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## "Życie na przemiał", Zygmunt Bauman, Kraków 2004 : [recenzja]

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Zygmunt Bauman, *Życie na przemiał* [*Life to Shred*], transl. Tomasz Kunz, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2004, pp. 208.

It will not come as surprise to anyone that to understand and reconstruct the idea included in *Life to Shred* one must dig through numerous metaphors, digressions, rich narration and semantic games. It is the manner in which all articles and books, with no exception, by Zygmunt Bauman look like (in case of this book, Bauman goes as far as to include special sub-chapters which constitute complex, specified in the whole narration, multi-page digressions). Having gone through the narration specific for Bauman, we reach a comprehensive view of the processes that are characteristic, according to Bauman, for the late modern times.

The idea that organizes the whole argument of *Life to Shred* is the certainty that it is a characteristic feature of the modern times that it generates widely understood waste. The first category of waste is of course production waste – industrial waste that does not constitute any consumption value and can hardly be recycled, thus finish on dump sites. As Bauman emphasizes, only the modern times are familiar with waste – in the pre-modern cultures there were no useless or unwanted objects that would have to be disposed of. They are generated in an institutionalized manner and constitute a permanent, inevitable outcome of production systems. Similarly, the modern times generate in a system-like way numerous categories of people that are socially excluded – defined by him as “human waste” or “people to shred”. The exclusion of some people is a part of the modern system, since it is the modern times that constitute a kind of a project (or rather consecutive projects of the

transformation of the world and relations among people). What is more, each project requires the rejection of those that would not fit into it. Consequently, it is possible to track the history of the modern times as consecutive endeavours to transform societies, as a result of which new categories of the excluded have been created. Simultaneously, there have been efforts to eliminate the social categories from the borders of social systems not to allow them to disturb their functioning, which resulted in, among others, forced emigration.

The situation on the job market is a perfect illustration of the exclusion processes characteristic for the late modern times. According to Bauman, job markets are not that spacious as to include all the people that look for work. Once, the unemployed constituted a reserve work force that could be reclaimed by the market. Today, these people have become unnecessary for productive systems, therefore, no system endeavours are undertaken to include them. People devoid of work become as a result handicapped consumers, which also has an effect in their social exclusion. Simultaneously, an exclusion is almost always irreversible in character, which is strictly related to, according to Bauman, the fact of disintegration of the *welfare state*. Another instance of the lack of will on the part of a state to include the excluded individuals are the strategies of penitentiary systems, which instead of reinstating criminals to society, pay attention only to the fact if their prisoners stay within their walls. A similar function is performed by the ghettos described in the book, as well as the so-called “hiperghettos” and camps for political refugees and emigrants – they are not supposed to – according to Bauman, make it possible for the excluded to return, but only to gather them in particular

areas, so that they would not disturb the functioning of markets and states. Especially meaningful, in this context, is the described in *Life to Shred* birth of a new industry, whose only aim is to secure the society of rightful consumers against any threat from the excluded ones. Most importantly, all the forms of exclusion described by Bauman are not far from the norm. Neither do they result from the wrong functioning of an institution, but are formally inscribed in the late modern times. Just as Ulrich Beck<sup>1</sup>, Bauman shows that for the late-modern society it is characteristic to feel permanent risk referring to the possibility of joining the excluded group. The risk is even greater, since a possible exclusion, which according to Bauman happens to an increasing number of people, is irreversible. At the same time, the costs of system contradictions (generated on a macro- or micro-level of social structure) are individualized. He presents the negative influence of this situation on the mental and social condition of people in a very suggestive manner.

Are there really no efforts to include the excluded? It must be remembered that there are some actions undertaken in the area of social policy<sup>2</sup>. The procedures are connected here mostly with the *empowerment* procedures, which are based on the creation in excluded people of a positive image of themselves, and on giving them more competences, necessary to come back on the job market, which constitutes the main tunnel of social inclusion. What is more, there are efforts to organize and develop local communities, so

that their inhabitants could learn how to cooperate and gain collective strength. Thus, the marginalized people are activated, they are taught independence and entrepreneurship. As the representatives of social services claim, there are numerous instances of actions undertaken in the countries of the European Union which show that it is possible to weaken and reverse the direction of the processes of social exclusion. However, the discussion between the representatives of active social policy and Bauman is difficult to provide. Firstly, the author of *Life to Shred* does not present any specific data with which it would be possible to discuss. Secondly, his concept of the late modern times is mostly based on the observation of the situation in the USA, where as he claims, the policy is more focused on the penitentiary system than on bringing people back to society and trying to include them, while the active social policy relies mostly on European models. Thirdly, it seems that Bauman finds the sources of poverty and system exclusion somewhere else than representatives of social policy. The concept of social activation of the excluded is based on the conviction that people are prone to social exclusion when they lack some resources and competence necessary to function on the job market, as well as represent a wrong attitude. Bauman on the other hand, seems to believe that productive system is simply unable to contain all people, as a result of which, there has always been a margin of the excluded.

An important issue raised in *Life to Shred* is the problem of social functions of excluded groups – Bauman claims that human waste perform some important functions in social system. Let us analyze the following example. In the globalism-stricken world, no country is able to control the workings of over-national

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<sup>1</sup> U. Beck, *Spółeczeństwo ryzyka. W drodze do innej nowoczesności*, transl. S. Cieśla, Warszawa 2004.

<sup>2</sup> *W stronę aktywnej polityki społecznej*, (eds.) T. Kaźmierczak, M. Rymsza, Warszawa 2003.

subjects. The lack of relevant regulations and institutions results in the lack of distinction in this area as to what is in accordance with, and what against the law. States make up for their helplessness towards the elusive over-national actors with pointing at “substitute enemies”, who are searched for in the excluded groups, e.g. of immigrants. In his previous works, Bauman exposed other social functions performed by excluded people. For example, the fact that the situation of poor people constitutes a kind of a communicate sent to the consumers, showing what are the dangers of falling out of the job market and what is the only alternative towards consumption (it was connected with a range of ways to humiliate the excluded). However, Bauman also shows that poverty has lost many of its functions. In this sense it is worth reminding the functional analysis of poverty by Herbert Gans<sup>3</sup>. He showed a number of other positive functions that poor people served. First of all, they were the source of cheap work force, ready to undertake the “dirty” and poorly paid tasks. Poverty created the work places in the area of social care, in addition to the area of protecting the rest of society against the excluded. The poor, as the recipients of social services and charity made it possible for the rest of society to achieve emotional satisfaction (more often than not, the help for the poor is a result of the religious ethos). What is more, poverty constituted a constant point of reference in the social structure that makes it possible to define one’s own identity and status (among others by charity work, which is a reflection of the social and economic status of the benefactor). In

a similar way, political leftist parties used the category of poor people as a legitimization of their existence. The poor also performed, according to Gans, important functions in respect to the processes of social change – for example, they were the source of cultural innovations (as an illustration there can be given such music styles as jazz and blues that were born among the poor of the American South; a similar situation can be observed today in form of the music created in Brazilian favelas). Moreover, they constituted a group, on which the political and economic expense of social change could be placed. Especially noticeable in this respect are the efforts of the USA to enlarge and keep control in various parts of the globe and the connected military conflicts – it is the category of the poor that was the source of soldiers. According to Gans, the positive functions enumerated by him often have their functional alternatives – to illustrate, there are other possible sources of cultural innovation or the army’s staff; the “dirty” job done by the poor can often become automatic due to technological progress. However, in the seventies, in which Gans’s analysis originates, many of the functional alternatives were much more expensive. For example, to get involved in a war without the poor would consume a larger part of the budget – a higher soldier’s pay would be inevitable as a proper motivation, as a category of people under a strong economical pressure would be gone, besides, it would be politically not popular. Gans drew a conclusion from the above that poverty has been and will be present always, because of its important social function, and a lot of its functional alternatives would appear dysfunctional for the more affluent part of society. In his opinion, poverty will disap-

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<sup>3</sup> H.J. Gans, *The Positive Functions of Poverty*, “American Journal of Sociology” 1972, no. 2, vol. 78, pp. 275–289.

pear only when it becomes dysfunctional enough for the wealthier social actors.

Nevertheless, as Bauman suggests, today the poor have lost an immense part of the above social functions. They no longer play the role of a reserve work force. They have also lost their religious function – they are no longer essential as the ones whom the wealthier help to earn their salvation. What is more, charity work ceases to be an indicator of the social status. Plus, aristocracy does no longer exist, who with help of charity legitimized their existence and differentiated themselves from the new rich group. Due to technical development, “dirty” jobs are also eliminated, which have so far been reserved for the excluded<sup>4</sup>. Even the army has changed the source of its men – the young poor ones are increasingly replaced with well paid professional soldiers<sup>5</sup> as a result of the process of gradual loss of social functions by poverty, the excluded are increasingly marginalized, since they become decreasingly necessary. They are becoming useless not only as far as production and consumption is concerned, but also in reference to the structuring of social relations. It is in this process of the disappearance of the social and economic functions of poverty that lay the sources of *Life to Shred* author’s convictions as to the permanent character of exclusion in the late modern times – yet another inclusion of the excluded is not profitable

for the market institutions and production systems because these people are totally useless for them. In addition, as a result of the aforementioned practice of spacial isolation of the ones excluded by society, and predominantly by the production system and market, they can function without any disturbance. Due to these means, instead of solving the problem of poverty we can pass it and simply forget about it. From such a point of view, poverty will last not only because it performs positive social functions (their number has considerably deteriorated in the last decades), but mainly because another inclusion of the excluded is unprofitable and dysfunctional for the social system. If the above remarks are true, it can be expected that poverty will disappear only when the mechanisms of separation of the excluded will no longer be efficient and human waste will “flood” other spheres of social reality and disturb or paralyze consumptive practices.

The threat of exclusion and constant production of waste (either human or material) also influences culture. In the last chapter Bauman argues that the dynamics of consumption lead to questioning of the values that are characteristic for the modern times. It appears that society, which constantly consumes consecutive products only to almost instantly send them to a dump site, is not able to understand the idea of eternity. Similarly, in the situation of one fashion change following another, we are unable to conceive the idea of unchangeable beauty. Similar change, according to Bauman, takes place in the sphere of human relations, where bonds or friendship become impossible because people treat each other just as the consumed things (the phenomenon of “fast dates” is an interesting issue enumerated by Bauman in this context).

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<sup>4</sup> See J. Rifkin, *Koniec pracy. Schyłek siły roboczej na świecie i początek ery postrykowej*, transl. E. Kania, Wrocław 2003.

<sup>5</sup> See Ch. Coker, *Outsourcing War* [in:] *Non-state Actors in World Politics*, (eds.) W. Wallace, D. Jossalin, New York 2001, pp. 189–202; H. Hoyng, S. von Ilseman, *Złoty strzał*, “Forum” 2004, no. 25, pp. 18–21.

As far as the analyzes of the late modern culture presented by Bauman are concerned, it is worth relating to the works of two other researchers: a French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky and a Scandinavian anthropologist Thomas Eriksen. Both of them present a picture of modern culture that is a reflection of Bauman's concept, yet they point at other reasons of these phenomena. The first of the mentioned authors, in his book *The Empire of Fashion*<sup>6</sup>, analyses contemporary societies from the point of view of fashion. In his opinion, fashion constitutes one of the most influential social institutions of the late modern times, which organizes other social practices. First of all, due to fashion, there has been a change in the time horizon in which social actors function. As late as at the end of the nineteenth century it was tradition that constituted the main source of the models of behaviour – the reproduction of social relations was based on the past and following the habits of our ancestors. However, today, in every sphere of social life – education, science, hygiene, consumption, sports, and entertainment, we follow social fashions; we look up not to our ancestors, but to our contemporaries – the time horizon of contemporary societies is “here and now”. Consequently, the future seems to be open and unpredictable, while in societies based on tradition it was clear that future social relation will reproduce the familiar habits. The fact that individuals follow the example of their contemporaries results in a situation in which they more frequently look for models outside their original groups. Instead of family influence, an individual is

shaped by numerous and varied factors – we take various features from different people with no institutionalized models of connecting cultural contents and models.

In analogy to Lipovetsky, Eriksen, in his book entitled *The Tyranny of a Moment*<sup>7</sup> writes about how the modern culture is dominated by the perspective of the so-called “fast time” – we do not think in the categories of the future or the past since we are absorbed in the fast-changing present. However, the determinant of this process is not placed in fashion but in the sphere of communicative and technical innovations, which have speeded up various kinds of social practices and caused an increase in information. Nevertheless, the processes described by him have paradoxical consequences. It appears that, for example, a wider access to information leads to an information overload, paralyzes us in a cognitive sense, and finally results in the so-called informative inflation. The informative acceleration and overload influence, according to Eriksen, a number of social processes and relations, including the attitude to an old age and the apotheosis of youth, relations at work, including the requirement of flexibility, and contradiction between work and family life. The information overload transforms our way of thinking. In today's societies there is no place for long cumulative narrations in which complex sequences of conclusions are performed – they are replaced by information separated from its context. As we can see, the cultural phenomena, characteristic for the late modern times, discussed by Bauman, can also be

<sup>6</sup> G. Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion. Dressing Modern Democracy*, transl. C. Porter, Oxford 2002.

<sup>7</sup> T.H. Eriksen, *Tyrania chwili. Szybko i wolno płynący czas w erze informacji*, transl. G. Sokół, Warszawa 2003.

explained from the point of view of other categories.

To sum up the above construction of *Life to Shred*, it must be noticed that in this book nothing new can be found (unless we consider new, following Bauman, the fact that instead of talking about the postmodern times we use the term of “late modern times”). All the more important theses and observations referring to the modern world that are formed in the book had been presented by Bauman in his previous works. Moreover, most of the claims seem to reflect what other researchers of the late modern times say, both the famous ones – Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck; and the less known – Lipovetsky and Eriksen.

However, it does not mean that *Life to Shred* is totally devoid of new ideas. Next to the most representative theses of Bauman, we can also find here new heuristic and bibliographic traits. Writing about the heuristic value of *Life to Shred*, I mean among others the remarks included there about what is the proper, sociological meaning of the discourse about overpopulation. Bauman claims that the so-called “overpopulation” is not a problem of demography or geography, but first of all of sociology. The fact that our Earth is overpopulated does not mean that the ecosystem is not able to sustain more people (Bauman refers to the estimations that present this claim as a false one), but that, in the late modern times, we are in a situation in which there are no more parts of the globe where we could move the excluded. It is by the urge to get rid of human-waste that Bauman explains the process of conquering America and exterminating its native inhabitants – in such a way, in his opinion, there was created a space for the “dump sites” of the excluded. Today, though, when countries are not able to throw their excluded

away from their borders, the excluded that constitute both the source of crime and budget overload, the waste of the processes of modernization distract the functioning of the structures that constitute the fruits of modernization. What is more, there is no inclusion of the excluded, thus the pathological situation intensifies. However, the above remarks of Bauman constitute only another conceptual link for his observations of the late modern times.

It is also worth emphasizing that even though it is possible not to agree with the statement of the author of *Life to Shred*, it is worth looking inside the book if only to find there other productive and interesting works. Once again, Bauman appears to have excellent knowledge of the most recent and highly interesting books in the area of social study.

However, in spite of the above heuristic traits, “Life to Spare” does not seem to offer any value added, at least as far as the cognitive aspect is concerned. The author does not try to consequently widen and enrich the created model of the late modern times. Instead of introducing new issues, he continues to apply his “theory” to various problems (in case of this work it is obviously about the processes of social exclusion that are, according to Bauman, an inevitable, system effect of modernization). Yet, the final applications performed by Bauman, turn anyway into a lecture of his general theoretical perspective. Once again, Bauman proves that all his publications constitute the presentations of various aspects of his coherent view of the late modern times. This theoretical perspective is system-like and complex in character. Bauman, even when focusing on only one aspect, he always does it in a wide context. Therefore, all earlier points of his works can also be found in *Life to Shred*:

modernization is linked here with the late modern culture, market and consumption analyses, and with relatively new issues in Bauman's works, i.e. with the problems of migration and risk. He revolves in the areas with remarkable fluency – he is very efficient in binding the exclusion practices that take place on a microlevel with the processes of globalization.

Why is it worth it to read Bauman? A sociologist that would expect from Bauman a cognitively organized presentation of theses or hypotheses that could be analyzed, will of course find no such thing. Bauman does not prove, only tries to charm the reader with his narration, erudite style and fluency with which he binds the issues and problems that usually constitute the subject of interest of various categories of researchers, who would not be able to connect their studies. In such a way, Bauman makes it possible to see the late modern times, from a more general and philosophical than sociological perspective, as a system of relations and processes. He shows, in a philosophical mode, what no researcher in specialized sociological discourses is able to catch. It can be treated as either a disadvantage or an advantage. However, in the context of *Life to Shred*, the words of Bauman gain a new value. The author is aware that in the late modern times of fast changing behaviour of people, academic concepts, as well as common goods are fast destined to be shred. Bauman tries to uphold his ideas by continuous re-telling it from the very beginning – thus, he reproduces his thought by telling it again. In this sense, *Life to Shred* is not cognitive in character – it seems to be of smaller meaning than the effort to petrify the sociological discourse by telling it again and again.

To understand the means that Bauman uses, I will make a digression. As primatology

shows, there are complicated social relations among the primate mammals. Though, they are temporary in character – they last only as long as the interaction itself. When animals turn their backs at each other, the social order created in the interaction disintegrates. Therefore, apes live in a constantly disintegrating social order, which must be sustained by interaction. It is a society without any structure. Human societies have structures. We owe it, among others, to culture – to symbols, knowledge, language and material objects that constitute functional culture. Due to them, social structures can retain their integrity. Modernization constituted another element of social order – to the methods of stabilizing social relations known to pre-modern societies were joined such modern and rationalized institutions as bureaucracy, law, modern markets, or science. This led to even stronger stabilization of social structures<sup>8</sup>. However, in the time of late modernism, the lasting of social order was disturbed. In the fast changing world of late modernism, cultural content, symbols, knowledge and values are prone to constant change, just as goods and fashion trends. As Bauman claims, they have a short “expiry date” and thus are quickly “shredded”. As a result of continuous social change that have no chance of institutionalize themselves, social structures also become blurred, since the factors and institutions that have so far stabilized them by social history, have been almost entirely eliminated. Therefore, in some respects, the social relations that bind us are coming closer to the ones we deal with among other primates, and not to those we dealt with in modernism. This

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<sup>8</sup> Comp. B. Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 174–215.

is the reason why Bauman writes about elusive modern times.

Let us now look again at *Life to Shred*, and at other works of the author. Bauman, due to continuous narration, reproduces his concept. What is more, in this way he reproduces culture itself! It lets us (sociologists, philosophers, and common people that live in late modernism) to reconstruct and remember better the vision of our modern world in its magnitude.

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**Dominik Antonowicz, *Uniwersytet przyszłości. Wyzwania i modele polityki* [University of the Future: Challenges and Models of Politics] Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warszawa 2005, pp. 200.**

A lot has been said today about the crisis of the idea of university. The problem is even deeper because there is no agreement as to the new concept of this institution. The defenders of traditional academic values do not always specify enough which heritage they mean. Is a true university a corporation of the Middle Ages, or is it a bureaucratic institution, closely related to a national state? The evolution of university did not stop on the concept of Humboldt. The modern academies must actively create their vision in the world of globalised economy based on knowledge, in societies who are endangered by unemployment and that want to study in huge numbers, even at university level. Looking for the right model of a government policy towards universities, such issues as academic autonomy, financing universities, putting university education on the market, etc. must all be analyzed. The book by Dominik Antonowicz performs a double

function in the discussion on the future of universities. Firstly, it is a source of knowledge on the development and transformation of universities, whose history started in the ancient times. The author also makes a detailed review of the concepts of government policies towards academic institutions, as far as legislation, financial and personal policy is concerned. On the other hand, the book is a voice in the debate. Antonowicz analyzes the models of politics towards universities in the countries of Western Europe and the USA, and he refers those problems and solutions to the situation of Polish universities. On which foundation, he forms instructions for Polish policy towards universities.

The book includes eight chapters. The author develops quite numerous aspects and refers to the rich history of the university. However, it must be noted that the whole was created very coherently and clearly. The initial three parts describe the evolution of the aspects fundamental for universities: the rules of the functioning and organization of the school, the term of academic autonomy, and the sources of financing the academy.

Antonowicz widely discusses the evolution of university from the Middle Ages' corporations (he also mentions ancient academies) to the modern age institution. Nevertheless, the main of his interest are constituted by the problems and tasks of modern universities. The last decades of the twentieth century constitute a breakthrough also for the idea of a university. Globalisation, the decreased role of the national state, which constituted a base for the culture-creating functions of a university, mass education, also at the university level, drastic limitations of finances from the budgets of countries, which have been directed into social spheres, as