

# Zygmunt Bauman

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## On Facebook, Intimacy and Extimacy

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Zygmunt Bauman

## ON FACEBOOK, INTIMACY AND EXTIMACY

*“Facebook is the leading social networking site having overtaken main competitor MySpace in April 2008”. “Facebook attracted 130 million unique visitors in May 2010, an increase of 8.6 million people”. “The website’s ranking among all websites increased from 60th to 7th in worldwide traffic, from September 2006 to September 2007, and is currently 2<sup>nd</sup>”.*

These are, supplied by the apparently constantly updated Wikipedia website, the latest informations about FaceBook’s phenomenal success: it’s uncommonly fast and relentless ascent, leaving far behind all other internet novelties and passing fashions, and beating all the records of growth in the numbers of regular users, and so also in the website’s commercial value... Indeed, according to Le Monde of 24 February, the current value of Facebook has by now reached an unheard-of sum of 50 billion dollars. And when I write these words, the number of Facebook “active users” passed the half-billion barrier. Some of course are more active than others – but half at least of active users are on Facebook in any given day. As the Facebook owners inform, an average user has 130 (Facebook) friends, whereas between themselves the users spend on Facebook over 700 billion minutes per month. If that astronomical figure is too big to digest and assimilate, let me point out that if divided equally between Facebook’s active users, it would give each one of them roughly 48 minutes per day. Alternatively, it could represent 16 million people spending on Facebook 7 days a week, 24 hours a day.

By all standards, success is truly astounding. The 20-years old Mark Zuckerberg must have stumbled on some kind of a goldmine, when inventing (some people say stealing<sup>1</sup>) the Facebook idea - and launching it, for the

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1 This particular claim of theft, like most those made and contested during the California “gold rush” of 1849 and thereafter, did not find unambiguous resolution in courts; but then the Internet at the start of the 21st Century, like California in the middle of the 19th, was a uniquely lawless place – without private property, licensing fees or taxes, and guns doing was elsewhere the judges and policemen use to do.

exclusive use of Harvard students, on Internet in February 2004. That much is pretty obvious. But what was that gold-like ore that Lucky Mark discovered and goes on mining with fabulous, and still steadily rising, profits?

On the official Facebook site you'd find the following description of the benefits credited with tempting/attracting/ seducing all those half-billion people to spend a good deal of their waking time on the Facebook's virtual expanses:

„Users can create profiles with photos, lists of personal interests, contact information, and other personal information. Users can communicate with friends and other users through private or public messages and a chat feature. They can also create and join interest groups and "like pages" (formerly called "fan pages", until April 19, 2010), some of which are maintained by organizations as a means of advertising.”

In other words, what the legions of “active users” enthusiastically embraced when joining the ranks of the Facebook “active users”, was the prospect of two things of which they must have dreamt of, yet didn't know where to seek them and find, before (and until) Zuckerberg's offer to his fellow students in Harvard has appeared on the Internet. First: they must have felt too lonely for comfort, but found it for one reason or another too difficult to escape their loneliness with the means in their disposal. Second: they must have felt painfully neglected, paid no attention to, unnoticed, ignored, and otherwise shuttled on a side-track, exiled and excluded, but again found it difficult, nay impossible, to lift themselves out from their hateful anonymity with the means in their disposal. For both tasks, Zuckerberg offered the means they heretofore sought in vain and terribly missed; and they jumped to the opportunity... They must have been ready to jump, feet in the starting blocks, muscles tense, ears pricked for the starter's shot.

I wonder: were Zuckerberg born thirty/forty years earlier, were he trained by his teachers to unctuously regurgitate Sartre's homilies or to repeat after Foucault as if quoting from the Holy Scripture that “author is dead”, were he have learned from the apostles of “New Criticism” that it is downright silly, and disqualifying for a student, to connect artistic texts with any personal details of the author's life – would it occur to him that it is precisely the “personal details” that make the author, and that therefore his young colleagues are itching to match the celebrated authors' glory through making public their own “personal details”? And in the utterly unlikely case that it would have occurred to that earlier-born Zuckerberg, would the millions of active users leap to his invention and would the billions of dollars follow them? It was only in the course of the last twenty years that, as Sebastian Faulks points out in *Faulks on Fiction*, “far from being banned from comment, the author's life and its bearing on the work became the major field of discussion”. And, he adds, this watershed change

“opened the door to speculation and gossip. By assuming that all works of art are an expression of their authors’ personality, the biographical critics reduced the act of creation to a sideshow”. I suspect (or rather I am sure) that only in the last twenty years that Zuckerberg could have his revelation and bring his tidings to his fellow students, whereas his fellow students would have been prepared to follow the Master along the road he pointed...

As Josh Rose<sup>2</sup>, the digital creative director of ad agency Deutsch LA, has recently observed, “The Internet doesn’t steal our humanity, it reflects it. The Internet doesn’t get inside us, it shows what’s inside us.” How right he is. Never blame the messenger for whatever you found to be bad in the message he delivered, but do not praise him either for whatever you found to be good... It depends, after all, on the recipients’ own likings and animosities, dreams and nightmares, hopes and apprehensions, whether they’d rejoice or despair in the message. What applies to messages and messengers, applies in a similar, even if somewhat different way to the Internet offers and their “messengers” – people who display them on our screens and bring them to our attention. In this case, it is the uses which we, the Facebook “active users”, all the half-billion of us, make of those offers, that render them, and their impact on our lives, good or bad, beneficial or harmful. It all depends on what we are after; technical gadgets just make our longings more or less realistic and our search faster or slower, more or less effective...

Let have a closer look now at those offers. The first one concerned the means of escaping loneliness... Let me quote once more from John Rose’s musings:

“I recently asked the question to my Facebook friends: “Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare... is all this making you feel closer to people or farther away?” It sparked a lot of responses and seemed to touch one of our generation’s exposed nerves. What is the effect of the Internet and social media on our humanity? From the outside view, digital interactions appear to be cold and inhuman. There’s no denying that. And without doubt, given the choice between hugging someone and “poking” someone, I think we can all agree which one feels better. The theme of the responses to my Facebook question seemed to be summed up by my friend Jason, who wrote: “Closer to people I’m far away from.” Then, a minute later, wrote, “but maybe farther from the people I’m close enough to.” And then added, “I just got confused.” It is confusing. We live in this paradox now, where two seemingly conflicting realities exist side-by-side. Social media simultaneously draws us nearer and distances us.”

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2 <http://mashable.com/2011/02/23/social-media-culture/>.

Admittedly, Rose is wary of passing unambiguous verdicts – as one indeed should be, in case of as seminal yet hazardous transaction as the exchange of sparse incidents of off-line “closeness” for the massive online variety. The “closeness” traded away was perhaps more satisfying, yet time-and-energy-consuming and beset with risks; the “closeness” traded in is no doubt faster, calling for almost no effort and almost risk-free, but many find it much less able to quash the thirst for a fully-fledged company. You gain something, you lose something else – and it is awfully difficult to decide whether your gains compensate the losses; besides, a once-for-all decision is out of the question, you will find it as brittle and until-further notice as the “closeness” you’ve acquired.

What you’ve acquired, is a network, not a “community”. As you’ll find sooner or later (on condition of course that is, that you won’t forget or won’t fail to learn what the “community” was all about - busy as you are piecing networks together and pulling them apart), that they are no more similar than chalk and cheese. Belonging to community is a much more secure and reliable condition, than having a network – though admittedly more constraining and obliging. Community watches you closely and leaves you little room for maneuver (it may ban you and exile, but wouldn’t allow you to opt out on your own will), while network may care little or not at all about your obedience of the network’s norms (that is, if a network has norms to obey, which all too often it doesn’t) and so gives you much more rope, and above all would not penalize you for quitting; but you can count on community to be a “friend in need, and so friend indeed” – while networks are there mostly to share fun, and their readiness to come to your rescue in case of a trouble unrelated to that shared “foci of interest” is hardly ever put to the test and even less frequently would pass it if put. All in all, the choice is between security and freedom: you need both, but you cannot have one without sacrificing a part at least of the other; and the more you have of one, the less you’ll have of the other. On security, the old-style communities beat networks hands down. On freedom, it is the other way round (after all, it takes but one push of the “delete” key or a stop to answering messages to get free of its interference).

Besides, there is all that enormous, indeed abysmal, unfathomable difference between “hugging” and “poking” someone, as Rose puts it... In other words, between the online variety of “closeness”, and its offline prototype: between depth and shallowness, profundity and superficiality, warmth and coolness, the heartfelt and the perfunctory... You choose, and in all probability you’d go on choosing and you can hardly stop to choose, but it is better to choose knowing what are you choosing – and to be prepared to pay the price of your choice. This is at least what Rose seems to imply, and there is no quarrelling with his advice.

So are the names and the photos which Facebook users call “friends”

close or distant? A dedicated Facebook “active user” boasted recently that he managed to make 500 new friends in a day – that is, more than I’ve managed in all my 85-years long life. But as professor Robin Dunbar, evolutionary anthropologist in Oxford, insists - “our minds are not designed (by evolution) to allow us to have more than a very limited number of people in our social world”. Dunbar actually calculated that number: he found that “most of us can maintain only around 150 meaningful relationships”. Not unexpectedly, he’s called that limit imposed by (biological) evolution “Dunbar number”. This is, we may comment, the point to which biological evolution brought our remote ancestors and in which it stopped, or at least slowed down sharply, leaving the field to its much nimbler, more agile and dexterous, and above all more resourceful and less patient successor – called “cultural evolution” (that is, triggered, shaped and driven by humans themselves, through the teaching/learning process rather than changing arrangement of genes).

Let’s note that 150 was probably the topmost number of creatures that could come together, stay together and profitably cooperate while surviving on hunting and gathering only; the size of a proto-human herd wouldn’t manage to go over that magic border without summoning, or rather conjuring up, forces and (yes!) tools other than fangs and talons. Without those other forces and tools, called “cultural”, continuous proximity of larger numbers would have been unsustainable, and so the capacity of “holding in mind” such larger numbers would have been redundant. “Imagining” totalities larger than those accessible to senses was as uncalled for as it was inconceivable. Minds had no need to store what senses had no opportunity to grasp... Arrival of culture must have, as it did, to coincide with the trespassing over the “Dunbar number”? Passing over that number being the first act of transgression of the “natural limits” – and given that transgression of limits (whether “natural” or self-set) is culture’s defining trait and its mode of being, also the birth act of culture?<sup>3</sup>.

The electronically sustained “networks of friendship” promised to break through the recalcitrant limitations to sociability set by our genetically

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3 Other scholars arrived at different limits, sometimes twice as large as Dunbar’s. According to a recent entry to Wikipedia, “anthropologist H. Russell Bernard and Peter Killworth and associates have done a variety of field studies in the United States that came up with an estimated mean number of ties - 290 - that is roughly double Dunbar’s estimate. The Bernard-Killworth median of 231 is lower, due to upward straggle in the distribution: this is still appreciably larger than Dunbar’s estimate. The Bernard-Killworth estimate of the maximum likelihood of the size of a person’s social network is based on a number of field studies using different methods in various populations. It is not an average of study averages but a repeated finding. Nevertheless, the Bernard-Killworth number has not been popularized as widely as Dunbar’s”. Unlike the researchers named above, who focus on groupings in various contemporary human populations, prime objects of Dunbar’s field and archive studies and suppliers of raw data from which the Dunbar’s number was calculated were primates and pleistocene populations; therefore, Dunbar’s proposition that given the structure of neocortex shared by primates and their younger human relatives the size of primaeval horde sets the limits to the number of “meaningful relationships” in humans needs to be taken as an assumption rather than a corroborated finding...

transmitted equipment. Well, says Dunbar, they didn't and will not – the promise can't but be broken. "Yes", says Dunbar in his 25 December opinion entry to the NYT, "you can "friend" 500, 1000, even 5000 people with your Facebook page, but all save the core 150 are mere voyeurs looking into your daily life". Among those thousands of Facebook friends, the "meaningful relationships", whether serviced electronically or lived off line, are as before confined inside the impassable limits of the "Dunbar number". The true service rendered by Facebook and its ilk, the "social" websites, is the maintenance of the steady core of friends under condition of highly mobile, fast moving and fast changing world... Our distant ancestors had it easy: they, much as their near and dear, tended on the whole to dwell in the same place from cradle to coffin, in close proximity to each other and within reach and sight of each other. This kind of, we may say, "topographic" foundation of long- term, even life-long bonds, is unlikely to appear, and yet less likely to be immune to the flow of time, vulnerable as it is to the vicissitudes of individual life histories. Fortunately, we have now ways of "staying in touch" that are fully and truly "extraterritorial" and so independent of the degree and frequency of physical proximity. "Facebook and other social networking sites", and only they - so Dunbar suggests - "allow us to keep up the friendships that would otherwise rapidly wither away". This is not, though, the end of the benefits they offer: "they allow us to reintegrate our networks so that, rather than having several disconnected subsets of friends, we can rebuild, albeit virtually, the kind of old rural communities where everyone knew everyone else" (*italics added*). In case of friendship at any rate, Dunbar implies even if not in so many words, Marshall McLuhan's idea of "media being a message" has been refuted; though his other memorable suggestion, that of the arrival of a "global village", came for a change true. "Albeit virtually"...

But is not "virtuality" a difference that makes a difference – a bigger one, and much more consequential for the fate of "meaningful relationships", than Dunbar is willing/caring to admit? Living in "the old rural communities" made it difficult to tie up bonds that were not tied up already, so to, speak, "by themselves", and more precisely by the circumstance of living the same "rural community"; and it made similarly, if not more difficult the un-tying of such bonds as haven't be already made null and void by the death of one or more of the bonds people. Living online, on the other hand, makes "entering" a relationship exceedingly easy; but so does it enormously facilitate the opting out for a relationship, while making it treacherously easy to overlook the "relationship" losing its content, emaciating, fading and in the end dissolving for mere absence of attention.

There are reasons to suspect that precisely those facilities secured and assured the "social networking" sites their tremendous popularity, making their chief marketer, Mark Elliot Zuckerberg, an instant multi-billionaire. It was those facilities that allowed the modern drive to effortlessness, convenience

and - comfort to finally reach, conquer and colonize the heretofore stubbornly and passionately independent land of human bonds. They made that land risk-free or almost; they made the overstaying-of-welcome by the ex-desirables impossible or almost. They made loss-cutting cost-free or almost. All in all, they accomplished the feat of squaring the circle, or of eating the cake and having it: by cleansing the business of inter-relating from strings attached, they removed the ugly fly of un-breakability that used to blight the sweet ointment of human togetherness.

Dunbar is right that the electronic substitutes for face-to-face brought the stone-age inheritance up to date: adjusted the ways and means of human togetherness to the requirements of our *nouvel âge*... What he seems to neglect, however, is that in the course of that adaptation those ways and means have been also considerably altered, and that in the result “meaningful relationship” have also changed their meaning. And so must have done the contents of the “Dunbar number” concept. Unless it is precisely the number, and the number only, that exhaust its contents...

The point is, though, that whether or not the numbers of people with whom one can enter the “meaningful relationship” stayed put over the millennia, the contents required to make relationship “meaningful” have changed considerably – and particularly drastically in the last thirty or forty years... They changed so much, that as the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Serge Tisseron suggests, relationships considered “meaningful” has moved from *intimité* to *extimité* – intimacy do “extimacy”...

Alain Ehrenberg, a uniquely insightful analyst of the convoluted trajectory of the modern individual’s short yet dramatic history, attempted to pinpoint the birthdate of the late-modern cultural revolution (at least of its French branch) that ushered us in the liquid-modern world which we continue to inhabit; a sort of the Western cultural revolution’s equivalent of the salvo of the battleship Aurora, that gave signal to the assault and capture of the Winter Palace and triggered the seventy years of the bolsheviks’ rule. Ehrenberg’s chose an autumnal Wednesday evening in the 1980s, on which a certain Vivianne, an ‘ordinary French woman’, declared during a TV talk show and so in front of several millions spectators, that her husband Michel being afflicted with premature ejaculation, she’d never experienced an orgasm throughout her marital life.

What was so revolutionary about Vivienne’s pronouncement to justify Ehrenberg’s choice? Its two closely connected aspects. First: acts quintessentially, even eponymically *private*, being revealed and talked about *in public* – that is, in front of everyone who wished or just happened to listen. And second: *public* arena - that is a space open to uncontrolled entry, has been used to vent

and thrash out a matter of a thoroughly *private* significance, concern and emotion. Between them, the two genuinely revolutionary steps legitimized *public* use of the language developed for *private* conversations between a strictly limited number of selected persons: of a language whose prime function was heretofore the setting the realm of the “private” apart from that of the “public”. More precisely, these two interconnected breakthroughs initiated the deployment in public, for the consumption and use of public audience, of the vocabulary designed to be used for narrating private, subjectively lived-through experiences (*Erlebnisse* as distinct from *Erfahrungen*). As the years went by, it became clear that the true significance of the event had been the effacing of once sacrosanct division between the “private” and the “public” sphere of human bodily and spiritual life.

Looking back and with the benefit of hindsight, we may say that Vivienne’s appearance in front of millions of French men and women glued to their TV screens also ushered the viewers, and through them all the rest of us, into a *confessional society*: a heretofore unheard-of and inconceivable kind of society in which microphones were fixed inside the confessionals, those eponymical safeboxes and depositories of the most secret of secrets, the sort of secrets which could be divulged only to God or his earthly messengers and plenipotentiaries; and in which loudspeakers connected to those microphones were perched on public squares: places previously meant for the brandishing and thrashing out of the issues of shared interest, concern and urgency.

The advent of the confessional society signalled the ultimate triumph of privacy, that foremost modern invention – though also the beginning of its vertiginous falls from the peak of its glory. The hour therefore of its Pyrrhic, to be sure, victory: privacy invaded, conquered and colonized the public realm – but at the expense of losing its right to secrecy: its defining trait and the most cherished and most hotly defended privilege.

Secret, similarly to other categories of personal possessions, is by definition the part of knowledge the sharing of which with others is refused or prohibited and/or closely controlled. Secrecy, as its were, draws and marks the boundary of privacy - privacy being the realm that is meant to be one’s own domain, the territory of one’s undivided sovereignty, inside which one has the comprehensive and indivisible power to decide “what and who I am” - and from which one may launch and re-launch the campaigns to have and keep one’s decisions recognized and respected. In a startling U-turn from the habits of our ancestors, we’ve however lost the guts, the stamina, and above all the will to persist in the defence of such rights, those irreplaceable building blocks of individual autonomy. In our days, it is not so much the possibility of betrayal or violation of privacy that frighten us, but their opposite: shutting down the exits. The area of privacy turns into a site of incarceration, the owner of private

space being condemned and doomed to stew in his/her own juice; forced into a condition marked by the absence of avid listeners eager to wring out and tear out our secrets from the ramparts of privacy, to cast them on public display, to make them everybody's shared property and a property everybody wishes to share. *We seem to experience no joy in having secrets*, unless these are the kind of secrets likely to enhance our egos through attracting attention of the researchers and the editors of TV talk-shows, tabloid first pages and the covers of glossy magazines.

'At the heart of social networking is an exchange of personal information'. Users are happy to 'reveal intimate details of their personal lives', 'to post accurate information' and 'to share photographs'. It is estimated that 61% of UK teenagers aged 13 to 17 'have a personal profile on a networking site' enabling 'socializing online'<sup>4</sup>.

In Britain, a country in which the popular use of cutting-edge electronic facilities lags cyber-years behind the Far-East, the users may still trust the 'social networking' to manifest their freedom of choice, even believe it to be a means of youthful rebellion and self-assertion. But in the South Korea, for instance, where most of social life is already routinely electronically mediated (or rather where *social* life has already turned into an *electronic* life or *cyber*-life, and where most of the 'social life' is conducted primarily in the company of a computer, iPod or mobile, and only secondarily with other fleshy beings), it is obvious to the young that they don't have even as little as a sniff of choice; where they live, living social life electronically is no longer a choice, but a 'take it or leave it' necessity. 'Social death' awaits those few who as yet failed to link up into Cyworld, the South Korea's cyber-market leader in the 'show-and-tell culture'.

It would be however a grave mistake to suppose that the urge of public display of the 'inner self' and the willingness to satisfy that urge are manifestations of a unique, purely generational, age-related urge/addiction of teenagers, keen as they tend naturally to be to get a foothold in the 'network' (a term rapidly replacing 'society' in both the social-scientific discourse and the popular speech) and to stay there, while not quite sure how best to achieve that goal. The new penchant for public confessions cannot be explained by the 'age-specific' factors – at any rate not by them *only*. As Eugène Enriquez summed up recently the message deriving from the fast growing evidence, gathered from all the sectors of the liquid-modern world of consumers<sup>5</sup>.

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4 See: P. Lewis, *Teenage networking websites face anti-paedophile investigation*, "The Guardian" 2006, 3 July 2006.

5 E. Enriquez, *L'idéal type de l'individu hypermoderne: l'individu pervers?*, [in:] N. Aubert (ed.), *L'Individu hypermoderne*, Érès 2004, p. 49.

If only one does not forget that what had been previously invisible – everybody’s part of the intimate, everybody’s inner life – now is called to be exposed on the public stage (principally on TV screens but also on the literary stage), one will comprehend that those who care for their invisibility are bound to be rejected, pushed aside, or suspected of a crime. Physical, social and psychical nudity is the order of the day.

The teenagers equipped with portable electronic confessionals are but apprentices training and trained in the art of living in a confessional society – a society notorious for effacing the boundary once separating the private from the public, for making public exposure of the private a public virtue and obligation, and for wiping out from public communication anything that resists being reduced to private confidences, together with those who refuse to confide them.

As early as in the late 1920s, when the imminent transformation of the society of producers into a society of consumers was in an embryonic or at best incipient stage and so was overlooked by the less attentive and farsighted observers, Siegfried Kracauer, a thinker endowed with an uncanny capacity for gleaning the barely visible, still inchoate contours of future-prefiguring trends lost in a formless mass of fleeting fads and foibles, had noted<sup>6</sup>:

“The rush to the numerous beauty salons springs partly from existential concerns, and the use of cosmetic products is not always a luxury. For fear of being withdrawn from use as obsolete, ladies and gentlemen dye their hair, while forty-years-olds take up sports to keep slim. ‘How can I become beautiful’, runs the title of a booklet recently launched on to the market; the newspaper advertisements for it say that it shows ways ‘to stay young and beautiful both now and for ever’.”

The emergent habits which Kracauer recorded in the early 1920s as a noteworthy Berlin curiosity spread since then like a forest fire, until they turned into daily routine (or at least into a dream) all around the globe. Eighty years later Germaine Greer could already observe<sup>7</sup> that ‘even in the furthest reaches of north-western China, women laid aside their pyjama suits for padded bras and flirty skirts, curled and coloured their straight hair and saved up to buy cosmetics. This was called liberalization’.

The schoolgirls and schoolboys avidly and enthusiastically putting

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6 In “Die Angestellten”, essays first serialized in the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” through 1929, and published in a book form by Suhrkamp in 1930. Here quoted in Quintin Hoare’s translation: S. Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, Verso 1998, p. 39.

7 G. Greer, *The Future of Feminism*, Dr J.Tans Lecture, Studium Generale Universiteit Maastricht 2004, p. 13.

on display their qualities in the hope of capturing attention and possibly also gain recognition and approval needed to stay in the game of socializing, the prospective clients in need to amplify their spending records and credit limits to earn a better service, the would-be immigrants struggling to gather and supply the brownie points in evidence of demand for their services in order to have their applications admitted: all three apparently so distinct categories of people, and myriads of other categories of people forced to sell themselves at the commodity market and wishing to sell themselves to the highest bidder, are enticed, nudged or forced to promote an attractive and desirable *commodity*, and so to try as hard as they can, while using the best means at their disposal, to enhance the market value of the goods they sell. And the commodity they are prompted to put on the market, promote and sell, are *themselves*.

They are, *simultaneously, promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote*. They are, at the same time, the merchandise and their marketing agents, the goods and their travelling salespersons (and let me add that any academic who ever applied for a teaching job or research funds would easily recognize her or his own predicament in their experience). In whatever bracket they may be filed up by the composers of statistical tables, they all inhabit the same social space known under the name of the *market*. Under whatever rubric would their preoccupations be classified by the governmental archivists or investigative journalists, the activity in which all of them are engaged (whether by choice, necessity, or most commonly both) is *marketing*. The test they need to pass in order to be admitted to the social prizes they covet demands them *to recast themselves as commodities*: that is, as products capable of drawing attention, and attracting demand and customers.

“To consume” means nowadays not so much the delights of the palate, as investing in one’s own social membership, which in the society of consumers translates as ‘saleability’: obtaining qualities for which there is already a market demand, or recycling the already possessed qualities into commodities for which demand can be yet created. Most consumer commodities on offer in the consumer market derive their attraction and their power to enlist keen customers from their genuine or imputed, explicitly advertised or obliquely implied investment value. Their promise to increase the attractiveness, and consequently the market price of their buyers, is written - in a large or small print, or at least between the lines - into the description of all products, including such products as are, ostensibly, to be purchased mostly or even exclusively for the sake of pure consumer pleasure; consumption is an investment in everything that matters for individual ‘social value’ and self-esteem.

The crucial purpose, perhaps the decisive (even if seldom spelled out in so many words and yet less frequently publicly debated) purpose of consumption in the society of consumers is not the satisfaction of needs, desires and wants,

but commoditization or re-commoditization of the consumer: *raising the status of consumers to that of sellable commodities*. It is ultimately for that reason that the passing of the consumer test is the non-negotiable condition of the admission to the society that has been reshaped in the likeness of the marketplace. Passing of that test is the *non-contractual* precondition of all *contractual* relations that weave and are woven into the web of relationship called the 'society of consumers'. It is that no-exception-allowed, no-refusal-tolerated precondition, which welds the aggregate of seller/buyer transactions into an imagined totality; or which, more exactly, allows that aggregate to be experienced as a totality called 'society' - an entity to which the capacity of 'making demands' and of coercing the actors to obey them can be ascribed - and so the status of the 'social fact' in the Durkheimian sense may be imputed.

*Members of the society of consumers are themselves consumer commodities*, and it is the quality of being a consumer commodity that makes them *bona fide* members of that society. Becoming and remaining a sellable commodity is the most potent, even if usually latent and seldom conscious, let alone explicitly declared motive of consumer concerns. It is by their potency to increase the consumer's market price that the attractiveness of consumer goods, the consumers' current or potential objects of desire triggering consumer actions, tends to be evaluated. 'Making oneself a sellable commodity' is a DIY job, and individual duty. Let us note: *'making oneself'*, not just *becoming*, is the challenge and the task.

Being a member of the society of consumers is a daunting task and never ending uphill struggle. The fear of failing to conform has been elbowed out by the fear of inadequacy, but has not become less haunting for that reason. Consumer markets are eager to capitalize on that fear, and companies turning out consumer goods vie for the status of most reliable guides/helpers in their clients unending effort to rise to the challenge. They supply 'the tools', the instruments required by the individually performed 'self-fabrication' job. The goods they represent as 'tools' for individual use in decision-making are in fact decisions made in advance'. They have been ready-made well before the individual is confronted with the duty (represented as opportunity) to decide. It is absurd to think of those tools as enabling individual choice of purpose. These instruments are the crystallizations of irresistible 'necessity' - which, now as before, humans must learn, obey, and learn to obey in order to be free...

Is not the Facebook's mind-boggling success due to providing the marketplace on which necessity may meet daily with freedom of choice?

## LITERATURE

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## SUMMARY

The author analyzes the Facebook phenomenon, perceived from the point of view of its mechanisms and their social effects. It turns out to be a negation of the former imaginations concerning disappearance of personal presentation as an author with his/her right to personal reactions through messages showing one's own feelings possibly in unlimited way. All this embodies needs for personal attraction of attention and escape from loneliness, although we get paradoxical result of getting closer to distant and creating distance with those being in the vicinity. Entering network is not the same as belonging to a 'community' since a wide scale of contacts does not contribute to emotional ties, despite being "friends" on the net. The author considers also effects of "cultural revolution" type, linked with relations on Facebook including also change of criteria of social "meaningfulness", particularly through change of relations between the private and the public. All this leads towards a new type of society called "confessional", permitting public showing and viewing of what formerly would not be exhibited and treated as closely intimate. This is connected with refusal of invisibility and makes part of a new approach to consumption and a new status of consumers in a liquid modernity as linked with struggle for attention and striving for the status of an attractive commodity. Individuals strive to exhibit themselves as commodity within the marketplace, concentrated on their attractiveness and the quality of its public perception. The consumption serves no more one's needs but "commoditization" of the very consumer linked with rising his/her status up to being able to be for sale within the network relations, possibly in a public way, including the former intimacy. Consumers become commodity with the potential of sale on a marketplace. (LW)

**Key words:** commoditization, confessional society, intimate vs. public relations, new consumer status, network instead of a community.

## O FACEBOOKU, ZAŻYŁOŚCI I UZEWNĘTRZNIENIU STRESZCZENIE

Autor analizuje fenomen Facebooka, pod kątem jego realnych mechanizmów i ich skutków. Okazuje się to zaprzeczeniem wcześniejszych wyobrażeń o zaniku potrzeby autorskiej prezentacji i prawa do osobistego odbioru w przekazie oraz pokazywania własnych emocji możliwie bez ograniczeń. Realizuje się tym samym potrzeba przyciągania uwagi i ucieczki od samotności choć niesie paradoksalne efekty w zakresie bliskości z oddalonymi i oddalenia wobec bliskich. Wejście w sieć nie jest wejściem we wspólnotę, gdyż duża skala kontaktów nie niesie więzi mimo „znajomości”. Autor śledzi przejawy „rewolucji kulturalnej” związanej z relacjami na Facebooku, także pod kątem zmiany kryteriów ich „znaczenia” społecznego, wraz z budowaniem nowych odniesień między tym, co prywatne i tym co publiczne. Prowadzi to do nowego typu społeczeństwa... „konfesjonalnego”, obserwacji publicznej tego, co zwykle miało charakter nieuzewnętrzniany i niedostępny poza wąską intymność. Wiąże się to z odrzuceniem niewidzialności także jako postawa konsumenta w płynnej nowoczesności i walka o przyciąganie uwagi, na wzór statusu atrakcyjnego towaru. Jednostki same zaczynają występować w trybie towarów na rynku, gdzie liczy się atrakcyjność i postrzeganie. Funkcją konsumpcji nie jest już zaspokajanie potrzeb, ale „utowarowienie” samego konsumenta, związane z podnoszeniem jego statusu pozwalającego na „sprzedanie” siebie samego w sieci relacji i to możliwie publicznie także w zakresie własnej „intymności”. Konsumenci sami stają się towarami, mającymi wartość handlową i potencjał sprzedaży. (LW)

**Słowa kluczowe:** utowarowienie, społeczeństwo konfesjonalne, relacja intymne vs. publiczne, nowy status konsumenta, sieć zamiast wspólnoty.