



Consuming Life

Zygmunt Bauman

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With the advent of liquid modernity, the society of producers is transformed into a society of consumers. In this new consumer society, individuals become simultaneously the promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote. They are, at one and the same time, the merchandise and the marketer, the goods and the travelling salespeople. They all inhabit the same social space that is customarily described by the term the market.

The test they need to pass in order to acquire the social prizes they covet requires them to recast themselves as products capable of drawing attention to themselves. This subtle and pervasive transformation of consumers into commodities is the most important feature of the society of consumers. It is the hidden truth, the deepest and most closely guarded secret, of the consumer society in which we now live.

In this new book Zygmunt Bauman examines the impact of consumerist attitudes and patterns of conduct on various apparently unconnected aspects of social life politics and democracy, social divisions and stratification, communities and partnerships, identity building, the production and use of knowledge, and value preferences.

The invasion and colonization of the web of human relations by the worldviews and behavioural patterns inspired and shaped by commodity markets, and the sources of resentment, dissent and occasional resistance to the occupying forces, are the central themes of this brilliant new book by one of the worlds most original and insightful social thinkers.

Consuming Life Details

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From Reader Review Consuming Life for online ebook

Pablo says

"Una sociedad de consumo sólo puede ser una sociedad de exceso y prodigalidad y, por ende, de redundancia y despilfarro. (...) el verdadero 'ciclo económico', el que verdaderamente mantiene la economía en movimiento, es el ciclo 'cómprelo, disfrútelo, tírelo'".

Importante lectura de reflexión.

Karen Villanova says

Uma epifania.

Philipp Keller says

(disclaimer: ich habe "Leben als Konsum" nur bis knapp zur Hälfte gelesen)

Mit diesem Buch erwartete ich ein aktualisiertes "Wir amüsieren uns zu Tode", doch tatsächlich fand ich ein philosophisch-wissenschaftliches Werk, welches nur für Leser geeignet ist, welche schon einen recht breiten philosophischen Hintergrund haben.

Zur Kritik:

Bauman baut "Leben als Konsum" sehr wissenschaftlich auf: er stützt sich sehr auf Quellen ab und erwähnt, welche neue Begriffe er einführen will - er macht eine eigentliche Beweisführung. Dadurch gestaltet sich die Lektüre recht langfädig, und er wiederholt sich oft.

Zudem erwartet Bauman einen philosophischen Background, den ich nicht habe: auch nach "Sofies Welt" und "kleine Weltgeschichte der Philosophie" konnte ich Bauman in weiten Abschnitten nicht folgen und als er dann Freud erwähnte und meinte, dass er seine Hauptargumente nicht mehr darlegen will, weil diese ja dem Leser bekannt sein würden, gab ich auf.

Zudem erschloss sich mir der Aufbau nicht: Bauman geht ziemlich wahllos durch die Themen durch, bleibt Seitenlang auf einer Meta-Ebene und greift dann plötzlich wieder Beispiele auf, etc.

Zum Lob:

Bauman "hat seine Hausaufgaben gemacht": er kann aus einer Fülle von Werken zitieren. Die meisten seiner Gedanken sind treffend und aufschlussreich.

=> der Inhalt ist gewinnbringend, aber die Form ist zu sperrig und zu kompliziert. Ich suche mir nun ein besser zu lesendes Buch mit ähnlichem Inhalt

Olivia says

Hot TAKES!!

Jorge Reyes says

Bauman con toda seriedad y honestidad intelectual atina en el análisis de la sociedad de consumo como una realidad actual, preocupante y deshumanizada. La crítica es clara y directa. La observación sagaz del autor tiene alcances interesantes que podría abrir los ojos de varios lectores. El tema desgraciadamente es unidireccional y aunque muestra genialidad en el análisis de las causas y los efectos de la sociedad de consumo, líquida y temporalidad de puntos, definitivamente se queda corto e inclusive con un gran sesgo en la propuesta personal sobre el desarrollo humano, la historia de la humanidad y los sistemas que las personas han creado, en la búsqueda incansable por la felicidad. El autor omite varias dimensiones fundamentales de la persona y así, se le escapa la visión necesaria de la antropología filosófica para comprender mejor la profundidad y complejidad de lo humano. Es un buen material que podría tornarse monótono y sumamente pesimista, más que realista, filosóficamente hablando. Recomendando leerlo con una perspectiva sociológica, con reservas y sin buscar obtener dogmas para atacar la política y las instituciones. Requerido cierto conocimiento de filosofía del hombre.

Tom LA says

Riflessioni molto limpide e a tratti proprio brillanti sulla nostra società. Molto interessante. L'ho trovato leggermente tendente al pessimistico, perché la nostra vita compensa le carenze e non é solamente fatta di fretta, stacchi, punti a capo, e frenesia di consumare. Mentre il quadro che dipinge l'autore é un po' troppo drammatico. Alla fine propone la sua soluzione, sebbene non la articoli neanche minimamente, secondo lui la soluzione é un ritrovato senso di responsabilità attraverso l'empowerment dell'individuo, e la educazione perenne. Mah.... Molto piú forte nel descrivere le magagne dei giorni nostri, che nel proporre soluzioni o direzioni da prendere. Tutto sommato, molto acuto, da leggere.

sara says

an in depth view of our society and the reality we live in right now.

Sokolovich says

Consumerism analyzed through different perspectives, even from the way we socialize (online) now.

I entertain the idea that Bauman's words bring some immunity against consumerism to the reader.

Zach Irvin says

This book was amazing. Really eye-opening, with razor sharp insights into the modern culture of consumerism. READ THIS BOOK.

Trevor says

The part of this book that I will remember next year – rather than just next week – is his discussion of how consumerism has changed our notion of time. So, I'm going to start with that.

In Ancient Greece they had quite a different notion of time. They saw time as being cyclical. Not just in the sense of the seasons and their repetitions, but even longer cycles and repetitions. In a sense this is also a strong influence on Nietzsche's idea of the eternal recurrence of the same – this Greek notion of time being circular.

The dawn of Capitalism required a new kind of time – one that was linear and directional. Time's arrow, it is sometimes called. You can't really have a notion of progress with a circle. Hegel overcame this by talking of progress spiralling. There is still a kind of return, but on a new and higher level. Still, linear time gives a clearer notion of time as progress.

We don't really think about progress anymore. It isn't that things don't change anymore, in fact, the opposite is the case. Change is omnipresent. So much so that it is like a kind of background hum we almost struggle to hear.

To capture this new universe, Bauman has come up with the idea of pointillist time. Pointillism is a technic of painting that grew out of impressionism. It involves creating a painting by applying dots of pure colour onto the canvas. From a distance these dots interact with each other to form an image – however, up close they are a chaos, dots one beside another, a kind of meaningless noise.

But this isn't the only idea Bauman is seeking to bring to our attention here. Points are geometric absurdities, geometric abstractions. A point has no dimensions. No height, width, depth. Yet it is the fundamental idea of geometry. A point, then, is seen by Bauman as having infinite potential. He explains that 'in the beginning' the universe was a point and with the big bang it became something infinitely more.

Okay, so what have we got so far? We have images that are impossible to see the meaning of up close, but that are made up of points of infinite potential. We have a universe made from a point that went a bit crazy. The other bit to think about too is that the current view of the universe is that every point is teeming with energy and that even if you had a perfect vacuum you actually wouldn't have a vacuum at all, as particles would 'borrow' energy from the space around them and pop themselves into and out of existence.

Every point seems to contain infinite potential, inexhaustible in what it can tell us. He says that the Sunday newspaper today probably has more information in it than your average 18th Century person would have come across in a lifetime. Even if that isn't true, a quick glimpse at the Internet will show you the effective

infinity of what one could know if we had infinite time. So, which bits are important and which bits can be safely ignored?

He tells the story of Corinne Bailey Rae – someone I'd never heard of before – who went platinum after a couple of weeks in the charts after being a nobody. Who would have known that this particular point in the universe was about to expand and become essential knowledge for a whole group of people more or less instantly? What is most interesting in this story is this bit:

'My mum teaches in a primary school,' Corinne told her interviewer, 'and when she asks the kids what they want to be when they grow up, they say, "famous". She asks them what for and they say, "Dunno, I just want to be famous." '

Bauman also makes the point that being consumers is a remarkably recent phenomena. Hard to imagine that there was a time when people wanted to be more than just consumers, admittedly. When you think about the metaphor behind consumption, the whole thing becomes quite unattractive. You know, fire consumes, TB consumes – it is a kind of laying waste. It is certainly a one-way process. But even this directionality is overlayed with the idea of pointillism. Capitalism, consumerism, seeks to reduce the distance from showroom to rubbish tip. And often we even celebrate products becoming waste - at last I can now get a new washing machine... The point is for you to be constantly anxious and constantly dissatisfied. Products are not really meant to satisfy your desires, but to constantly nearly satisfy them. Again we are back at the points in pointillist paintings. And we can never stand back far enough to see beyond these points of infinite potential to glimpse the bigger picture. For these points are also pointless. We are surrounded by so much information the effect is much the same as being surrounded by no information. Are earth tones in, or should I go with more vibrant colours? When I was a child we used to laugh at the idea of men wearing tights, now men get on pushbikes wearing lycra and talk about their PBs on their death rides. Like the atoms that pop into and out of existence, it is impossible to guess today what will be important or even here tomorrow.

We buy so much stuff as a way of expressing who we really are. A few years ago Microsoft had a series of ads with people saying, "I'm a PC". It always seemed a bit strange to me – why people would want to pretend they were a machine? The Turing Test in reverse. But Bauman makes the point that to be a real subject in our society you have to first become a commodity. To be a subject you need to be able to buy the stuff that makes you real. To buy the stuff that expresses your true self (don't worry, there are quite limited choices, and although they change all of them time, they come in strictly defined categories – people will let you know when you stuff up), To get this identity proving stuff you need to have money. To get money to be able to be a worthy subject you need to sell yourself – you need to be a commodity. To consume you must allow a large part of yourself to be likewise consumed. The part of your life where you are being consumed grows with time – soon, you will find you have nothing really in common with people so much as with 'things'. You will buy things out of guilt for the people you live with because you have no time to spend with them and our society associates love with stuff. Then you might start resenting them as you only get to see them when you are tired. Anyway, they are ungrateful and infinitely obsessed with their own hand-held device – eternally scanning for the one piece of information that will turn from point to universe and help them make sense of it all.

As much as I gasp at the sheer brilliance of this man – his image of pointillist time is stunning – I can't help coming away from reading his books feeling washed out and depressed. Still, I've started another of his and have yet another waiting by my bed.

Heli Miranda ahumada says

Mas de lo mismo del chabon, pero el enfoque en el consumo(como dice el titulo) esta bueno.

Juan Camilo says

Buen libro.

Emma Sea says

There's no point in me writing a review when Trevor already said all this.

Solange says

lo estoy leyendo en castellano, si pueden, leanlo!

Kenny B. says

An imperative, albeit sobering, read on the Postmodern consumerist culture and the individual/society it eventually molds. Ever so socially insightful, Mr. Bauman elucidates on various issues such as liquid modernity, identity, pointillist conception of time , transaction-based society, class divisions, law enforcement, the commoditization of the individual and our interpersonal relationships, and much more. The final chapter, "Collateral Casualties of Consumerism," is alone worth the price of admission. Heartily recommended to anyone with even a slight interest in the social analysis of consumerism, the culture it has spawned, and the implications that arise from said culture.
