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• Cyber-Utopians: Internet, especially social networking sites, makes possible dramatic, revolutionary increases, improvements in social collaboration
• Yahoo’s (and other companies’) shift away from allowing work at home to back into the workplace.
• Instead of working at home on their own or remotely in digital collaboration, Yahoo now wants employees to collaborate more directly in the workplace.
• Believe “face-to-face interaction among employees fosters a more collaborative culture.”
• Driven by idea that more interaction, collaboration leads to more innovation- very important to a company like Yahoo
Debate:

James Surowiecki sees merit of digital collaboration, favors Yahoo move- creativity through “face time” on the job.

Even Google, doing much to allow for ever-more digital collaboration, investing heavily in face-to-face office environments on corporate campuses; encouraging “old school” collaboration.

Jennifer Glass argues against Yahoo: “workers who collaborate with others in loose networks generate better ideas” than those isolated in single location.

This debate leads to questioning cyber-utopian view; privileging, exaggerating the uniqueness of, collaboration on digital spaces.
• Examine debate from the perspective of **prosumption**, interrelated process of production and consumption

• Collaboration a form of prosumption-dialectical process of two or more parties “producing” and “consuming” something of mutual interest and importance.

• DIY also a form of prosumption
• Focus especially on “new prosumer”, “new means of prosumption” (vs. means of production, consumption)

• material (e.g. fast food restaurants) and digital (e.g. social networking sites) new means of prosumption; avoid “internet-centrism”

• Digital imbricated in material world, and vice versa; “augmented reality”; e.g. “showrooming”-shopping on smartphones in department stores.
• Conclusion: *mixed relationship* between the “new” means of prosumption and collaboration- the new means of prosumption, on- and off-line, encourage *both* DIY *and* collaboration, **but** more collaboration online than offline

• Unprecedented types and degrees of collaboration *and* much done by people largely DIY
• Increased DIY consistent with Foucault on *individualization* in prison, cells, Panopticon.
• Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody: “the co-creation paradigm rests on the notion of...increasingly *individualized modes of relating*.”
• Prosumption overlaps with “do-it-yourself”; Scholz describes online world as “do-it-yourself economy”.
PROSUMPTION

- Correcting an Historical Error
  - **Productivism** (1850-1950): Marx, Weber, Durkheim, even Veblen; Consumer Virtually Absent from 18th Century Discourse
  - You are **not** Producers (Workers) or Consumers
  - No “Pure” Production or Consumption
• Prosumption as the Primal Act; the Once-And-Future Act
• All Production Involves Consumption
• All Consumption Involves Production
Prosumption-as-Production  Balanced Prosumption  Prosumption-as-Consumption

Figure 1
The Prosumption Continuum
• Examples:
  • Material:
    ▪ package delivery for Wal-Mart;
    ▪ “work” supermarkets;
    ▪ ATMs;
    ▪ DIY yogurt making;
    ▪ electronic check-in at airports, hotels
• Digital-
  ▪ Facebook;
  ▪ YouTube;
  ▪ Wikipedia;
  ▪ blogs;
• grading selves on MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses)
DIY in the Material World:
- Caring for one’s self psychologically, physically;
- Purchasing materials needed, repairing, building, something;
- Lining up in fast food restaurants to collect one’s food and disposing of one’s debris;
- Washing one’s own dog at a dog-washing salon;
- Building, okay just putting together (“impossible-to-assemble”), IKEA furniture;
- Buying, using medical technologies (blood pressure and glucose monitors; pregnancy, PSA, HIV, and cholesterol tests)
• DIY in the Digital World:
  ▪ Doing all the work on Internet sites such as Amazon.com (making the appropriate choices for purchases; providing delivery, payment information; various steps needed to complete the process);
  ▪ producing, inadvertently, important information ("traces") for many websites that use algorithms to trigger ads;
  ▪ buyers, sellers providing information to eBay; ordering, processing, sending, receiving and returning products; writing, voting on eBay “guides”.
• Collaboration in the Digital World:

- Peer-to-peer lending on Zopa (Zone of Possible Agreement), economic collaboration between investors and those who need money for a project (Kiva similar micro-financing site);
- Finding lodging on Airbnb with collaboration between parties doing the renting and those who are renting;
- Collaborating with tourists on Couchsurfing; provide free couches to crash on; crashing with other couchsurfing providers.
• Collaboration in the Material World, declining but...
  ▪ at the counter and drive-through at the fast food restaurant;
  ▪ at remaining checkout counters still staffed by people,
  ▪ at the remaining small book shops
Explaining the Conclusions on Collaboration, DIY on Material, Digital Sites:

Similarities: Explicable in that in both cases looking at collaboration, isolation as involving the same general process (prosumption) on the same kinds of sites (the new means of prosumption).
• Differences: Due to Objective Affordances:
  ▪ Both material, digital means of prosumption offer objective affordances for collaboration and DIY
  ▪ Digital means of prosumption such as Facebook offer infinitely more affordances for collaboration than a material means such as McDonald’s.
  ▪ McDonald’s offers more affordances for DIY; especially clear in drive-through window.
• Differences: Due to Subjective Affordances:

- People have been socialized, and have learned, to expect more affordances from the digital than the material world.
- Users think Facebook offers nearly infinite possibilities for collaboration; expect few such possibilities in McDonald’s, especially, for example, the drive-through.
- “Thomas Theorem”, if people “define situations as real, they are real in their consequences”
- Define Facebook as offering more collaborative possibilities; it is likely that there will be more such collaborations.
- Define McDonald’s as a place to get into and out of as quickly as possible. As a result, expect, create, engage in few collaborative relationships.
• A More Dialectical Perspective on Affordances:

- The “social construction of reality”; people create social realities, once created they constrain people.
- Structural realities of material and digital means of prosumption, including their affordances, created historically and created anew each time people involved with them.
- However, ability to create them anew limited by residues of past realities and constructions.
- There are great limitations on the ability to redefine and recreate those settings, as well as their affordances.
- Ongoing dialectic between the social construction of affordances and the affordances offered by settings in which the social construction takes place.
Analysis demonstrates utility of using a more general set of sociological ideas—prosumption, the new means of prosumption, affordances rather than ideas largely specific to the Internet.

Allows us to better identify what, if anything, is unique about the digital world.

Allows us to debunk the idea that the Internet is a totally different utopian space characterized by a dramatic and revolutionary increase in social collaboration.
• Marxian perspective: new means of prosumption largely capitalistic enterprises,
• Or in the case of digital sites will be captured by capitalists once show signs of success (MOOCs).
• Are, or will be, structured, top-down systems to increase control, profits
• Another myth- digital world inherently and necessarily decentralized, democratized.
• True must be less disciplinary than that exercised in other capitalist systems.
• Digital control more subtle, more about creating ambiances that lead people to what is desired, but still control.
• Control, punishment of the “soul”.
• With increasing ubiquity of Internet, especially social networking sites, are we immersing ourselves in hierarchical, capitalistic system with unimaginable capacities to punish our souls?
• Close on a slightly more positive note
• Critical theory: new means of prosumption, especially digital, part of the “culture industry”.
• Help to produce mass culture, or a culture that is “administered...nons spontaneous, reified, phony culture rather than the real thing”
• However, from the perspective of prosumption, led to a slightly more positive perspective. Versus passive “consumers” of culture, more active, the more “productive”, prosumer
• Better envision prosumers rebelling against culture industry or at least playing larger role producing a less phony, more real, culture.
• Tends to contradict more pessimistic views of the critical theorists, influenced by Weber and his thinking on the “iron cage; more in line with the optimism of Marx.
MOOCs

- based to a large degree on means of prosumption
- involve a great deal of collaboration among student-prosumers in both the digital and material worlds.
- some websites associated with MOOCs (e.g., Coursera) also function like social networking sites which serves to increase collaboration; students able to collaboratively build profiles, download photos and plan to meet with one another in person, via Skype, etc.
- Course material, especially lectures, typically produced by professors
- However, great emphasis on incorporating feedback from students; students (consumers) play a major role in producing and revising the content; the students and the professors are *both* prosumers of, and collaborators in, education
• Able to collaborate, have global exchanges, with students throughout the world; the extent of educational collaboration greatly increased
• Able to interact with a far greater number of students; the numbers of students involved in educational collaboration is much greater
• An open network of learners is created leading to more open collaboration between instructor and students and especially among students
• Collaboration far more democratic; students more agential; empowered to have more say; at least some of them are more prosumers-as-producers of their own education
• Much more self-regulation by students in MOOCs; more power to create novel forms of collaboration among selves, with instructors
• More informal learning; casual forms of collaboration possible
• Learning that takes place far less structured
• Students collaborate directly in online discussion forums
• Collaborate in the grading process through a peer-to-peer grading systems
• They help determine which students’ questions and comments by voting on them; questions, comments with most votes most likely to receive the attention of the instructors.

• Most participate only marginally or not at all (the “lurkers”); collaboration here, and elsewhere, involves a continuum with both active and an inactive ends populated by these lurkers. At the inactive end there is the greatest concern about the quality of education on MOOCs.

• Topics raised, or even potential answers to exam questions, can be discussed with non-students (e.g., spouses) thereby widening the education network; more and different types of collaboration are made possible, even encouraged, by MOOCs.