



Liquid Times

Life in an Age of Uncertainty

SOCI 4225: 7 May – 13 August 2024

Class Time: Tuesdays, 4–7pm

Course Instructor: Dr. Ryan Higgitt

Office: Surrey Main 3850C

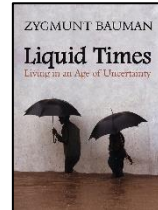
Office Hours: TBA

Location: S. Main 3830

E-mail: ryan.higgitt@kpu.ca

Phone: TBA

Course Website: [Moodle](#)



“Social disintegration, the falling apart of effective agencies of collective action, is as much a condition as it is the outcome of the new technique of power. For the power [of the global elite] to be free to flow, the world must be free of fences, barriers, fortified borders and checkpoints. Any tight social bonds, and particularly a territorially rooted network, is an obstacle to be cleared out of the way. Global powers are bent on dismantling such structures for the sake of their continuous and growing fluidity, that principal source of their strength and the warrant of their invincibility.” – Zygmunt Bauman

This course takes a historical sociological approach to try to make sense of the unprecedented mental health, opioid and homelessness crises in Canada and the increasing wars and conflict worldwide. We start with the system of thought of Polish-born sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and move through a series of sociological and philosophical discussions culminating with Jürgen Habermas’ insights into the emancipatory potential of intersubjective communication. Bauman characterizes life today as fluid, individualized and increasingly ambiguous. This can help us understand connections between each of postmodernism, neoliberalism, AI, fake news, the proliferation of uncertainty, suspicion and fear as well as, ergo, radicalization and other comparable forms of exploitation of the poor and the vulnerable. For Bauman, if the Holocaust was the outcome of modernity’s inherent impulse toward absolute order and control, postmodern relativism is equally perilous, leading first to rampant consumerism and celebrityism, then to a fragmentation of the kinds of understandings of humanness that otherwise give coherence to ‘human rights,’ and then, ultimately, to nihilism, brutality and destruction. Navigating between the two unviable options, says Habermas, requires halting the widespread rejoicing in unrest and instead engaging in a project of communicative rationality as the foundation of participatory democracy; an idea apparently in line with the philosophy of Deganawida and Hiawatha.

Secondary objectives:

- Think critically about how only some questions are allowed to be asked at university and only some conclusions can be drawn, and about how exactly we arrived at this circumstance;
- Analyze the peculiar and yet ever-so-distinct resonance between the present-day “war on racism” and the erstwhile and certainly contradictory “War on Terror”;
- Examine why the Great Confederacy eventually crumbled and why the Haudenosaunee, in the wake of that crumbling, would annihilate other Indigenous Peoples;
- Distinguish imperialism and/or colonialism during the medieval and modern periods, for example that of the Iroquois, Aztecs, Mughals, Ottomans, Arabs, Japanese, Chinese, Omanis, and British, among others, from the new forms characterizing our present late modern (liquid modern) times.