian vision and so any mystery of any boundary cannot have any ethical content. It is as if instead of cultural development there had been a mutation in culture.⁴⁹

In Bauman, the desire of an ‘inferior’ society to join the superior, i.e. stronger one (that is, to be accepted by the powerful), is in fact a principle described in “Scene and Obscene”:

⁴⁹ Bond, *Plays 5*, “Notes on Postmodernism“, p 24.

Power struggles tend to be waged in the form of legitimacy wars. ‘Having power’ means being able to have one’s way whether or not the other side is happy about it and however dearly it might like to slow down or arrest one’s progress; it implies therefore a degree of coercion, an application of force – the other side needs to be forced into obedience. If that forcing into obedience is legitimate, force feels no more as coercion, let alone as violence and the obedience to command can be safely expected while resistance to command becomes an exception.⁵⁰

If obscene means *out of scene*, then coercion is carried out with the aid of all social structures which accept coercion as legitimate. To illustrate this, it is worth mentioning that during the bombing of Belgrade in 1999, fliers were thrown from airplanes almost on a daily basis to inform the citizens of Serbia that NATO has nothing against the citizens it is bombarding every day, but against their president, who is a stumbling block standing in the way of expansion of human rights and democracy⁵¹. These double-bind messages were supposed to explain that US and EU do not hate anyone, but are simply using force (including depleted uranium) for our own good, and only because they are forced to do so. Their behaviour illustrates Bauman’s analysis of legitimate coercion’, and violence:

In every case of well-established and stable distribution of enabling/disabling capacities of power, a clear line is drawn to separate the ‘legitimate coercion’ from violence. (...) The war against violence is waged in the name of the monopoly of coercion. (...) non-violent social order is for all practical purposes a contradiction in terms. Our modern civilization had listed ‘elimination of violence’ as one of the principal items of its order-building agenda.⁵²

Throughout history class societies of the West (the so called democracies) created various crises that in the 20th century lead to two World Wars and climaxed in the formation of numerous death camps throughout Europe. There were at the time no hypermarkets like today, where products made through exploitation of cheap labour in peripheral societies could be bought, but the exploitation of cheap labour was used in all the colonized territories. When this old imperial ideology met with the new technological progress and Ford’s assembly line, the Holocaust became easily possible. In his *McDonaldization of Society*, George Ritzer follows Bauman in stressing that postmodern society is permeated with superficiality appropriate for the planned McDonaldization of every segment of social and personal life. Modern societies, paradigmatically embodied in fast services, create fast individuals with no deep emotions, who move about various McPlaces created by the McCivilization, along the paths of less and less sensitivity to morality and responsibility for the Other. McValues of the Century of the Self do not encourage *being-for* the Other. McDonald’s and other similar No-

⁵⁰ “Scene and Obscene“, pp. 6-7.

⁵¹ See more on this topic in Ljiljana Bogoeva-Sedlar’s book *On Change, Essays 1992-2002*, ‘Art Against War, or War against Art? NATO’s use of Shakespeare in the 1999 attack on Yugoslavia, Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Belgrade, 2003, pp 169-191.

⁵² “Scene and Obscene“, pp. 7-8

places of the postmodern civilization are conceived as places to pass through, not places where one can feel *at home*.⁵³

In *McDonaldization of Society*, Ritzer used the coffee served by Starbucks as an example of a product that has not lowered its quality despite McDonaldization. Bond, on his part, wrote a play *Coffee* in order to make a powerful statement about the banality of evil. Bond takes us a long way from Ritzer's postmodern Starbucks glitter, to a place called Babi Yar in Ukraine, where during World War Two, as many as 33,771 Jews were shot on a cliff and thrown into a ravine, their common grave.⁵⁴ This was part of the Nazi campaign against the Soviets and "the largest single massacre in the history of the Holocaust". In his notes for the play, Bond says:

Soldiers massacred innocents at Babi Yar. They thought they had finished for the day. They relaxed and brewed coffee. A last band of stragglers were herded in to be shot. A soldier was so upset at having to work overtime that in disgust he threw away his coffee – the gesture of sulking child refusing food. The gesture images the last century and the dangers that threaten this century. Evil is not banal; but it makes everything else banal – our homes, society, politics, lives. Evil is throwing away the coffee. We live in the age of banality. The problem is not why soldiers killed at Babi Yar. The problem is how was Babi Yar – and Auschwitz – ever possible. The historical and social explanations do not explain, they ascribe causes that might have had other effects. Auschwitz has no history. It is always in the present. Auschwitz is the cradle in which we rock our children – that is the gift of our banality.⁵⁵

If Auschwitz is the central place where humanness and inhumanness come absolutely face to face, then in Bond's view such confrontation becomes the centre of drama. He deals with situations he calls '**situations of the gate**', because he is interested in the moments which determine, in more ways than one, **who is inside and who is out**. Although it is thought that there are social *means* which can prevent extreme situations such as holocausts, they nevertheless keep reoccurring because, Bond believes, society does not cherish justice, which is the fundamental human need. More than once he has insisted that:

The basic conflict in human life comes from the fact that man seeks justice and is forced to live in a society that is not just, because the economy it is based on requires inequality and injustice. The structural need of man is justice, while the structural requirement of society is the opposite.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ritzer, George, *McDonaldizacija društva*, Jesenski i Turk, Zagreb, 1999, str. 213–214. Ritzer, George, *The McDonaldization of Society: An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life*, Pine Forge Press, 1993

⁵⁴ While Jews were the largest group to be killed, thousands of other Ukrainians were also murdered, as well as Soviet POW's and political activists, the Roma and others. (A/N)

⁵⁵ *Hidden Plot*, 'Notes on Coffee for Le Théâtre National de la Colline', p. 165

⁵⁶ (2001, a conversation with the audience at the Colline Theatre) Extrait d'une allocution d'Edward Bond dans la salle Maria Casarès du Théâtre National de la Colline à l'occasion de la création du Crime du XXIème siècle par Alain Françon, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6nIZNr7ob0>

Bond uses the phrase '*situation of the gate*' to define the fundamental injustice of divisions which culminate in the Holocaust, while Bauman uses the phrase '*standing at the gate*' to explain the relation between the civilized man and his image of the Other, the one he considers a barbarian and whom he tries to civilize by resorting to utmost barbaric methods.

Hiroshima got rid of the barbarians 'out there', but Auschwitz and the Gulag of the barbarians 'in here'. At no moment of modern history were the barbarians allowed to confine themselves to 'standing at the gate' – they were sniffed at and spied on and dug up all over the place, in a most capricious manner resonant with their own definitional capriciousness. Modernity from the start *historicized* and *internalized* the status of barbarians.⁵⁷

In light of Bauman's definition of the civilizing process as the process which *is not about the uprooting (of violence), but about the redistribution of violence*, and Bond's analysis of the *age of banality* in which we live, which is not founded on justice, we come to one more subject which they both explored in depth, and that is the morality of violence. Bauman suggests that the principal tool of severance of deeds and morals continues to be adiaphorization. By adiaphorization he means:

(...) making certain actions, or certain objects of action, morally neutral or irrelevant – exempt from the category of phenomena suitable for moral evaluation. The effect of adiaphorization is achieved by excluding some categories of people from the realm of moral subjects, or through covering up the link between partial action and the ultimate effect of so-coordinated moves, or through enthroning procedural discipline and personal loyalty in the role of the all-overriding criterion of moral performance.

When Bauman wants to illustrate what he means by "insensitivity to cruelty", he gives the example of Himmler. The SS Commander, he says, was a man who:

(...) could worry about the mental sanity of his Einsatzgruppen charged with the killing of the Bolsheviks and the Jews point-blank. General Schwarzkopf did not have to worry about the integrity of his mass-killers. They never looked their victims in the eyes; they counted the dots on the screens, not corpses. His pilots returned from their bombing sorties in a state of excitement and elation: 'It was just like in a movie', 'Just like a computer game', they reported. And his world-wide admirers watched with bated breath on their TV screens pictures they knew well from the amusement arcades: dots convening on crosses. What they saw was a game well played.

He concludes that "the aesthetic criteria proper for the world of play and amusement may well displace the now irrelevant moral criteria, at home in the world of human interaction."⁵⁸

Himmler appears in Bond's essay "William Shakespeare's Last Notebook", in an argument developed in order to explain how pretence of love is used as an excuse for cruelty:

St Augustine: 'Love, and do what you will.' Himmler: 'I gas the Jews out of love'. On this paradox hangs the future of humankind. But it is paradox which our culture dare not understand and which hides a secret our democracy cannot dispense with. Our democracy teaches its children the wisdom of

⁵⁷ Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, p. 144

⁵⁸ Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, "Violence, Postmodern", pp. 149–151.

Himmler and calls it the wisdom of St Augustine; but really they are the same wisdom. St. Himmler and Reichsführer Augustine. You give your virtues to the state and they are returned to you as vices.⁵⁹

Bauman explores the configuration of Western civilized consciousness which brought about the Nazi Holocaust both from the point of view of a sociologist, and an eye witness. He says that if we want to understand better what made the death camps possible, we should not look at the *statistics*, but try to find what made possible the complete “separation of action and ethics, of what people do from what people feel or believe, of the nature of a collective deed from the motives of individual actorship.”⁶⁰ Many Bond’s plays try to do exactly that: explore the separation of action from ethics throughout civilized history. These plays include *Coffee, Born, The Crime of the 21st Century, People*, his second war plays (known as Colline tetralogy). Particularly illustrative is the play he wrote for young people entitled *At the Inland Sea*. Here is how we can recognize Bauman’s separation of action from ethics in one of Bond’s plays.

WOMAN: They do, they do. **People do things to show they’re human! I heard – a soldier – saw a body with a wristwatch. They’d missed it, hadn’t taken it. He bent down to steal it. The time was wrong. He put it right – and the body was buried with the watch telling the right time. Even soldiers have to show themselves they’re human!** (Looks around.) The people are staring at the door. Their faces are sad: the terror’s in their eyes. Why don’t they sing? Hold hands and dance! It’s their world! The soldiers would beat them with their rifles. (Turns back to the Boy) God can’t save it. If he did everyone would know. The world would be turned upside down. The other mothers would ask why their child wasn’t saved. People would be angry. God dare not save my child. They’d throw stones at him. The dead children would spit at him. You can save it. You’re nobody. Nobody knows what you do. Nobody notices. Tell the story! Perhaps it happens like this all the time! The story’s told to the child – but no one else notices. Not even God. He’d be ashamed.⁶¹

In *At the Inland Sea* Bond explores the situation of a victim – a mother who is about to enter the gas chamber in Auschwitz. In order to illustrate to what extent irrational, formal morality has managed to replace fundamental morality, he describes a soldier who winds the watch on a dead body (dead because he or someone like him killed it) instead of stealing it. In *Coffee*, Bond examines the state of mind of those who commit crimes: those who pulled the triggers in the places of execution such as Babi Yar. Pilots in Bauman’s example, who see their tasks as children see video games, have their parallels in the behaviour of the soldiers in *Coffee*. The way Bond’s soldier Nold rationalizes his orders to kill is especially illuminating:

Nold: They ain got faces. Two backs like the targets in the butts. **The one-arm man with the scythe movin down the world, thass war.** They won’t be no trouble dead. Justa stack ’em up. It’s their land, let ’em be buried in it. Then we can go ’ome in peace, where the sun shines ’n the shit smells as if it’s

⁵⁹ Bond, *Hidden Plot*, in an essay “William Shakespeare’s Last Notebook”, p. 100

⁶⁰ Bauman *Life in Fragments*, “A Century of Camps?”, p. 195

⁶¹ Bond, *At the Inland Sea*, Methuen, 1997, p. 12

come out a'civilisation. More poor sods're drowned in the milk a' 'uman kindness 'n all the blood bath since some shise-'ouse invented carnage. It's orders, thass all.⁶²

In Bond's plays the soldier is never simply a killer: by birth, he is also a moral being, who despite everything, manages to grasp and preserve his own humanity. Instead of simply following orders Nold in Bond's *Coffee*, refuses to kill the Woman and her mentally impaired daughter. He kills his superior officer, who had given him the order, instead. Such human reaction can also be seen in Bond's earlier *War Plays*. Bond wants to highlight that even in places such as Auschwitz and Babi Yar there is still humanity, an intimate sense of justice which sometimes manages to overcome social submissiveness. That, in Bond's view, is the most profound way of getting to know oneself. Through drama we dramatize our own humanity and in that way we re-examine it. There are no other (or better) ways to face the Auschwitz and Hiroshima in ourselves.

In his 1999 essay on the Holocaust, entitled "A Larger Consciousness", American historian and peace activist Howard Zynn warns that the world of barbwire has not been overcome as long as the camps from the Second World War are shown as an isolated chapter in the history we claim we have successfully surpassed. Wars did not end after World War Two, he reminds us, and the true state of the world confronts us in the information we get every day from the horrible places where crimes continue to be committed. Zynn, like all thinkers who see the whole historical picture and not merely "a world in fragments", is most worried by the fact that global violence today is no longer questioned and no longer poses a problem. This is because the violence is committed by the 'attested righteous', those who have a monopoly over violence, as Bauman would say. In his essay Zynn explains:

What happened to the Jews under Hitler is unique in its details, but it shares universal characteristics with many other events in human history: the Atlantic slave trade, the genocide against Native Americans, and the injuries and deaths to millions of working people who were victims of the capitalist ethos that put profit before human life.⁶³

Bond, too, believes that the chapter of the XX century is not over and that the violence which characterized the XX century has continued into the new century in which there is no defined concept of peace. In his autobiographical poem "A Writer's Story" Bond concludes:

Like all who lived at the midpoint of this century or were born later
I am a citizen of Auschwitz and a citizen of Hiroshima
Of the place where the evil did evil and the place where the good did evil
Till there is justice there are no other places on earth: there are only these two places

⁶² Bond, *Plays 7, Coffee*, p. 162–163.

⁶³ see <http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Zinn/RespectingHolocaust.html> or <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/60/145.html>

But I am also a citizen of the just world still to be made

When Bond says that “it takes a lot of culture to make us killers”, we can recall Bauman’s analysis of the civilizing process in Eastern Europe, where the superior cultures which continue to parade their legitimate killers, required that all bonds with the socialist past be broken. What is wrong with this argument was highlighted by Harold Pinter in his Nobel Prize Lecture. Pinter said:

(...) everyone knows what happened in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe during the post-war period: the systematic brutality, the widespread atrocities, the ruthless suppression of independent thought. All this has been fully documented and verified. But my contention here is that the US crimes in the same period have only been superficially recorded, let alone documented (...) Direct invasion of a sovereign state has never in fact been America's favoured method. In the main, it has preferred what it has described as 'low intensity conflict'. Low intensity conflict means that thousands of people die but slower than if you dropped a bomb on them in one fell swoop. It means that you infect the heart of the country, that you establish a malignant growth and watch the gangrene bloom. When the populace has been subdued - or beaten to death - the same thing - and your own friends, the military and the great corporations, sit comfortably in power, you go before the camera and say that democracy has prevailed. This was a commonplace in US foreign policy in the years to which I refer.⁶⁴

That is why our post ideological times do not represent the triumph of a better conception of global society. What we are witnessing is rather the restoration of the old, technologically improved capitalist schemes, accompanied - as was to be expected - with the misery of those who cannot escape the local dimension and are marginalized by globalization, the world’s false liberation.

Bond thinks that reason and sanity which could save us can be recovered only through children’s unspoilt imagination. In his essay “Our Story”, he says that:

The imagination must seek to create the world as it is, not as market democracy wants it to be. That is what makes us human. But often the imagination seeks blindly, reacts without understanding, and the chaos worsens. There is conflict in us and in society. Words change their meanings, crime becomes law, violence becomes policy, and we have no way – no story, no drama – of stopping it. A world of misery opens before us.

The question is not whether in the next hundred years there will be a new Auschwitz and a new Hiroshima. There will be. The question is only what new names will be made infamous and what new horrors will be done there.

This will be because our democracy corrupts drama – makes false the story we need to create ourselves.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ from the Harold Pinter’s Nobel Lecture, Art, Truth & Politics, http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2005/pinter-lecture-e.html Interesting points about the same issues can be found in the text by professor Ljiljana Bogoeva Sedlar ‘The 21st Century: The Age Of Consent, Or Concern?, The Rise of Democratic Imperialism and ‘fall’ of William Shakespeare”, *Naslede* Journal of Language, Literature, Art and Culture*, 2009, vol. 6, no. 12, Thematic issue: Harold Pinter, The Faculty of Philology and Arts, 2009, Kragujevac, pp. 31-52,

⁶⁵ *Hidden Plot*, ‘Our Story’, p. 5 See also Ljiljana Bogoeva-Sedlar’s analysis of wars and cures, in the essay “The Cunning of History and Seamus Heaney’s: Cure at Troy”, *Anthology of Essays*, no. 13-14, Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Journal of the Institute of Theatre, Film and Television, Belgrade, 2008, pp. 93-113

If Bond, like William Blake before him, sees a way out of this situation through the power of the imagination, Terry Eagleton, too, sees it as a source of alternatives, noting how eagerly the holders of power are trying to destroy it:

(...) the ambition of advanced capitalism is not simply to combat radical ideas, or even to discredit them. It is to abolish the very notion that there could be a serious alternative to the present. Its task, in brief, is to **annihilate that perilous power known as the imagination**.⁶⁶

In the context of the ethos of the epoch we call postmodern, Tony Coult, theatre expert and Bond's biographer, summarizes Bond's arguments from "Notes on Postmodernism" with these words:

Humanity is different from the markets which are by their nature unpredictable and abstract – the very opposite of the human imagination continually seeking to know, to understand, to feel to find meaning and structure. If market economies release their energy through fission and fragmentation, socialism works by fusion and coalescence. Technology which simply gives the market more and more tools to be dangerously arbitrary and random with, could facilitate the growth of global consciousness and activity, but instead is enslaved by global trade⁶⁷

In his "Notes on Postmodernism" Bond contemplates the relation between people, technology and authority, as well as the way in which arts and theatre are part of that relation. Within his historical review of Western civilization he summarizes today's situation in the following manner:

It's said that post-modern politics are aestheticised and ordinary life has become theatre. In many ways, our situation is comparable to that of Christians and puritans when they closed theatres and created a church-god and factory-devil. But capitalism theatricalizes life and uses theatres. Its aesthetics are iconoclastic, the ad-man's detritus. It manufactures (sometimes unintentionally) problems and solves them by medication and entertainment. This makes the problems static. The Greeks used problems to humanize the mind; capitalism uses problems to belittle us. Spectacle becomes vicious, excitement that appeals to biological resonances which capitalism wrongly supposes to be free of cognition; with the best intentions it trivializes spectators.⁶⁸

Bauman concludes in the final chapter of his *Life in Fragments*, that "fragmentarity and episodcity, discontinuity and inconsequentiality" are not a recommendation for the moral life, even if they represent the image of our postmodern morality. Instead, he recommends Emmanuel Levinas' *Being for the Other*, and responsibility for the Other. If that were the case, we would not hear, as often as we do: *I do not want to get involved... For all I care, outside could be a wasteland*.⁶⁹ If we continue to think such thoughts the wasteland, like the Birnam wood, will come to claim us soon enough.

⁶⁶ <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/Death-of-the-intellectual> Terry, Eagleton, "Death of the Intellectual"

⁶⁷ See Tony Coult in *Notes and Commentary* on Edward Bond's *At the Inland Sea*, Methuen Drama, 1997, p. 75.

⁶⁸ Bond, *Plays*: 5, "Notes on Postmodernism", p. 31

⁶⁹ Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, "Morality and Politics", p. 270

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