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“Transcending Capitalism and Consumerism through Real Utopias”

Abstract:

The expansion of markets and pressures for endless growth in material consumption are not contingent features of a dynamic capitalist economy; they are intrinsic to an economy rooted in the competitive drive for profits and capital accumulation. Any serious effort to counteract systemic consumerism, therefore, must also attempt to transcend capitalism. But how is this possible? While capitalism has become more destructive both to the lives of people and the health of the environment, it seems to most people either to be an unalterable force of nature or to be backed by unassailably powerful social forces. Social democratic hopes of *taming capitalism* by neutralizing its harmful effects through decisive state regulations have been undermined by the globalization and financialization of capital. Revolutionary ambitions of *smashing capitalism* through a ruptural seizure of state power, a coercive dissolution of capitalist institutions and their replacement by an emancipatory alternative, lack credibility. Are these the only logics of transformation? There may be a different route that points beyond capitalism: *eroding capitalism* by building emancipatory alternatives to capitalism in the spaces and cracks within capitalist economies and struggling to defend and expand those spaces.