

The Capture of the New World of Prosumption by Capitalist Interests: Is There Any Alternative?

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ABSTRACT

In contrast to the conventional view, the primal (mainly) economic process is prosumption, *not* consumption or production. Prosumption has taken on a variety of new forms today creating a “new world of prosumption”. While all binary distinctions (including production-consumption; material-digital) are to be rejected, it is important to point out that this is the case in the “material” world, but it is especially true of the relatively new digital world. While prosumption implies democratization and empowerment, the new world of prosumption (including “smart” prosuming machines) has, to a large degree, been captured and exploited by capitalist interests thereby thwarting those “romantic” possibilities. Prosumption as a process predates capitalism and it was not foreordained that it would come under its control. In fact, there are some contemporary forms of prosumption that have largely eluded capitalist control (e.g. Wikipedia, Firefox, Linux). Do the latter offer hope for the more romantic scenarios associated with prosumption? Or are they little more than increasingly isolated cases in a capitalist system that can be seen as more pernicious than ever as it leads, among other things, to increased unemployment, inequality, exploitation and alienation?

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Goal of the Colloquium: To build a knowledge base for greater understanding of how a transition beyond our contemporary consumerism-based culture and economy might take place.

Approach: The colloquium examines and synthesizes theories and empirical experiences of social change from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives. The aim of the seminars is to bring together scholars and practitioners concerned with social change into sustained and free-flowing interaction.