



Practices of Selfhood

Zygmunt Bauman, Rein Raud

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Contemporary understanding of human subjectivity has come a long way since the Cartesian 'thinking thing' or Freud's view of the self struggling with its unconscious. We no longer think of ourselves as stable and indivisible units or combinations thereof - instead, we see the self as constantly reinvented and reorganised in interaction with others and with its social and cultural environments. But the world in which we live today is one of uncertainty where nothing can be taken for granted. Coping with change is a challenge but it also presents new opportunities.

Uncertainty can be both liberating and oppressive. How does an individual understand her or his position in the world? Are we as human beings determined by our genetic heritage, social circumstances and cultural preferences, or are we free in our choices? How does selfhood emerge? Does it follow the same pattern of development in all people, all cultures, all ages? Or is it a socio-cultural construction that cannot be understood outside its historical context? Are the patterns of selfhood fundamentally changing in the present world? Does new technology allow us more autonomy or does it tempt us to give up the freedoms we have?

These are the questions that Zygmunt Bauman and Rein Raud explore in their engaging and wide-ranging dialogue, combining their competences in sociology, philosophy and cultural theory to look at how selfhood is produced in social practice, through language, efforts of self-presentation and self-realisation as well as interaction with others. An indispensable text for understanding the complexities of selfhood in our contemporary liquid-modern world.

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