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Zygmunt Bauman's Critique of Consumer Culture in the People's Republic and in Present

Analysis and criticism of consumer culture has been a continuous theme in the work of Zygmunt Bauman. In the fifties and sixties of the last century he drew attention to the penetration of capitalist patterns in Polish society. He regarded this process as a significant threat to the development of socialist ideals and devoted much time to criticizing it. Moreover, he promoted a personal pattern that may be described, in terms of his contemporary writings, as "pilgrimage." Although in subsequent years his ideological involvement continually fluctuated, he never ceased to criticize consumer culture. His analyses on this topic are an inherent part of his reflections on the transformations of modernity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. He put special emphasis on the "consumerist syndrome" and its penetration of all spheres of social life. The implication is that social life has been increasingly organised by axiological patterns shaped by the market. Bauman's analyses on this topic involve both criticism and an attempt to alter the status quo. In this paper I consider aspects of continuity and discontinuity in Bauman's analyses of consumer culture, both at the beginning of his academic career and in his later writings. I compare his analyses to empirical studies made in the People's Republic of Poland and the Republic of Poland. The comparison sheds important light on Bauman's analyses and serves as a foundation for their critique.

Key words: culture, consumption, critical theory, Polish society, Zygmunt Bauman