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Groundhog day? Nietzsche, Deleuze and the eternal return of prosumption in lifelong learning

Abstract

This **conceptual** article examines George Ritzer's concept of prosumption in the context of lifelong learning in the UK. Ritzer's references to prosumption as a form of eternal return of a "primal act", which draw on the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze, introduce some ambiguity into the concept. This ambiguity echoes a certain polarization in the debate about co-creation, especially regarding the nature of consumer participation in the creation of value, but it is central to defining the limits of consumer freedom and agency. Critical analysis of UK lifelong learning discourse shows how prosumption can work as a tool of control in this context, producing docile subjectivities, compliant forms of creative co-production and disposable 'nothing' products through repetition and a return of the same. Where prosumption is able to challenge this repetition, however, it involves creativity and the return of difference. These examples show how eternal return, ultimately, underpins prosumption's claim to offer a valid description of emerging practices of prosuming lifelong learners.

Keywords

Prosumption, eternal return, lifelong learning, Nietzsche, Deleuze,

Introduction

This theoretical paper discuss the concept of prosumption as defined by George Ritzer (Ritzer, 2013b; 2014), linking examples from the discourse of lifelong learning to some of the more concrete activities of the Occupy movement to answer questions about the status of prosumption as an analytical tool. Indeed, Ritzer's concept reflects the ambiguity and even polarization which is often found in studies of consumer behaviour (e.g. Zwick et el, 2008; Beer and Burrows, 2010; Ramaswami, 2011, Zajc, 2015). Indeed, while this interest indicates that phenomena such as prosumption, co creation and co-production are widespread, the precise nature and actual originality of prosumption is unclear. In particular, Ritzer's reference to philosophical concepts of eternal return and difference, drawn from the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze, are intended to justify the relevance and critical potential of the concept, but need to be examined if we are to understand its conceptual and practical impact. It is possible that concepts of prosumption, co-production and co creation have become diluted, and risk losing their critical grip.

The issue is neither idle nor speculative. Ritzer's main reason for aligning prosumption with Friedrich Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal return is to illustrate prosumption's originality and its fundamental importance. The problem, however, is that if prosumption is indeed 'rife throughout the economy and the social world' (Ritzer, 2014, p.5), every interaction, even in preindustrial society, might be labelled prosumption of one sort or another. This implies that apparently new forms of interaction, far from involving real change, are in fact epiphenomena which express a deeper 'eternal return of the same' in 'a different guise' (Ritzer, 2014, p. 17-18), and thus simply 'another stage in the eternal return of the prosumer' (Ritzer, 2014 p.19). The question implied by Ritzer's analysis is whether the eternal return creates

anything or not, and if so, what this tells us about consumer behaviour. Can such a concept maintain its specificity and critical grip, particularly on emergent consumer behaviours (cf. Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2010; Naidoo et al, 2011)?

To tackle this question **from a theoretical standpoint**, I review briefly the way Nietzsche and Deleuze themselves use the concept in order to question the definition of prosumption as a return of the same. I then apply the concept to recent changes in the context of the UK lifelong learning sector, where the ambiguity suggested by the term certainly exists in recent discourse from influential professional bodies. Specific examples are given of the prosumption of learning and conclusions are drawn which highlight the repetitive expectations which are increasingly in place in the sector. In particular, this analysis asks how an eternal return in prosumption might help to highlight the ways in which knowledge and learning are essentially seen as inseparable from other consumer goods. If many goods are intended for repeated redistribution as impersonal, globalized 'nothing' products with nothing to single them out (Ritzer, 2003; 2013a), how far is lifelong learning itself, despite its own emancipatory claims, a vehicle for the co-creation of nothing?

However, these expectations are not enough to limit prosumption to repetition, and examples exist of practices which displace prosumption in novel ways. Although discourses and practices from powerful organisations in lifelong learning do, I argue, rely on a logic of repetition, attempts to redefine certain public spaces by the recent occupy movement at its margins exemplify how concrete material change can indeed take place when prosumerist relations are questioned. Occupation, I suggest, responds critically and creatively to the key emerging issues of lifelong learning,

including debt, neoliberal subjectivity and the commodification and appropriation of knowledge-making practices. My conclusions draw on the ways in which the Occupy movement has, albeit temporarily, used the affordances of space to demonstrate that prosumption need not be repetition of the same.

Prosumption

George Ritzer defines prosumption (2013b; 2014) as the proactive ways in which consumption increasingly involves simultaneous processes of consumption and production, indicating a shift in market relations and blurring the line between organizations and individuals (Tapscott and Williams, 2006; Humphreys and Grayson, 2008; Eden, 2015). It is a 'primal act' of relation for Ritzer since consumers have always been involved in the selection, distribution and even development of the products they consume. Prosumption may thus be an example of repetition in human behaviour, or an eternal return of the same process of prosumption which comes round again and again (Ritzer, 2013b). Is prosumption, Ritzer asks, like Harold Ramis's 1993 movie *Groundhog Day*, the eternal return of the same thing?

Answering this question involves suggesting that prosumption, to be useful, must imply some form of novelty to avoid being diluted as a concept. Some work sees this novelty in the arrival of various forms of co-creation and co-production (cf. Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Sawhney et al, 2005; Lusch and Vargo, 2006; Ramaswamy, 2009; Chathoth et al, 2013; Zajc, 2015). Zwick et al (2008) also see a

'new paradigm' in co-creation, which, it has been argued, is "fundamentally altering the very nature of relationships among individuals and institutions" (Ramaswamy, 2011:196). On this view, customer demand is no longer external to the firm or a passive mirror to supply, but an "experience environment" (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004:8) where consumers and producers both have the freedom to interact in reciprocal and mutually beneficial, empowering ways which even enhance their well-being (Pera and Viglia, 2015).

Such enthusiasm is not universal, and for some this rhetoric of novelty and consumer freedom is illusory (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008). Harrison and Waite (2015:517) assert that there are limitations to the sort of empowerment afforded by co-creation. They mention the ethical implications of marketers' encouragement of co-production activities and hint at the belief that an 'ethical surplus' is created by the consumer's gaze and affective investment in brands (Lazzarato, in Arvidsson, 2005:241). Hence, despite its potential, prosumer capitalism is (still) 'characterized by subtle, seductive and indirect controlling processes' (Ruckenstein, 2013:2). Masking continued exploitation, some practices may have evolved, but fundamental relations have not. In particular, a co-creation economy is still driven by processes that liberate and subsequently capture 'large repositories of technical, social, and cultural competence in places previously considered outside the production of monetary value' (Zwick et al, 2008: 166). Affective and immaterial labour in particular are still exploited for firms' benefit (Arvidsson, 2005), even when it involves customers appropriating, customizing or even 'owning' the brand. Such work remains unpaid, and any rewards for this co-productive participation are intangible at the level at which they are felt, reinforcing the essentially exploitative (but not inevitable) relation between consumer and producer (Cova and Dalli, 2009).

To be sure, this potential is actualized in novel ways: the main source of value lies not in concrete production but in the entrepreneurial co-development of idealized images of branding, public relations and marketing of services rather than goods (Lusch and Vargo, 2006; Buscher, 2010; Aspara et al, 2014). When brands become affective, cultural phenomena and “the ultimate expression of self” (Cova and Dall’O, 2009:317), marketing needs to focus on the attitudes and constructions of reality by consumers who want to ‘own’ them in the sense that they have ‘constructed’ their social value for themselves. This abstraction is not new, and is arguably axiomatic of capital’s ideal operation (Roberts, 2012:37), although it is now prosumers who are recruited to invest their own time, money and skills in the capture, management and channelling of know-how and creativity for profit (Beckett, 2012:2).

Despite seeming novel, then, prosumption therefore may simply be an ‘intensified dynamic’ of this value-producing labour (Buscher and Igoe 2013: 301). Far from revolutionizing anything, psychoanalysis would suggest that prosumption’s repetition embodies desire (Ruckenstein, 2013) and ultimately our death-drive, with capitalism merely activating our unending desire for what is lacking: ‘[t]he more the commodity fails, the more consumers invest themselves in the future and the commodities to come’ (McGowan, 2011:27). At any rate, these concerns for psychic drives and the metaphysical nature of capital seem to demand that consumption be understood as a profound phenomenon, which is why it has been linked to the question of its ontological nature and one of the best known ontological hypotheses, Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal return.

Eternal return

The doctrine of eternal return (or recurrence) in Nietzsche's elusive writing invites numerous interpretations. However, two broadly contrasting interpretations are often made (cf. Rowe, 2012).

First, a 'cosmological' example from *The Gay Science* clearly presents life as an eternal return or repetition. What if we had to live this life 'innumerable times' and that 'there will be nothing new in it'? What if everything were reproduced in precisely 'the same succession and sequence' as the hourglass of existence is turned over again and again (Nietzsche, 2001: 194-195)? On this reading, the eternal return is an inevitable, endless cycle of cosmic repetition, and therefore a fatalistic, mechanistic return of the same. Prosumption, on this view, merely describes the age old reality of necessary relations of exchange.

The question of our response to eternal return, though, introduces the possibility of a very different, 'anthropological', interpretation. The idea that we constantly repeat the past forces us to accept the fact that we can never hope to escape our actual world (Wicks, 2013). Nietzsche says that our goal is to achieve a form of consciousness where 'one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary (...) but love it' (Nietzsche, 1992:37). Famously criticizing Socrates for treating life as a disease (Nietzsche, 2001:194), on this view the eternal return is an 'ultimate confirmation and seal' of a way of being (Nietzsche, 2001:195). No moral authority can transcend or correct (one's) life, he says (2001:162), and so a healthy attitude to this fate is to will or affirm it. This 'cosmological' reading accepts that it is not Nietzsche's last word on the eternal

return, but a stage on the way the eternal return as affirmation, joy and health heralded in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche, 1992:69-81). Nietzsche thus wants us to overcome the burden of the past by inventing new habits and modes of living (Ansell-Pearson, 2005). This is an optimistic attitude whose final iteration comes in the controversial collection of notes published as *The Will to Power*. Here, the idea that '[e]verything becomes and recurs eternally' implies a positive enjoyment of uncertainty and experiment (Nietzsche, 1968: 546).

It is this latter reading which underpins Gilles Deleuze's interpretation and it's also the one that seems to link most closely to the idea of prosumption as a productive, even creative, act. This controversial reading (cf. D'lorio, 2000) reflects Deleuze's incorporation of the eternal return into his own philosophy of internal difference. In a key work, *Difference and Repetition* (2004a), he argues that nothing can be identical to anything else, or even to itself, if by this we mean having a recognisable identity which continues through time. **Even physical space, for Deleuze, can be non-homogeneous as a result, since no spatial container pre-exists things, and no things can be said to exist outside their constantly changing relations with other entities. The direct consequence is that concrete change happens, including to real things in extension and real space, leaving the possibility at least of completely new sets of relations.** Thus Deleuze (1925-95) repeatedly insists that to understand the eternal return as the return of something is a contradiction and that it is the non-deterministic return of that which differs. Deleuze's judgment is unambiguous: 'we must not make of the eternal return a return of the same (...) the same doesn't come back' (Deleuze, 2001: 87). The eternal return 'selects out' negativity, weakness and anything uncreative (Deleuze, 1962:53-55; 2001:88-89; 2004b:204).

Ritzer's reference to eternal return, then, presents us with two contrasting interpretations of prosumption: the return of the same or the return of difference. If prosumption is, as Ritzer states, a primal state which repeats itself, then its purchase on changing circumstances may be limited because it is a truism of relations per se. If, on the other hand, it embodies the eternal return's creativity, as his reference to Deleuze would suggest, its grip is much more effective. The two interpretations seem incompatible, but the question of prosumption's actual value can only really be resolved by considering the situated nature of specific consumer practices. So, to assess how far prosumption can be said to reflect these different interpretations of the doctrine in lifelong learning, I'll start by establishing parallels between learning and prosumption in the sector, before identifying where opportunities for creativity and the development of identity in lifelong learning are, too often, reduced to an exercise in the repetition of the same fundamental relations. Following this, I identify examples of prosumption which suggest new prosumer practices and validate the claims of prosumption and thus an eternal return of difference.

The Prosumption of Lifelong Learning

Broadly speaking, a strong parallel exists between the identity of the UK lifelong learner and that of the consumer. Both are engaged in simultaneous consumption and production processes underpinned by technological and financial structures which facilitate the creation of, and investment in, value (cf. Komoski, 2007). Similarities such as these between lifelong learners and prosumers shed light on what an eternal return of prosumption might mean for lifelong learners for the following reasons.

First, the traditional view that education ‘is not a commodity like food’ (Peters, 1970:126) has been outstripped by today’s cognitive economy where virtual goods like money, language and affect (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2010:126-127; Holttinen, 2014), and indeed lifelong learning itself converge. Education consumers have long been ‘shopping for futures’ (McCarthy and Dimitriadis, 2001:48), but when they also contribute to the information economy, which involves the circulation of altered content (Arvidsson, 2005), learning also becomes a form of production. To facilitate this move in lifelong learning, there has been a converging of policy and practice (Biesta, 2006) and consumption of knowledge has certainly imposed itself in this way as a model in (higher) education (Kaye et al, 2006; Molesworth et al, 2009; Newman and Jahdi, 2009; Holmwood, 2014; Woodall et al, 2014), where this development has been seen as a way of enhancing quality (cf. Ek et al, 2013). Like other goods, learners typically purchase learning in the form of specifically designed qualifications and accreditations distributed by various public and private further and higher education organs. These credits can be exchanged and re-circulated as symbolic cultural assets or capital, but strikingly for a theory of prosumption, the responsibility of teachers in LLL to create this value is also increasingly emphasized in the sector’s discourse. Petty (2013:27) reckons the impact of teachers in millions of pounds, and that of a career in teacher training produces billions in an economy “irrigated by a well of knowledge and skills” and, to extend his suggestive metaphor, where teacher trainers “have their hand on the pump”.

On this view, learning, imagining and inventing have become the raw material of consumption and investment (Raunig, 2010:115) in a knowledge economy whose biopolitical potential is clear to many (e.g. Coll, 2013; D’Hoest and Lewis, 2015).

Agency, freedom and choice are ambiguous concepts as a result, since co-creative processes place responsibility on the shoulders of 'self-interested' individuals (Olssen and Peters, 2005:314) imbricated in their own very cost-effective self-governance. Such prosumers become responsible for their own long-term financial well-being (Xiao et al, 2014:592 see also Heller and Callender, 2013), whilst also, in the corporatist discourse of lifelong learning, adding value for wider international competitiveness of the nation and of course its businesses.

This certainly describes lifelong learners, whose composite identities make them, in many ways, ideal examples. Lifelong learners are never simply learners, but are frequently also employees, sometimes of the organizations which train them, often in forms of insecure, unpaid, voluntary employment or other unruly, sub-rosa activity. Teachers themselves are good examples: the organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Teaching and Learning International Survey states that teachers must do more than simply prepare students for lifelong learning, and must actually *become* lifelong learners themselves (OECD, 2014, p. 5). As cradle-to-grave learning becomes increasingly life-wide, their professional – if not wider - identity is increasingly defined by co-creation processes whereby, while still ethically and financially accountable, professionals must take a 'voluntary' approach to creating and managing their own development (Appleyard and Appleyard, 2014, p. 2; SET, 2015:5). This belief in co-creation as a source of value is noticeable professional organizations such as England's ETF (2014) pursues a deliberate policy of collaborative work between employers and practitioners for the benefit of the sector. The principle aim is to open up a 'two way street' which invokes the joint responsibility of those involved and and 'add[ing] value to employers' businesses' (CAVTL, 2013, p.21).

So, like elsewhere, developments in technology and the globalization of education increasingly demand that teachers presume learning by not just disseminating knowledge but by creating it in suitable forms for themselves and others. This demand for co-creation is reflected in formal training in the UK, where teacher education is expected to show a greater focus on 'creative new ideas' (BIS, 2012a:34), 'innovative and creative approaches' (LSIS, 2013:14) and being 'creative and innovative in selecting and adapting strategies to help learners to learn' (Education and Training Foundation / ETF, 2014:2). These demands reflect a common contemporary discourse, wherein creativity itself is 'increasingly obtuse and over-commodified' (Salehi, 2008, p. 159), becoming little more than 'a consumable package' (Salehi, 2008, p. ii).

This obtuse logic demands presuming subjects who believe that that novelty is needed when, in fact, compliance is demanded (cf. Ryan and Bourke, 2013; Bathmaker & Avis, 2013), especially in lifelong learning, whose interest in creativity provides striking examples of a lack of innovation which implies that presumption is a return of the same. This, for example, is underlined by the expectations of the ETF's new members group, created in May 2015. Paying members of The Society for Education and Training (SET) will benefit from the "discounted prices" which are on offer if they join *en masse* through organizational subscriptions (SET, 2015:2). They will be able to access this knowledge base, but they will also co-create it, since the SET aims to "involve members in its design and delivery" (SET, 2015:3). On the presumption model of the teacher as permanent learner keen to update their knowledge, teaching and non-teaching members alike to get a chance to develop "their own practitioner research" as well as contribute to "the wider knowledge base for the post-16 sector" (SET, 2015:2). By writing for the organization's newsletters

and research publications, their “own self-improvement” will be able to “feed the collective building and sharing of effective, evidence-based practice” (SET, 2015:3). In return for this intellectual labour, participation will “add value to members’ individual and collective endeavours” so that the quality of the education and training system as whole might benefit. Like other forms of prosumption, none of this labour is remunerated other than by the possible low-level affective rewards accrued through the process. Potential members are thus presented with “an essential choice” to “demonstrate their commitment to their own career and to the future of the sector” (SET, 2015:6). The SET’s members are not just choosing to invest in their own immediate and long-term career, but also in the collective strength and future of our profession (SET, 2015: 1). This participation in the creation of new channels for professional knowledge is expected to “yield significant return on investment for the practitioner and her/his employer (SET, 2015:4).

If prosumption describes the proactive ways in which consumption increasingly involves simultaneous processes of consumption and production, trainers and educators are paradigmatic prosumers in an economy which demands exponential growth in numbers of knowledge workers (TLRP, 2009; Avis, 2014). The implications go well beyond the interests of the SET’s target group or the market for textbooks, however, as consumers of learning products become co-creative prosumers of learning *qua* product. This means updating professional knowledge and skills on a regular basis, ensuring that plenty of learning is consumed and bolstering recruitment and retention figures. This kind of learning, often based in action research and reflective practice which are more or less owned by the trainee (cf. Petty, 2006 *inter alia*), has a short shelf-life and signals a further similarity between teachers and other more obviously co-creative consumers. Taking one

definition of the latter (Zwick et al 2008: 173), both are supposed to be “free subjects” whose propensity for continuous self-transformation matches their desire to become the objects of self-shaping practices. Lifelong learning here is not just an economic investment: it is an ontological one which takes an active interest in the very being of the populace. For Biesta (2006), when lifelong learning becomes a *private* good whose value resides in its relation to its economic function in this way, it becomes increasingly hard to justify spending *collective* resources on it. And indeed lifelong learning has responded to this ‘persistent hegemony’ of individualistic, reductivist divisiveness (Evans, 2014:46), like marketing, by placing the spotlight, as we have seen, on the creativity of its prosumers.

Thus, precisely because their much-coveted capacity for creation makes them unruly, teachers and learners are drawn in and governed through their potential for innovation as productive, lifelong sources of added value. This is not new, if indeed ‘[c]apital feeds directly off life itself’ (Arvidsson, 2005:252). Here, subjects do not simply supply the raw (cognitive) material (Smith and Swift, 2014), but co-create the consumer economy, for example through financial apparatuses such as student loans in which they are literally personally invested. This transfer of collective (financial) responsibility to the individual is also basically prosumerist in the sense that the individual is at least partly responsible for creating the whole. Concretely, individual students expect that investment in education will enhance their future productivity and in turn future labour market earnings, an expectation borne out by research (Bachan, 2014; Donghoon, et al 2014). For Ritzer, focusing on prosumption draws our attention to the importance of debt in maintaining levels of consumption, as well as its role in debt-driven crises such as the 2008 downturn and its continuing effects. The cognitive economy of learning plays an important but ambiguous part

here: although higher education in the UK, once the preserve of the elite, is now a seen as a right (Kaye et al, 2006), neoliberal education actually offers the right to debt instead. Individual choice remains 'the core presupposition' of neo-liberal theory (Warde, 2014:283), and debt enables the individual to invest in learning, co-producing themselves as neoliberal, lifelong learning products. Education, on this view, is commodified to the extent that it has an economic 'exchange' value, rather than (for example) an intrinsic 'use-value' (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005:271).

Future gain is thus vital to the prosumer (Ritzer (2014:8), and individual consumers' ability make to decisions which serve their own long-term financial interests (rather than put them at risk) is of increasing interest to researchers. Recent work suggests that basic financial concepts such as risk diversification and compound interest are not well understood, especially among the socio-economically less successful (Letkiewicz and Fox, 2014; Xiao et al, 2014, Harrison et al, 2013). In particular, Estelami (2014:330) found that the single most important reason for financial decision errors lay in underestimating the negative effects of time on financial value, notably the cost of interest and the fall of cash value over time.

The wider importance of this education economy beyond individual speculation should not be underestimated. In the UK, learners have paid university fees since 1998, following a funding crisis linked to the huge expansion in UK HE since the war (Bachan, 2014). Fees in the UK have risen higher than any other OECD country (Holmwood, 2014), and typically, a one-year teacher education course currently costs around £8,500, often paid for by loans provided by the state. The long term, global impact of such debt is moot: estimates of student debt in the US suggest around \$1.1 trillion is owed, with more than 7 million borrowers in default (Kim et al, 2014). In the UK, individual graduation debt levels of over £50,000 have been

predicted by some (Harrison et al, 2013), and 73% of these will have to be at least partly written off (Sellgren, 2014). Some suggest that investment in learning may be the next financial bubble to burst as employers and other stakeholders decline to invest in training costs which exceed perceived benefit (cf. BIS, 2012b, p.11)

Eternal return suggests that this is worrying, since successful investment relies on understanding the way in which financial gain cannot be reduced to a return of the same, and that dividends at payback time cannot therefore be guaranteed. It also points to the way in which the issue of speculation goes beyond mere questions of financial debt and its potentially harmful effects on physical and mental well-being (Cooke et al, 2004; Shen et al, 2014; Williams, 2014). Again drawing on Nietzsche, Lazzarato (2012;2014) argues that debt has a pernicious moral component when the indebted subjects are simultaneously responsible and guilty for their individual fate as ideal, 'indebted', subjects of capital. Just as the eternal return is ultimately an ethical question of how to live under these circumstances, the linking of social responsibility with a form of moral debt can also be traced to Nietzsche (1996:51-54), for whom guilt arises as a feeling of personal responsibility in the primordial relation between buyer and seller. Much as Ritzer sees presumption as a 'primal' act, nothing can really be repaid fully because no common measure exists to ground the exchange. Debt contracted today cannot be repaid tomorrow, when values are no longer commensurable because things will have changed. The return of the same is impossible, because everything is *essentially* different. Hence, the act of lifelong learning is positioned as a remedy for lack, and Lazzarato's reference to guilt complements a tradition of (de)moralising discourse in a sector which is used to being seen as a problem to be fixed.

This analysis may seem unnecessarily pessimistic. Some hold that consumption can turn the tables on capital by returning power to the consumer, expressing identity through 'playful creation and transformation of the self' (Hanna, 2013:383) and helping to bond stronger communities (Bookman, 2014). It's not clear, however, whether this optimism accounts for the effects of, for example, marketing techniques, particularly the practices elicited by the current global downturn (Estelami, 2014). These techniques solicit prosumers' productive capacity to create added value cheaply, and the resulting interactions are submitted to constant (self-) scrutiny. Appended to the guilt this induces, even playful consumption becomes hesitant and self-doubting (Beckett, 2012; Håkansson, 2014). Rather than simply perpetuating a 'system of quasi-enslavement' (Raunig, 2013: 31-32), when learners participate in the co-creation of their own professional identity, this prosumption does not just reconfigure identity but actually manufactures it (Zwick and Denegri-Knott, 2009; Beckett, 2012; Buscher and Igoe, 2013).

The kind of identity in question is of course a reflection of these trends. As consumption generally becomes increasingly virtual through the predominance of service-goods like learning, commodity (and increasingly data) flows transform consumers into signs and create the illusion of agency (Appadurai, 1990:307). Is this part of big government's participation in an 'education war' Olssen and Peters (2005: 340) conducted through bio-political apparatuses interested in the regulation of life itself (Foucault, 1976; 1997)? Certainly a competitive economy based on knowledge has to extract value from the previously 'anti-industrial' areas of culture and creativity (Raunig, 2013:96). On this view, there does seem to be an eternal return of the same as relations between capital and latent labour are reproduced, albeit in a

particularly cost-effective manner. LLL still works as a 'training ground' for the 'production, reproduction and transmission of knowledge' (Lines, 2008, p. 13), an eternal return of the same exploitative relations which reflects Nietzsche's own analysis of professional training as the use of repetition to produce human machines (cf. Beighton, 2014).

As these criticisms suggest, many aspects of the current situation in lifelong learning seem to suggest that prosumption implies a repetitive eternal return of the same objects, subjects and relations, albeit in an evolving way. And yet these examples only give a partial picture of an eternal return of prosumption, whose potential for change cannot be dismissed if, as in the Deleuzian analysis referred to by Ritzer, it exemplifies a return of difference. So I'd like to turn now to examples of where an eternal return of difference exists and where prosumption does more than reproduce existing relations. A key aspect of this form of prosumption is that, instead of co-creating homogenized products, it is concerned with the prosumption of space by those who want to do more than simply prosume learning in repetitive ways.

The prosumption of space

Even those who underline the repetitive nature of co-creation recognise that consumer resistance is an integral part of consumption (Cova and Dalli, 2009:319). From the point of view of the prosuming lifelong learner, a different kind of investment seems to be emerging in the interest in the places of consumption (e.g. Evans, 2010; Bookman, 2014; Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014). **Protest activities such as Occupy Wall Street (Gitlin, 2013; Calhoun, 2013) spread to thousands of high-profile locations across the world (Ruggiero, in Chomsky, 2012) from student occupations in Vienna (Raunig, 2013) to the occupation of a future**

2016 Olympic site in Rio de Janeiro (Guardian, 2015). Taking student protests in the UK (cf. BBC, 2012; 2014; Hensby, 2014; Ibrahim, 2014) as an example of the ways in which matters of lifelong learning have been spatialized, protests have attempted, with greater or lesser success, to subvert the spaces of capital and provide students with “the space and opportunity to explore alternative ideas about education and society” (Rheingans and Hollands, 2013:546). This is a useful example insofar as it exemplifies the ways in which spaces have been used as a way of disrupting relations of consumption which fail to take account of changing demands and circumstances. The fact that police report on how protective fencing was pulled down by protesters (BBC, 2014), more than simply expressing student complaints (a lack of democratic options, tax avoidance by fast-food multinationals, and the lifetime of debt created by the loan system), implies that such transgression questions and even reconfigures what the space actually is and what can be done there. Gerald Raunig has argued that a ‘chain of reterritorialization’ (Raunig, 2013: 70) is formed when space is reinvested and reapportioned, albeit temporarily, in this way, but what does this mean for lifelong learning?

First, such activity focuses our attention on the way in which capital, in order to achieve the kinds of value creation discussed so far, relies on a spatialization of time. Time is segmented, quantified and distributed in ways which assist the creation of surplus value, allowing excess value to be commodified and consumed as time possessed rather than time lived. And while this spatialization helps subject individuals to capitalist modes of production (Arvidsson, 2005), it is also here that individuals can potentially free themselves from perpetual consumption (McGowan, 2011:29). Not just a democratic right to assemble, it is both a medium for action and

a desired state of being, a 'meaningful project of the simple negotiation of everyday decisions' (Calhoun, 2013:30). Urban transitional spaces, symbolic spaces and even overcoded spaces, offer an opportunity for expression of incommensurable desires and activities. In this way, they express an eternal return of difference as 'something new, sparked by its own exciting innovations, giving voice to new participants and new visions' (Calhoun, 2013:27). These innovations include (some) social media for example (Zajc, 2015), where, although time cannot be overcome, space can, inviting the possibility that prosumption which creates and feeds off its own spaces of possibility might disrupt repetition of traditional relations of the return of the same.

Conclusion

Thinking of the ends of lifelong learning in these circumstances, prosumption cannot simply facilitate repetition because it fails to equip minds with the ability to work with this unpredictability. This risks creating practical incompetence (Bruner, 1996.pp. 42-43) and a situation where few professionals feel prepared for the unpredictability of professional life by initial training (Fenwick, 2012). Learning which fails to provide this preparation risks co-creating bland, generic 'nothing' products of little real value. Identifying the changes which emerge to challenge this repetition remains a challenging question, but it is one which lifelong learning faces if its telos is to avoid being a prosumer of nothing.

But thinking about prosumption as an eternal return indicates more than empty repetition. Lifelong learning is paradigmatic of unruly contingency and the economy's 'predictable' unpredictability (Stronach and Clark, 2011, p.5), and so looking for a

recurrence of the past relies on 'nostalgic visions of the future' (Ambrose, 2012: 77), or the nihilistic expectation that the future will or should resemble or repeat the past. This expectation, for Deleuze, is the complacent discourse of beautiful souls, incapable of real change, who thrive on their *ressentiment* in a sad desire for repetition (Deleuze, 2004a:259). If the concept of prosumption exemplifies the eternal return, it does not work through repetition, but by working selectively: new day, new Groundhog.

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