

A name for a peer production-based society ? Part 2

On 15sep09, Mathieu wrote:

"The problem for me is simple: if one were to say that a name / slogan is necessary, the name has to sound good. I'm sorry, but I cant find an aesthetic / communicational pleasure / punch in the term "gratisist" - to me it just does not sound right. Communist may be wrong substantially but it has a better ring in my view. "

RV: I don't think that the "sound" of the word is such an important question. Of course within some limits: a word impossible or too difficult to pronounce, for example, would be a hindrance. But the sound of a term is greatly induced by its content, its meaning and its use.

It remembers me the story of that very young writer who wanted to find a beautiful pseudonym to sign his writings, a pseudonym which "sounds great". But he had the feeling that all the best ones had already been taken: Shakespeare, Goethe, Dante... Shakespeare sounds great not because of the musical composition of its syllables but because Shakespeare wrote great things.

I think that if the meaning of a word is really necessary and useful, its "sound" will improve as it used by more and more people.

Mathieu doesn't give a precise opinion about the NEED of a name for a peer-production-based society.

Stefan Merten does: *"I agree that it would be very useful to find a name for such a society"*(6oct09)

Robin Upton is also very clear: *"It is worth spending time to think of suitable names, since this decides how people categorise stuff, and therefore which frames they apply to it."*(7oct09)

Stefan proposes some conditions for such a word:

"We can at least try [to find a word] and may be we can reach some sort of agreement. I think the goal would be to find a term

1. *which sounds well*
2. *is not too wrong / misunderstandable*
3. *is not burdened with historical meaning."*

I agree with these conditions, relativising the first one as I already did. I would add a 4th one: the capacity to be translated easily in other languages.

Dealing with the second condition ('*is not too wrong*') Stefan makes a criticism to the term "gratisism": *"However, another important characteristic - production based on Selbstentfaltung - is not caught by gratisism."*

It is true that the precise concept of Selbstentfaltung is not caught by gratisism. But it may be not so far. Gratisism means that you get products for free, but it also means that you produce for free. Producing for free can be the case for a forced-labor camp, which is here obviously out of scope. Here it means producing "for the pleasure". Pleasure is part of the concept of Selbstentfaltung.

Stefan Mn: *"Not too long ago in Oekonux we agreed on using the term "peer production" as describing the more general phenomenon we are witnessing. "*

RV: Peer production is a nice term and we were right to adopt it. However I think it has two small weaknesses:

- the meaning of the term is hardly understandable for people not used to the reality of "peer" relations and the term "production" doesn't say much by itself; fortunately the understanding of "peer" will inevitably develop as the "peer" practices expand.

- it is not always easy to translate. For example, in the French Wikipedia it is translated by "travail collaboratif", that is "collaborative work". Collaborative is really vague and work is wrong since producing for pleasure is not work.

When I write in French I prefer to use the English term itself.

Stefan Mn:

« *Contrary to "gratisism" the term "peer production" focuses very much on the production aspect. In a way these both terms complement each other nicely. A combination of both would thus probably not be too wrong (2.) and not burdened with meaning (3.). But I can't think of a term which sounds well (1.): "peergratisism"? "gratispeerism"? "peeratism"? Well, the last one sounds sexy ;-).*»

RV: Well, as I already said, I am not convinced that the question of sound is so important. But I find interesting the term "peer-gratisism", because it allows to specify that we are not dealing with gratisism based on financing by advertising, nor by taxes, As Robin puts it: *"Familiar words make it easier for people to understand (or to think they understand, which may not be good)."* Gratisism is not a familiar word, but "gratis" is. And, familiarly, many gratis products are financed by advertising or taxes. Adding peer to gratisism may help to prevent a misleading understanding.

Altruism?

Robin:

"I use 'altruism' to describe my work, since this word still has many positive connotations and a suitable etymology."

RV: Altruism is indeed opposite to business, to the capitalist logic and more generally to the commercial practices, since it means giving without waiting for a reward. But as such it tends to be associated to the religious vision of "sacrifice". The idea of giving, producing for pleasure, which is a crucial aspect of peer production, is, or may be absent.

Wikipedia (English) says:

"Altruism is selfless concern for the welfare of others. It is a traditional virtue in many cultures, and a core aspect of various religious traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Sikhism, and many others."

Referring to Stefan's conditions, I would say that "altruism" is weak for the second (*is not too wrong / misunderstandable*) and the third (*is not burdened with historical meaning*).

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