

'I Nature':

Exploring and Theorizing the links between
New Media and Nature Conservation

DIGITAL NATURE

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Nature 2.0



- Fuchs (2008: 126): Web 1.0 (cognition), 2.0 (communication) and 3.0 (cooperation)?
- Web 2.0: *prosumption* (facebook, twitter, blogosphere, etc.): co-creation of what is consumed
- Also in conservation: produce the nature you want to conserve (from 'second nature' to 'nature 2.0')?



Nature 2.0



- Nature 2.0: new online forms and manifestations of ‘second nature’: “a nature that is *humanly* produced (through conceptualization as well as activity) and that therefore partakes, but without being entirely, of the human” (Biersack, 2006: 14)
- The political economy of Nature 2.0:
 - Stimulates AND complicates the commodification (‘neoliberalisation’) of nature
 - Encourages the reimagining of nature online
 - Broader argument around prosumption as an alleged new form of capitalism as the basis of ‘I👍 Nature’

Stimulating / Complicating commodification

1. Antagonism between 'gift economy' and 'commodity economy', and between commodification and decommodification on the internet (Fuchs, 2008)
2. Direct vs indirect forms of revenue in the internet economy (shopping on amazon vs facebook adds)
3. Intensification of the political economy of the sign and decomposition of sign value: part of the bigger context of prosumption in late capitalism



Reimagining Nature online

- Nature ‘tailored to your interests’: YOUR or MY nature (hence, antagonism between *social* media and *individual* imagination)
- Individuation, or creating ‘discrete ontologies’
- Slater: Gigantification (“the ability of ... particular images to move viewers owes in part to their success in concealing other facets of a much larger reality”)

Prosumption: A new form of capitalism?

- Ritzer and Jurgenson: “are we entering the phase of ‘prosumer capitalism’ ”? They argue that the “unique characteristics” of the web 2.0 ‘world of prosumption’ “allow us to begin to think of it as possibly a new form of capitalism” (Idem).
- This ‘new form of capitalism’ can be identified by four points:
 1. “capitalists have more difficulty controlling prosumers than producers or consumers and there is a greater likelihood of resistance on the part of prosumers;
 2. the exploitation of prosumers is less clear-cut;
 3. a distinct economic system may be emerging there where services are free and prosumers are not paid for their work;
 4. and there is abundance rather than scarcity, a focus on effectiveness rather than efficiency in prosumer capitalism” (Idem: 31).

Prosumption and contemporary capitalism

- Not about the *form* but about the intensification of *particular* capitalist dynamics with a much longer history
- prosumption should be seen in the historical context of capitalism trying to overcome the consumptive limits to increasing powers of production
- Hence: importance of a theory of sign value *related* to production of capitalist accumulation
- Historical trend: the need for consumers to do more 'realization labor'

Prosumption and contemporary capitalism (2)

- Prosumption is (becoming) central to how ‘value’ is created in contemporary capitalism
- Conserving nature these days similar to professional corporate marketing.
 - “Marketing’ s desire to produce cultural conditions that allow for more subtle ways to insert brands and products deeply into the fabric of consumer lifeworlds has resulted in a style of marketing practice that now aims at completely drawing consumers into the production and, more importantly, *innovation* process itself” (Zwick et al, 2008: 168):



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Prosumption, capitalism and conservation

- Through interactive web 2.0 applications, conservation organisations are increasingly drawing consumers into the production of conservation, thereby enabling them to ‘prosume’ and co-create (narratives about and images of) ‘nature’ as well as their own identities as environmentally conscious citizens
- Prosumers themselves set up and develop the imagery that defines their relationship to (imagined) natural environments (spectacle), and so ‘add value’ to the work of conservation organizations



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The 'hidden' world of producing conservation

- When people engage in prosumption, they enter into relationships with other people and with the natural environment.
- Their prosumption is at once symbolic *and* material.
- 'prosumption' of conservation is actively channelled and mediated *by actors* to achieve certain desired outcomes *within particular contexts, frames and modes of governance*



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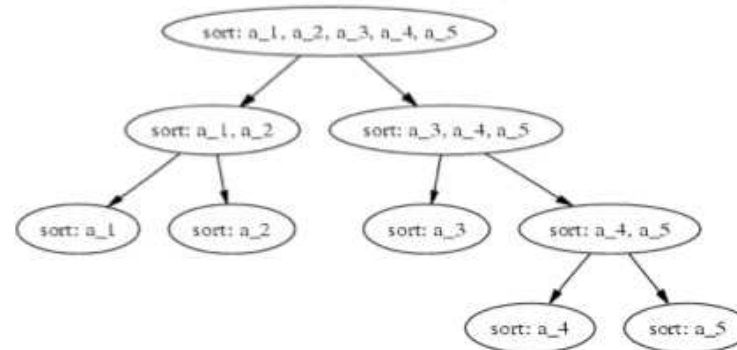
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Dutch Cowboys

Politics of platforms and the 'algorithmization of life'

- Intense competition behind the scenes over whose platform best enables presumptive conservation (and development) - and thus who reaps the surplus value of having a central platform!
- 'Algorithmization of life' ↔ commodification of life





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The 'like economy' (Gerlitz and Helmond)



- Part of 'socialising the web', particularly by Facebook, but also other social media
- Likes as 'rhetoric of sociality' are turned into metrics and valuable consumer data
- In turn, this infrastructure "allows the exchange of data, traffic, affects, connections, and of course money" (p.2)
- Commodification of affect (no 'dislike') 
- → Hence: 'I  Nature' represents a major – but complicated - move in the commodification of nature

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