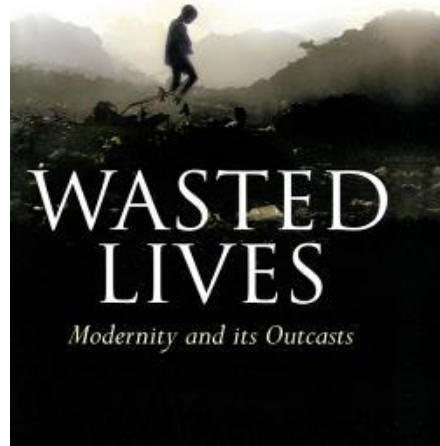


ZYGMUNT
BAUMAN



Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts

Zygmunt Bauman

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The production of 'human waste' - or more precisely, wasted lives, the 'superfluous' populations of migrants, refugees and other outcasts - is an inevitable outcome of modernization. It is an unavoidable side-effect of economic progress and the quest for order which is characteristic of modernity.

As long as large parts of the world remained wholly or partly unaffected by modernization, they were treated by modernizing societies as lands that were able to absorb the excess of population in the 'developed countries'. Global solutions were sought, and temporarily found, to locally produced overpopulation problems. But as modernization has reached the furthest lands of the planet, 'redundant population' is produced everywhere and all localities have to bear the consequences of modernity's global triumph. They are now confronted with the need to seek - in vain, it seems - local solutions to globally produced problems. The global spread of the modernity has given rise to growing quantities of human beings who are deprived of adequate means of survival, but the planet is fast running out of places to put them. Hence the new anxieties about 'immigrants' and 'asylum seekers' and the growing role played by diffuse 'security fears' on the contemporary political agenda.

With characteristic brilliance, this new book by Zygmunt Bauman unravels the impact of this transformation on our contemporary culture and politics and shows that the problem of coping with 'human waste' provides a key for understanding some otherwise baffling features of our shared life, from the strategies of global domination to the most intimate aspects of human relationships.

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From Reader Review Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts for online ebook

Henrique Cassol says

"O Planeta está cheio". Bauman começa seu livro com esta constatação. O mundo está cheio, não há espaços vazios, inabitados, "Terra Nullius", por isso, áreas marginais são transformadas em depósitos de lixo. Estes depósitos estão cheios de despejos, mas também de "refugos humanos". Bauman classificou estes contingentes humanos, como indispensáveis, redundantes, removidos da sociedade de consumo, i.e. são consumidores falhos.

O sustentáculo do capitalismo e de nossa sociedade é o trabalho. Mas, à medida que o Estado tem abandonado a maior parte de suas funções protecionistas, econômicas e sociais, com relação ao trabalho de seus concidadãos - devido à submissão ao capital, o mercado de trabalho tem apresentado condições cada vez mais precárias. Isto levou a duas consequências: o Estado escolheu a "política de segurança" (mais precisamente segurança pessoal) como estratégia para recuperar a autoridade perdida e restaurar sua importância perante aos "cidadãos do bem" e; os desempregados foram, em muitos casos, taxados de redundantes ou de refugo, ou seja, são dispensáveis aos cidadãos do bem.

Estas mazelas pós-modernas são sentidas pela geração X, pois estes não apenas perdem seus empregos da noite para o dia, sua confiança, seus sonhos, mas também a sua dignidade, sua autoestima e o sentimento de serem úteis e de conquistarem um lugar social próprio.

Hyokun Yun says

This book provides an analysis of the modern world's recent problem: the production and accumulation of "human waste". Modernity is characterized by its constant obsession to reject the current state and build a new order. This results in continuous production of collateral casualties of modernity. When globalization of modernity was still in progress, excess population in developed countries could be recycled at developing/underdeveloped countries. Now, the global spread of the modern way of life has reached the furthest limits of the planet, and the global production of human waste needs to be locally taken care of. Urban ghettos, refugee camps, and prisons, which are such waste-disposal mechanisms, remind us of our own vulnerability and insecurity, which is the real reason underneath our hatred against them.

This certainly was a thought-provoking book for me. I started to think more carefully about the roots of my feelings about security and vulnerability, and more critically about my penchant for newer, more flexible things. However, this book does not provide deep analysis into the reason why modernity came to take this form; this book is more about its effects. This is probably because Bauman has written many other books about modernity itself, but this made me to feel some of his claims about modernity are not based on clear evidence or subject to change. I will have to check out his other books on modernity.

Jorge Caballero says

I must begin by stating that I don't agree with everything (nor even necessarily with most) of what's expressed in this book, but I still found it a stimulating and interesting read, with ideas worthy of further inquiry.

In this book, Bauman postulates that an inevitable by-product of society's current model of constant economic progress and modernization is waste.

He starts by addressing the way on which we're compelled to throw away "old"/"obsolete" appliances to make way for newer "better" ones thus creating rubbish and a need to find a dump-site to dispose of it... he follows this line of thought to imagine what happens when the dumps fill up and there's no place to put our trash out of sight: we have live with it in plain view amongst us.

Then he goes on to state that just like rubbish, our way of life inevitably produces "human waste", people who have been deemed redundant and thus "don't belong" in society and have been earmarked to be dumped... and how once someone has been thus labeled, the prospects of being "recycled" back into society are extremely dim.

A factor compounding on the problem, Bauman ascertains, is that the world is "full", there's no possible local solution to a global problem, no place to dump the redundant, no colonies, no places in need to be modernized left, so we have to have those wasted humans among us... thus the destitute and the criminal.

The author also explores the role the State plays on setting the rules that define what, and who, is included/excluded from "legitimacy", and that in today's globalized de-regularized world this role is one of its few if not its only claim to sovereignty and exemption.

The book closes with an invitation to assume the challenge we're confronted with and search for an alternative feasible global paradigm to reshape society.

Mehmet Yorulmaz says

Son "Atik Kulturu" bolumu olmasa 1 yildiz verecegim bir kitap. Ilk bolumleri cok agir, akademik, sIkIci, okumasi zor. Fakat son bolum guzel.

Claudia Altavilla says

siamo tutti in bilico tra la società e la discarica
spietata lucida analisi della società liquido moderna nella quale tutto diviene prima o poi un rifiuto destinato alla discarica...anche l'essere umano può diventare rifiuto e spesso reinserirsi nella società è impossibile. Viviamo nell'epoca dell'estetica senza arte dove il nuovo diviene subito vecchio e privo di valore e solo chi è in grado di consumare, spendere afferrare le occasioni riesce a sopravvivere, gli altri sono odiosi scarti, esuberanti da contenere, da eliminare ...e se gli altri diventassimo noi?

Rhys says

Another good book by Bauman - and a little more focussed than usual.

The best part, for me, was his presentation of the transition from a social (welfare) state to a fear-state, in

which the justification of the state is to create, and then manage, fear.

He presents an allegory from Franz Kafka "of the subterranean shelter which an unnamed safety-obsessed animal spent its life designing, digging and endlessly perfecting only to deepen the terror that kept it working" (p.50). Our burgeoning awareness of insecurity engenders fear and more insecurity - 'self-reproducing, self-corroborating and self-magnifying'.

"The social state is gradually, yet relentlessly and consistently, turned into a 'garrison state', as Henry A. Giroux calls it, describing it as a state that increasingly protects the interests of global, transnational corporations 'while stepping up the level of repression and militarization on the domestic front'. Social problems are increasingly criminalized. In Giroux's summary, "Repression increases and replaces compassion. Real issues such as a tight housing market and massive unemployment in the cities – as causes of homelessness, youth loitering and drug epidemics - are overlooked in favour of policies associated with discipline, containment and control."" (p.85)

My frustration with Bauman is his resistance to using well-established words and concepts in describing 'liquid modernity'. It's okay, Zygmunt, to use the words 'immiseration' or 'reserve army of unemployed'.

Eric Aguirre says

Poco a poco me estoy volviendo más y más adicto al trabajo de Zygmunt Bauman. El mundo moderno esta produciendo una cantidad alarmante de desperdicios humanos. Aquí nuestro autor no nos está hablando del medioambiente, sino que nos habla del hombre como basura. El progreso económico de países como Estados Unidos, Japón, Inglaterra, Alemania y China por ejemplo; están dejando al margen países y continentes enteros. En pocas palabras: para que el capitalismo y la globalización funcionen de manera optima es necesario que existan residuos humanos. Mientras que los países ricos perfeccionan sus estructuras e infraestructuras a niveles extraordinarios, la otra parte del planeta (que es la mayoría) no tienen ni los recursos básicos para vivir. Los países ricos buscan el progreso económico y la satisfacción total de sus necesidades a toda costa, sin importar la cantidad de excluidos y marginados que crean en el proceso.

Lo preocupante es que la población del mundo crece a un ritmo vertiginoso. Las computadoras cada vez hacen más el trabajo de los hombres y el poder económico le pertenece a un grupo más reducido. Mucha gente sabe que la superpoblación es un problema que esta a la vuelta de la esquina, pero lamentablemente las soluciones siempre son a corto plazo. A esta altura es interesante plantearse como lo hace Zygmunt Bauman ¿Porque no ya trabajar en este problema a nivel mundial en vez de a nivel local? Porque todos los países pobres del mundo tienen que aguantarse las sinvergüenzas de los países más desarrollados. El estilo de vida hiperconsumista, materialista y progresista del primer mundo a lo único que nos va a llevar es al desastre a nivel planetario.

Me encantó el análisis filosófico que hace sobre el miedo a la muerte en el hombre contemporáneo. Según Bauman hemos pasado del "miedo a la muerte" al "miedo a la vida". También existe un exceso de optimismo poco realista y una ceguera con respecto a la muerte en el mundo actual. Nos dice nuestro autor que una vez eliminada la idea de la muerte de nuestras vidas, creíamos que esto nos traería una tranquilidad espiritual. Sin embargo, lo único que nos ha traído es ansiedades, depresiones y una obsesión con la idea de posesiones y progreso. El llamado "culto al progreso" es una idea sin sentido desprovista de propósito espiritual.

Dan says

Not Bauman's best. It continues unpacking ideas he expressed in *Liquid Fear*, and his other books. Mainly the futility of seeking local solutions to global, systemic problems.

He adds the idea that modernity by definition involves an attempt to improve society through design. Designs always involve waste, and thus any 'designed society' will involve wasted lives.

Brant says

Uncovers how our modern progressive world sees the poor and marginalized of our societies. Just like trash, we discard those who we perceive won't benefit our lives. Sad but true! Case in point, the many slums built on top of the garbage heaps here in Manila, where so many people scrounge for anything to live on. Unfortunately, now the rich sift through the garbage for anything valuable before it even makes it to the slums.

Trevor says

I'm not sure what I was expecting from this, but it would be fair to say I was expecting less. I certainly wasn't expecting to be confronted with a wealth of fresh ideas and to have my perspectives on so many issues skewed.

This is what I sometimes call a 'white board' book. Normally, books that remind me of a teacher at a white board filling in a mind-map around a single term are the worst books I've ever read. But this shows what comes from someone really thinking through an idea in all its manifestations.

What is waste? It is fundamentally that which is not needed, but that is necessary in producing things that are necessary. Bauman reminds us of what Michelangelo was supposed to have said when asked how he produced such amazing statues – I just chip away all the bits that don't belong and I'm left with what does. Our effort to make the perfect society have tended to try to follow Michelangelo's advice.

There was a time when human waste (or waste humans rather) – the people our society produces who 'do not belong' – could be shipped off somewhere 'empty' so that we could be done with them. The problem now is that the world is full. There are no 'empty' places. Terra Nullus no longer exists. But our societies continue to produce wasted humans – in fact, at an increasing rate.

Marx referred to these people as necessary to Capitalism in the sense that they provided a 'reserve army' of the unemployed. But today these people are no longer really 'unemployed' – rather they have become redundant. They can not be recycled, re-employed – they are literal waste.

Once our society could be considered comparable to a farm. Life had cycles and there was a sense of progress within these cycles. You plant a seed and you harvest many seeds. You raise a sheep and it produces many sheep.

But Capitalism is better compared to a mine than to a farm. Value is extracted and once extracted it is gone

forever. In the process of extracting that value it is inevitable that there will be waste. Slag and environmental destruction seem inevitable consequences of mining. To get at the bit you need you must separate it from the waste and rubbish. There is no cycle and there is no commitment to an ongoing relationship - these are just extraction and making off with the goods.

And as with mining, so with Capitalism. There is a fascinating part of this book where he discusses Enron. How they had, what he calls, a ritual sacking of 15% of their workforce every year, with a further 30% put on notice to lift their game. The interesting thing here is that no matter how well the organisation was going there would always be a bottom 15%. Such is the grinding necessity of averages. Utter dedication was required, but with about one in every six employees disappearing due to under-performance every year and nearly half being negatively assessed, only Dr Pangloss would feel optimistic of a long term future with the company. That is, the company might expect hard work from its employees (out of fear), but loyalty and commitment would probably match that shown to the employees by the company.

We truly are the waste society. There was a time when we spoke of 'programmed obsolescence' - where companies would design flaws into their products to ensure we would turn them over and buy new ones once they failed. Now, this isn't even necessary. We replace things that are virtually brand new so as not to be seen as 'falling behind'. He mentions an ad for a washing machine which said, "If someone tells you there is a better washing machine they are lying." But the company is lying here too, as in a year or two they will be telling you there is a better washing machine and that this one is now obsolete, old fashioned, and ruining your life.

Change is the only absolute - and change is constant and increasingly meaningless. It isn't about change to achieve a better approximate of perfection - we have forgotten about perfection along the way. Change is now its own justification. Once I attended a meeting in my role as a union organiser where a manager was explaining a new organisational structure. He said that if staff were unhappy with the structure they should just wait, as it was inevitable that there would be a new one in a year or so. You may think he was being cynical or perhaps even ironic - but he was perfectly serious. He wanted people to understand that this situation was 'normal'. There is no optimum arrangement, just different arrangements and change is the only good.

Bauman relates this to art too. There was a time when artists sought perfection too. However, today artists are much more likely to create 'events' rather than 'masterpieces'. I'm not sure how I feel about this, as I do believe there is a strong tendency in the notion of the art event that is a rejection of capitalist commodification. If I paint a picture it gets put in a frame and sold to the highest bidder. If I stage an event, that is much more difficult to turn into a commodity. Except, of course, that tickets can be sold and the 'event' can then have the same 'programmed obsolescence' as everything else.

Where I found this most interesting and most challenging was around the notion of the infinite. There is no exclusion in the infinite - the infinite includes all. He discusses the notion of an infinite God and how the Biblical God required His followers to fully submit to His will to gain His favour. But what is particularly interesting here is that Bauman talks of this as people submitting to God as a means of overcoming their fear of the infinite - the uncaring infinity against which we are nothing. An infinite that doesn't care at all about our welfare or well-being. But even this God becomes what it sought to replace. Rather than an uncaring universe, we are left with the book of Job - once again we are left with the inscrutable will of God and us merely His playthings.

In his discussion of the Devil I suddenly realised I don't really understand the Devil at all. Why doesn't God seek the redemption of Satan and the fallen Angels? Surely, they must be worth more to him in his creation

than we are? Oh, by the way, I am not really interested in answers to these questions – that would be like you supplying me with answers to why Harry Potter should have had dark hair. Whatever interest your speculations may have would be of interest to you alone, I suspect.

The nature of refugees as the ultimate in human waste – how our society needs them to justify its own excesses – how globalisation and the free movement of capital is also premised on the restricted movement of certain people (non-people, really) – how the world is over-populated with ‘them’, but there is always room for more of us (all the concern with the population explosion in the third world – places where the population density is often the lowest on the planet – but our constant concerns with declining birth rates and ageing populations at home, in some of the most densely populated areas on earth). As he says, "if the whole population of China and India moved to continental USA, the resulting population density wouldn't exceed that of England, Holland or Belgium."

This is a chilling vision. We are all tormented by the threat of our becoming waste. All of us know that it is far too easy for us to be defined as waste and as redundant. And we all know the consequences of such a designation. But we ignore the consequences that are already playing out in terms of mental illness and general fear. Our compliance is assured as soon as our ‘security agencies’ issue another threat of attack by ‘Islamofascists’ or whatever the current panic term is. How amusing this ought to be, this idea that underdeveloped nations will somehow overthrow the world's most developed nations. As if more than twenty centuries of history had not been enough to prove the opposite is virtually always the case. That we panic rather than laugh at such propaganda is symptomatic of the depth of our complicit acceptance of the ‘defend at any cost’ our way of life. That we accept that Afghanistan is both over-run with people worse than Hitler and a safe place to return refugees to, shows the depth of our rationalisations and self-interested selective memory.

This is a remarkably concise and clearly written book. This holds no punches. It is clear in ways few sociologists are clear. And it is challenging in ways that will have me thinking about the implication of some of what he has to say for many weeks and months to come. This book offers no real solutions – but for holding up a mirror in which we can see ourselves reflected back, it provides us with a service I suspect too few of us will be grateful for. The alternative is to just look away – but that alternative is becoming daily more difficult.

Marek Mackiewicz says

Hands down the most clearly written academic book that I've read as yet. The insight that the author had into his contemporary world is awe-inspiring. Particularly if one takes into account that Bauman was 79 (sic!) at the moment of its publication.

I hope to be able to write like that one day

Norma says

Del mismo es que del mismo modo en que el capitalismo moderno nos coloca en una dinámica de consumo en que las cosas que compramos, las usamos por un ratito y rápidamente se van al basurero, las sociedades han generado una población superficial a la cual desechan, del mismo modo que a las cosas. Las vidas

desperdiciadas serían más bien como vidas desperdicio: quienes no se integran a una comunidad, quienes no se integran a formas de trabajo "normal" (como quienes tratan con los residuos en los basureros en la India), los migrantes en su tránsito o los exiliados. En otros términos, ellos viven como "anomalías", fuera de la ley o fuera de la norma.

La cuestión con las cosas es que todas tienen fecha de caducidad, inevitablemente se convierten en desperdicio por su finitud, pero ¿que pasa con las vidas humanas? No se trata de pensarlas en función de su utilidad, sino de observar su sentido de trascendencia (de que están ligadas al sentido de lo infinito), quizá así, nuestras vidas no sean un desperdicio. Pero ¿Cómo pensar esa infinitud en el sentido de nuestra vida?

Oscar Garcia says

Perfect for people who want to start to see the world around us in a critical way. Highly recommended.

Elena says

Nice and thought provoking, but the two central chapters seemed too repetitive to me. I had to skip some pages because i couldn't get through it. Very nice introduction, I liked the references to Calvino, and very nice ending, comparing museums to graveyards and giving an insight on the consumism on our personal relationships. I would recommend it after all.

L says

Bauman writes his argument as if he were teaching a graduate seminar course. He does not cite sources or support his argument with quantifiable data because he assumes at this level you understand his viewpoint, and it works well. This is not to say his work is academic and beyond a readers understanding of his thoughts -- in fact he writes quite plainly and many of his ideas are well thought out.

One question a reader is left to ponder is whether or not people better prefer to throw out yesterdays product or if they find more joy in buying new items. These acts appear similar but are not one in the same thing. Until people come to terms as to why they consume and dispose as they do, and which activity they prefer more, one can not begin to understand the problem of why products and people are treated the same way.
