Review of "Consuming Life"

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Book Review | *Consuming Life*

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*Consuming Life*, authored by the well-known philosopher Z. Bauman, starts from the premise that there are new tendencies that have overridden the day-to-day life of people. These changes emphasize the needs of a full exposition of private life. By the way, companies are prone to eliminate those workers who do not satisfy their expectances to the extent transforming the human resources in material resources. In a similar manner, processes of control focus on the exclusion of all those factors that do not contribute with efficiency and efficacy to the system. This reality is accompanied by a migration policy aimed at giving certain stimuli at the time of restraints. Whereas the capitalist system warrants the stability and entrance of certain members excludes others who are not surely functional.

This sharp contrast, of course, can be evidenced in many sphere of social life. Bauman denounces that modern consumers have become in a self-commoditization of the goods they elect. Even if the market has historically highlighted the encounter between supply and demand, hitherto the boundaries of both are being blurred. Tenets of capitalism are based on attractiveness of elaborated products that can be sold to a wider net of consumers. For Bauman, secularization involves not only religion but also politics. In the past, citizens were interested by the public affairs and claims of politicians for solutions to their concerns. Today, the market seems to have invaded and replaced the role of the State. Rules of the market have been expanded to public life and determine what is or is not due. We should assume that we live in a society of consumers characterized by a lack of neatness between consumer and good. In the society of

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consumers humans are worth according to their purchasing power and the potential horizon of consumption. Nobody can be subject if not product first.

Philosophically speaking, the essence of the subject is frequently commercialized by means of virtuality fraught with visual features. A term coined by Bauman as “Fetishism of humanity” can be self-explanatory in this matter. Securities of a monitor or a PC bring us the stability that real life cannot assure but jeopardize the social bondage. Post modernity is associated in a new way of producing and consuming which might be detached in three important variables: pointillist time, transformation of consumer in a consumed good, and the usage of knowledge and information systems.

The latter seems to be the case of the Web or Internet services which prevent people from making a personal contact with others, lovers, friends; even matrimony are prone to these resources to meet with others. As a result of this, distrust and fear of otherness is indeed rising day by day. In the comfort of home, viewers become accommodated to watch on TV more catastrophes landscapes. Disasters of others generate a sentiment of security in the audience, as a sense of being elevated over the rest of mere mortals, of being unique and exclusive, beyond the jurisdiction of death. The fate seems to be at our feet ready to be colonized and subdued. Modern capitalism is a wave that has blurred the older limits between reason and emotions. Love stories and tragedies or love embedded in tragedies (miracles) corresponds with the discourse and content one can observe in films and programs.

Underpinned in the belief that consumption is an unalienable and unplanned process in which the biologic and cultural life converge, Bauman argues that consumerism can be understood as a type of social covenant which rules the life of citizenship and at the time triggers production forces associated to educate lay people. However, consumption and consumerism are two different things. The former refers to the ability exclusive of humans to transform the environment while the latter can be contemplated as a pathological behavior enrooted in alienation.

The liquid society of consumers elaborates goods that do not endure for all life, but they should be replaced every year. This generates continuous needs of consuming and producing, which is extrapolated to the social liaison. A decline of trust and personal contact is accompanied with the quest for novelty. Pointillist time is characterized by the promotion of uncertainty and novelty. If our parents or grandparents were born in a society that prioritized the capacity of accumulation, nowadays, capitalist societies reward the possibilities to change.

As a result of this, modern, or better said, postmodern consumerism affects the bondage, declines the trust, and triggers fear and the feeling of insecurity. On the one hand, the promise of eternal satisfaction only is feasible thanks to the general dissatisfaction of all consumers. On the other hand, when a desire is satisfied the
boundaries of needs disappear. The advent of the market does not valorize the reason at disposal to decision-making process of subjects. Otherwise, it puts emphasis on the irrationality of emotions and emptiness of imagination. However, in a society governed by consumerism emotions are materialized and circumscribed to private life. It is noteworthy about the materialization of love. Paradoxically the greater the obsession of people for seeking company, the greater the loneliness.

Ultimately, Bauman reminds readers that the society of consumers encourages values oriented to short-terms where self-identity, emotions, self-experimentation play a pivotal role. This type of narcissism produces an increase of fear and panic that drives them to a total consumerism. After all, fear is the only sentiment that has no bottom. Bauman’s main thesis is that excess of consumption works as a ritual mechanism to the end of softening the uncertainness of a more hostile world. The lack of planning and long-term expectancy connote with anguish and reclusion.

Readers who wish to explore in the world of Bauman will find a valuable text written with a fine and polished style. His critiques are oriented to define what in society we merit for living and the negative aftermath of mass-consumerism. The moot point here is to determine the relationship between mass-consumption and current social and psychological pathologies such as abuse of drugs, phobias, panic attacks, and distress. The approach of professor Bauman, for that reason, can be contrasted to other of similar caliber such as Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, Niklas Luhmann and Castel, personalities who focused in the effects post-capitalism creates in day-to-day life. Most certainly, Consuming Life will in upcoming years be considered a classical work. To be honest, the prophecy of Weber about Iron Cage wherein emotions and feelings are subject to repression can be now completed. Bauman’s message calls for awakening from the slumber we are in.