

Academic Labour and the Capitalist University: A
critique of higher education through the law of value

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Publications

Dedications

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Publications submitted for examination

Neary, M. and Winn, J. (2009) The student as producer: reinventing the student experience in higher education. In: Bell, L., Neary, M. and Stevenson, H. (eds.) *The future of higher education: policy, pedagogy and the student experience*. London: Continuum, 126-138. <http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/1675/>

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* Winn, J. (2012) Open education: from the freedom of things to the freedom of people. In: Neary, M., Bell, L. and Stevenson, H. (eds.) *Towards teaching in public: reshaping the modern university*. London: Continuum, 133-147. <http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/4064/>

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* Winn, J. (2013) Hacking in the university: contesting the valorisation of academic labour. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism and Critique*, 11 (2) 486-503. <http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/12514/>

* Winn, J. (2014) Writing about academic labour. *Workplace: A journal for academic labour*, 25, 1-15. <http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/14592/>

* Winn, J. (2015a) Open Education and the emancipation of academic labour. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 40 (3). <http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/14594/>

* Winn, J. (2015b) The co-operative university: Labour, property and pedagogy. *Power and Education*, 7 (1) 39-55. <http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/14593/>

Introduction

This commentary provides an overview of a body of work that was published between 2009 and 2015. It summarises the significance of the contribution of that work and establishes its coherence both chronologically and thematically.

The work submitted for examination consists of ten items, with the key sole-authored components comprising a book chapter (Winn, 2012) and four peer-reviewed journal articles (Winn, 2013; 2014; 2015a; 2015b). Other, joint-authored work is intended to be supplementary and to provide further evidence of the two persistent themes of inquiry which my work has been concerned with over the last six years: the role and character of labour and property in higher education, or rather, ‘academic labour’ and the ‘academic commons’. Six of the ten publications discuss these themes through a critique of the role of technology in higher education, in particular the way networked technology forms the practical, ideological and legal premise for the idea and forms of ‘openness’ in higher education. Throughout my work, I treat ‘technology’ as a reified and fetishized concept which masks the more fundamental categories of *labour*, *value* and the *commodity-form* that are concealed in the idea and form of the ‘public university’. I start from the observation that advocates of ‘open education’ tend to envision an alternative form of higher education that is based on a novel form of academic commons but neglect to go further and critically consider the underlying form of academic labour. As such, the product is set free but not the producer. In response, through my publications I develop the theoretical basis for an alternative social and institutional form of co-operative higher education; one in which openness is constituted through a categorial critique aimed at the existing commodity-form of knowledge production.

The wider context to which my work responds is the marketization of UK higher education since the early 1990s and the concurrent conceptualisation in the UK of students as consumers (Naidoo *et al*, 2011). For those of us who are critical of this shift in higher education, which follows a broader destruction of the welfare state in the UK (Huber and Stephens, 2010), one response is to re-engineer the organising principle of higher education so that students are understood as ‘producers’ of knowledge and academic collaborators. In doing so, my co-authors and I have aimed to reinvigorate the processes by which universities are seen as sites that openly contribute to the general intellectual well-being of society (Neary and Winn, 2009). In the absence of such a response, a combination of market competition among universities (Palfreyman and Tapper, 2014), and students coerced by a ‘pedagogy of debt’ (Williams, 2006) defines the social purpose of the university as instrumental to the needs of capital and an individual rather than social good. In effect, this shift can be understood in terms of the welfare and intellectual life of students being increasingly subsumed by the imperatives of capital (Wood, 2002) and subordinated to the reproductive requirements of labour under capital (Rikowski, 2002). Within the confines of working within higher education, the political project of my research has always been against such imperatives and subordination.

The body of work discussed here provides a substantial and original contribution to knowledge in the following ways: By subjecting ‘open education’ to a negative critique based on Marx’s categories of the commodity, value and labour, I reveal fundamental features of the ‘academic commons’ that have not been identified through critiques that neglect the materiality of openness and technology. In order to illustrate this, I examine how ‘hacking’ (out of which the Open Education movement developed) was not only a cultural phenomenon but a form of academic labour that emerged out of the intensification and valorisation of scientific research. I develop this by exploring how

'value' is an underlying and mediating imperative in higher education, and illustrate how using a 'form-analytic' approach helps us reconceive the social form of knowledge and the roles of teacher and student in a way that most treatments of academic labour fail to do. I also demonstrate how it is possible to go beyond this critique by adopting a position of methodological negativity, against labour rather than from the standpoint of labour, to construct a theory for an alternative to the capitalist university: co-operative higher education. By combining this theoretical and practical work with emerging ideas on 'open co-operatives' in other areas, I show how new forms of higher education cannot be based on existing practices of reciprocity based on the production of value, as is often assumed, but rather on a new and directly social form of knowledge production that emerges out of the free association between individuals who recognise that we have much to learn from each other.

Chronological overview of my published work

I began my research in 2008, seeking to fundamentally question the idea of the modern university and the purposes of higher education, catalysed by the dysfunctional relationships between research and teaching and teacher and student (Neary and Winn, 2009). In this chapter, which I wrote with Mike Neary,¹ we provide historical references and recent examples of students engaged in research with their teachers. We highlight the affordances of this reconfiguration of the pedagogical relationship but argue that this model of ‘research-engaged’ teaching and learning has become uncoupled from the discussion about the real nature and idea of the university as a social institution. This chapter established a great deal of related subsequent work in a large scale institutional project that is referred to as Student as Producer

(<http://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk>). We connect work undertaken by Mike Neary at the Reinvention Centre, Warwick, to the student protests in Europe and the US in the late 1960s, when demands were made to democratise the production of knowledge across society. This discussion is then grounded in the earlier work of Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and Karl Marx (1818-1883), each of whom offer incisive commentary and analysis of the nature of capitalist production. Benjamin is key to this chapter as his work makes explicit links between student life and the productivity of the university, insisting on the need for intellectual workers to intervene in society not only through their product but by reflecting critically on the means of production, or the “apparatus” of knowledge production. On this basis, students do not simply engage in research for the sake of the ‘output’ but in the process of research they should be encouraged to reflect

¹ On reflection, the production of this chapter was itself an example of what it argues for. It marks the point when I took on the role of student, embarking on research with my supervisor and colleague that continues to this day. The chapter also acts as a reference point throughout my subsequent publications, establishing in a preliminary way the themes of academic labour, academic commons, openness and co-operativism, as well as establishing the significance of Marx’s social theory for my work.

critically on the character and idea of the university. We then focus on Marx's concept of the 'general intellect', and its more recent articulation as 'mass intellectuality', each idea pointing to forms of knowledge that are expressed both in the general 'living' knowledge of society but also embodied in the material development of society, most visible in the products of science and technology. We conclude by arguing that recent open technologies enable the increasingly social, co-operative production of knowledge, as seen in the 'hacker' and 'free culture' movements. In doing so, this 'free culture' provokes us to question the purpose of the contemporary university, the relationships between research and teacher, teacher and student, and therefore the organising principles upon which academic knowledge is transmitted and produced.

In the next publication, which I wrote with Richard Hall, we question the role of technology in higher education and the affordances of 'openness' in education in the face of social crisis (Hall and Winn, 2011). This article was written in the context of two related crises: global recession and environmental catastrophe. We sought to shift the attention and energy of the 'open education' movement, whose focus at that time was on the sustainability of business models for 'openness', towards addressing social problems arising from the impact of an energy crisis on the provision of higher education and the sustainability of human life itself.

In the first of the key, sole-authored publications included here (Winn, 2012), I develop an original critique of open education by analysing the production and promises of Open Educational Resources (OER) through Marx's labour theory of value. I critically assess the ambitions and achievements of the Open Education movement, always conscious of the emancipatory potential established in the earlier book chapter with Mike Neary

(Neary and Winn, 2009) and the opportunity for a praxis of openness to reconfigure the relationship between teachers and students, the university and society. In this article, I conclude by arguing that the revolutionary potential of open education remains undeveloped in its liberal reconceptualization of what it means to be a researcher, teacher and student and that this potential could be realised by a shift in focus from the liberation of resources to the liberation of teachers and students from their labour. This established the main trajectory of my research, which works towards the theory and practice of post-work and post-capitalist higher education. By post-work, I refer to the abolition of wage labour for the production of surplus value, effecting both a qualitative transformation of human labour and its quantitative reduction (Krisis Group, 1999). By post-capitalist, I refer to social relations that are not mediated by the imperative of producing value, the social form of wealth in capitalist society (Postone, 1993; Hudis, 2012). A critique of labour, private property and value in the context of higher education, and in particular open education, is central to many of the works submitted.

Following this, in an article co-authored with Mike Neary, we establish the genealogy of openness in higher education within the wider free and open source software movement and focus on a critique of the knowledge commons (i.e. intellectual property) (Neary and Winn, 2012). While recognising the importance of reproducing forms of shared social wealth, we argue that this has been at the avoidance of recognising the pivotal role of labour and the form it takes in capitalism. According to Marx, property in the form of a commodity, whether private, public or common is the objectification of the dual form of capitalist labour; its use-value and exchange-value expressing the dual concrete and abstract qualities of productive labour. We assert that it is the form that wealth takes in capitalism (i.e. the value-form), which continues to mediate and dominates the

production of the commons, including that found in the production of knowledge (i.e. open education). From this point, we implicitly develop the idea of ‘mass intellectuality’, which we identified in our earlier work (Neary and Winn, 2009), but through a negative critique of its underlying theory found in Autonomist Marxism. The connection between Student as Producer and the production of a commons is made through the recent work of Gigi Roggero, who has also made the case for ‘co-research’ whereby academics and students work together as a form of political praxis (Roggero, 2011). Likewise, for Roggero, it is a focus on how knowledge is produced which provides the basis for building an ‘institution of the common’. We conclude by proposing that the Social Science Centre, a co-operative for higher education that we co-founded in 2011, is such an institution (Social Science Centre, 2013).

Throughout this work, I have been concerned with the role of the student in higher education and the need for students to democratically participate in the design, development and governance of their university’s infrastructure. This should be understood more broadly as a desire to improve the technological means and organisational conditions for increased co-operation between university staff and students and encourage greater democratic control by labour over the means of knowledge production (Winn, 2015b). A brief overview of this research and development work, spanning four years and ten grant-funded projects, is summarised in a short case study (Winn and Lockwood, 2013). In this case study, we argue that Student as Producer offers an appropriate and critical framework for the practice of openness in higher education. It is an attempt to avoid the reification of openness and ground it as praxis in an adequate critical social theoretical framework.

Following this, in the second of my key publications, I provide a more thoroughgoing history and critique of the hacker movement as a precursor to the openness movement in higher education (Winn, 2013), and argue that hacking should be understood as a response to the broader and longer trajectory of gradually commercialising university research and the concomitant valorisation of academic labour. This article proposes an original standpoint from which to understand the hacker movement and the resulting open education movement. It is an attempt to both theorise the way in which the productivity of academic labour has been gradually ‘improved’ over the last century (a concurrent combination of both ‘formal’ and ‘real subsumption’, whereby labour is drawn into the capitalist process of valorisation and transformed), and highlight how this resulted in the creation of a subversive form of property that is reciprocally shared in perpetuity (i.e. ‘free and open source software’) (Pederson, 2010). It is that subversive form of property which is now regarded as exemplary in terms of the voluntary and highly co-operative form of labour it has given rise to, which when threatened by the imperatives of early venture capitalism, escaped the enclosure of the university, only to return in the form of business models for open education 20 years later.

When taken chronologically, each of my publications has increasingly focused on the pivotal role of academic labour (both teacher and student) in the formation of higher education, and in the third of my key publications I develop an original critical position on academic labour (Winn, 2014). Here, I contrast my own approach to literature which tends to focus on ‘academic identity’ and changes to the labour process. While other contemporary writers, such as Glenn Rikowski, have perceptively employed Marx’s critical categories to discuss academic work, I discuss the productive pedagogical relationship between teacher and student in terms of a value-form analysis, offering a

critique *of* labour rather than a critique *from* the standpoint of labour (Postone, 1993). In this article, I also develop my combined theoretical and methodological approach and further outline basic features of post-capitalist knowledge production (i.e. higher education); one that builds on the achievements of capitalism and overcomes its dominating forms, rather than trying to recover a ‘golden age’ of higher education which, if it ever existed, was specific to the changing historical and material conditions of its time.

Building on this, in my next key publication (Winn, 2015a) I revisit the theme of open education and apply the argument developed in Winn (2014) by offering an original critique of ‘open access’ through Marx’s theory of the value-form, and of the legal infrastructure of open education through the work of Marxist legal theorist, Evgeny Pashukanis (1891-1937). I conclude by outlining the relevance and potential for post-capitalist higher education of the emerging ‘open co-operative’ movement, which attempts to resolve in practice a number of issues I have raised throughout my work on the nature of labour, property and technology. As such, I attempt to bring together in a preliminary way, open education and co-operative higher education and point towards a framework for open education based on the values and principles of a new and radical form of co-operativism.

This is the premise for my final publication where I review recent work concerning co-operative higher education and theorise the fundamental features of a co-operative university (Winn, 2015b). This fifth key publication addresses many of the research questions in my earlier work concerning the role and character of academic labour, the constitution of an academic commons and the democratisation of knowledge

production, and in doing so consolidates my theoretical and methodological approach by providing a coherent and original model of labour, property and pedagogy for post-capitalist higher education. Here, I also review a number of subsequent articles through which Student as Producer has been developed both as a pedagogical framework and a political project. In doing so, I propose that the collective work on Student as Producer provides the pedagogical basis from which the institutional form of co-operative higher education can be developed, pointing towards the abolition of academic labour and the constitution of an academic commons. Due to restrictions on the length of the final article, the published version offers no discussion of the Social Science Centre, Lincoln (SSC), but I want to acknowledge the crucial contribution that my fellow scholars of the SSC have made to my experience of co-operative higher education and subsequent reflections on our mutual work. It has been a defining feature of my personal and professional life since we established our co-operative four years ago and I am continuing to develop this work on open, co-operative higher education through a number of conference papers² and a funded research project.³

² <http://josswinn.org/category/conference-papers/>

³ Beyond Public and Private: A Model for Co-operative Higher Education. Available at <http://socialsciencecentre.org.uk/blog/2015/03/30/beyond-public-and-private-a-model-for-co-operative-higher-education/> [Accessed 23 April 2015]

Research context and researcher positionality

Openness

Before joining the University of Lincoln in 2007, I was the audio-visual archivist for Amnesty International, a role that required a detailed knowledge of the history of film, video and image technologies within a not-for-profit, campaigning organisation supported by an international membership. Archivists curate institutional and social memory. Part of that role involves making informed judgements about the potential for a technology (e.g. parchment, paper, photo-chemical film, magnetic video, digital hard drives, etc.) to be accessible and useful in the future. It requires the archivist to question assumptions about the provenance of technology and its future potential for both the production and preservation of collective memory. Working in that profession made it clear to me that technological choices are not neutral and that ‘progress’ must be defined not only by what we imagine of the future but also what we retain and understand of the past. Through my practical work as an archivist it was made clear to me that the development of specific technologies are less the result of individual genius and invention and more the product of on-going social, economic and political imperatives. I was also a member of a profession that understands the social benefits of non-proprietary and open technological standards so that historical media can be preserved effectively and made accessible now and in the future, un beholden to private and commercial interests.

Consequently, I have long held a social and political interest in open standards and open technologies and I joined the University of Lincoln in 2007 to work on the implementation of an open access and open source archive for research. By definition, open source is non-proprietary software that the user is permitted to modify if they wish.

By having access to the source code, an individual can, with the requisite knowledge, understand how the technology works and this can contribute to the longevity of the artifact. Open source software is defined and protected by the application of a legal license but is more broadly characterized by a concern for the principles of openness, transparency, collaboration, joint ownership and consensus (Coffin, 2006). The product of these principles is now widely referred to as a ‘commons’, defined and guaranteed by the legal framework of free licenses (Neary and Winn, 2012; Winn, 2015a). When applied to the production of academic knowledge, I refer to it as an ‘academic commons’. As I discuss in my work (Winn, 2013), so-called ‘copyleft’ licenses such as Creative Commons (<http://creativecommons.org>) and the General Public License (GPL) (Stallman, 2002), subvert commonly held notions of ‘intellectual property’ and consequently impact on the actual process by which people work together. This is sometimes referred to as ‘commons-based peer-production’ (Benkler, 2006). Within the context of the university, it works against what David Noble referred to as the “systematic conversion of intellectual activity into intellectual capital and, hence, intellectual property” (Noble, 1998).

Despite the existence of an academic commons, the conflict of property interests and their concomitant manifestation in the labour process within higher education remain apparent. This was the genesis for my article on the history of hacking in universities (Winn, 2013) where I discuss how Richard Stallman left his work at MIT because of this conflict of interests. In other words, Stallman withdrew his academic labour so as to protect his property interests and in doing so was able to establish a commons based on voluntary and co-operative labour. In my research for that article, I recognized that the model for open source software development was the outcome of academic struggle and that a renewed focus on open source methods and principles (the ‘hacker ethic’) might

be applied to other forms of academic endeavour to help revitalise our aspiration of the student as a producer of knowledge. In effect, I was reclaiming the ‘open source’ model for the production of knowledge as an academic pursuit that had ‘escaped’ the US academy in the mid-1980s and been recovered through the predominantly US and European open education movement in the early 2000s.

This idea is evident in the first of my publications (Neary and Winn, 2009), where we concluded by arguing that the ‘free culture’ movement (later discussed in Winn, 2013 and Winn, 2015a) offers a model of production, enabled by copyleft and similar licenses, by which the organising principles of knowledge creation could be reinvented, repositioning the student as an academic collaborator and valued producer of knowledge rather than predominantly a consumer. My contribution to this book chapter established a recurrent theme throughout my work, which is to regard assertions of ‘free culture’ or ‘openness’ as explicit statements about property relations and consequently about the ‘means of [knowledge] production’ and the role and form of the labour which produces the academic commons. I later led a number of grant-funded research and development projects focusing on the theme of ‘openness’ in higher education (Winn and Lockwood, 2013), which I argued were intended to practice these changes in property and labour relations between the institution, academics and students, such that the student is recognised as a producer of knowledge and of the social world.

Social crisis

The larger social context to my work has been the Great Recession of 2008-2009 and the subsequent secular crisis affecting the UK and elsewhere (Hall, 2014; Roberts, 2009). I want to note that the current period of capitalist crisis since late 2007 has framed my

entire experience of working in UK higher education. This has produced in me an urgency to understand the concrete effects that are still unfolding and to respond in a theoretically informed way. The political response we have seen from national governments is so clearly inadequate, unsustainable and ultimately catastrophic (Magdoff and Foster, 2011), that I sought a coherent theoretical framework that was historically and materially grounded. The political reaction to the crisis was felt in UK higher education with the removal of public funding for teaching in the arts, humanities and social sciences and the tripling of student tuition fees. This was at a time when my own work was increasingly focused on the collaborative and productive relationship between academics and students, yet the policy and financial framework for higher education in the UK was intensifying and reinforcing the primacy of the exchange relationship and the role of students as consumers.

This deeply felt contradiction has remained the case throughout my work to-date and began to form its theoretical expression following my reading of Marxist scholar, John Holloway (2005), who viscerally articulates the embodiment of critique as the ‘scream’: “a scream of sadness, a scream of horror, a scream of anger, a scream of refusal: NO.” (2005, 1) Holloway, influenced by the ‘negative dialectics’ of Theodor Adorno (Holloway, 2008) and Marx’s pursuit of the “*ruthless criticism* of all that exists” (Marx, 1975, 142), insists that “we start from negation, from dissonance” (Holloway, 2005, 1), so that we might “relate to each other as people and not as things.” (2005, 2) I have indeed ‘clung to the scream’ throughout the work included here and have repeatedly sought to offer a negative critique of the capitalist university while convinced that changes to social relations made possible by the Internet and web-based technologies are historically progressive.

Scholar activism

Having previously worked in an international, member-supported, campaigning organisation for human rights, I have tried to find ways that my academic work can also be characterised by an ethic of activism. In the context of the greatest social crisis of my lifetime and amidst a coercive and undemocratically enforced set of reforms in UK higher education (McGettigan, 2013), I discovered the work on ‘scholar activism’ by Paul Chatterton, Stuart Hodkinson and Jenny Pickerill (The Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010). These honest accounts of their work provided an inspiring, contemporary example of how it is possible to act ‘in, against and beyond’ the confines of the capitalist university. Published in the aftermath of the 2008-9 global recession, their writing urges other academics to make “strategic interventions” that overcome the “false distinction between academia and wider society.” (247)

Chatterton *et al* claim that the “starting point for today’s scholar activism must be, as Casa-Cortes and Cobarrubias assert, ‘rethinking the university as a site of production and not as an ivory tower for the contemplation of the outside world.’” (Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010, 262) This principle requires that within the university we recognise the centrality of academic labour, its processes, exploitation, precarity and hierarchies. Although the Autonomous Geographies Collective acknowledges the role of academic labour in the production of value for the capitalist university, they do not develop a substantive critique as I have done throughout my work. In doing so, I am less concerned with the detail of the labour process, which is well documented by others (e.g. Ball, 2003; see Winn, 2014), and more interested in establishing how academic labour can be understood abstractly according to Marx’s corresponding categories of the commodity-form and the dual form of labour. In other words, academic or so-called

‘immaterial’ and intellectual labour, including that of the student, is not privileged or special labour but takes the same form as labour in general and is likewise employed, exploited and in contest with capital. While acknowledging that universities act as “powerful agents of neo-liberal globalisation and corporate power, climate change, the commodification of education, the militarisation of society and local gentrification (Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010, 263)”, my use of Marx’s theory of value has led me to understand capitalism as a totality of social processes and to situate such “powerful agents” within and subject to the ‘quasi-objective’ logic of capitalist relations and to question the individual agency of labour which liberal theory promises (Postone, 1993).

The on-going shared research project throughout all of my work since 2008 has been Student as Producer. In addition to the original book chapter (Neary and Winn, 2009) I have since situated most of my funded research and development projects within the context of this large-scale institutional project (Winn and Lockwood, 2013). Student as Producer can be understood as encapsulating different forms of work: Since 2007 it has been a strategic, political project led by Mike Neary from within the University of Lincoln; between 2010-2013, it was a grant-funded, institution-wide teaching and learning project involving academics, student and professional staff from across the university. For some of us, it has always been a form of praxis, attempting to theorise the capitalist university and reassert the student’s role in the emancipatory project of higher education that was clearly recognised in the global protests of 1968 (Ross, 2002) and has been reasserted through student protests on-going in the UK and elsewhere since 2010.

To pursue and extend this activism, in 2011 I co-founded the Social Science Centre, Lincoln (SSC) a co-operative for higher education (Social Science Centre, 2013). The SSC has allowed Mike Neary and I to extend our work on Student as Producer within an autonomous member-run co-operative. Initially, we were inspired by the work that Stuart Hodgkinson and Paul Chatterton had done on autonomous social centres (Hodgkinson and Chatterton, 2006). Their research had revealed to us a network of inspiring centres across the UK and Europe, which act as hubs of resistance to the privatisation of public spaces, such as universities. We saw how these co-operatively run centres collectively broaden and strengthen the efforts of existing social movements by providing space and resource for the practice of different forms of social relations, not based on wage work and private property but instead on mutual aid and the construction of a social commons. Modeled on the social centres, we wanted the Social Science Centre to provide a similar space for higher education and for developing our work on Student as Producer in ways that a mainstream university cannot contain.

Current approaches to understanding the changes in UK higher education remain tied to deeply rooted conceptions of public and private (Neary, 2012). Ours is not an argument for or against the privatisation of public higher education but an attempt to go beyond the conventional paradigms of public and private and constitute in practice a form of higher education grounded in the work of theorists such as Karl Marx and Walter Benjamin, the social history, values and principles of the international co-operative movement (Yeo, 1988), and emerging practices of reciprocity which are constituting a new form of academic commons (Neary and Winn, 2012). This approach assumes that a new social and institutional form of higher education must be based on a pedagogic framework that offers an adequate critique of the capitalist university. The university

must once again be asserted as a social and political project rather than an instrument of the economy. We must interrogate its institutional and social forms, such as the emergent ‘open education’ movement, through critical categories that seek to go beyond the fetishized categories of economics. (Clarke, 1979, 5; Bonefeld, 2014) Through praxis, I have identified sufficient confluences between our pedagogic approach and the theory and practice of worker and social solidarity co-operatives (Conaty, 2014; Winn, 2015b) to believe that a model of co-operative higher education *can* be developed that is more adequate to the current crisis. Because of the specific historical innovations of worker co-operatives and ‘common ownership’, a co-operative model of higher education is easily aligned with Student as Producer, a pedagogical framework that recognises academic labour and the academic commons as the organising principle for the production of knowledge. A recent article included here (Winn, 2015b) aims to contribute towards that process and my current work directly builds on this.

Theory and method

The value-form, whose fully developed shape is the money-form, is very elementary and simple. Nevertheless, the human mind has for more than 2,000 years sought in vain to get to the bottom of it all, whilst on the other hand, to the successful analysis of much more composite and complex forms, there has been at least an approximation. Why? Because the body, as an organic whole, is more easy of study than are the cells of that body. In the analysis of economic forms, moreover, neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both. (Marx, 1976, 90)

Through my initial reading of Holloway, I was drawn to the work of Karl Marx and more recently to writers in the ‘New Reading of Marx’ (Postone, 1993; Elbe, 2013; Bonefeld, 2014) and *Wertkritik* (‘value critique’) schools of Marxism (Larsen *et al*, 2014). I have also been influenced by a concurrent and often complementary British tradition of Marxism which emerged in the 1970s, originally associated with the journal *Capital and Class*, including writers such as Werner Bonefeld, Simon Clarke, Ana Dinerstein, John Holloway, and Mike Neary, who have each taken up a critique of value and the ‘value-form’. Following these writers and against the traditional and structuralist Marxist standpoints, I place an emphasis on Marx’s ‘labour theory of value’ as a theory of social domination that extends to capitalist society in its totality. This approach led me to a view of the university as a social institution organised around the category of ‘value’ in the form of waged work and private property.

Through the use of different levels of abstraction, Marx established that commodities in capitalist society are characterised by their *use-value* and their *exchange-value*, and the substance and source of the value of a commodity is human labour, which also has a

corresponding dual form: *concrete labour* and *abstract labour*. Abstract labour is the social reduction of individual concrete labour to a qualitatively homogenous form. Abstract labour is retrospectively quantified in terms of *socially necessary labour time*, which is the time it takes, on average, to produce commodities. As efficiencies in production (e.g. through improved labour techniques and technologies that replace labour) are increased due to the imperative of market competition, the socially necessary labour time to produce commodities is decreased and thus the amount of social labour required in production is reduced, too. Unlike in classical political economy, which argued that individual labour time was the measure of value, socially necessary labour time is a historically dynamic measure of time (Postone, 1993, 291-298), which occurs “behind the backs of the producers” (Marx, 1976, 135). Marx’s theory therefore asserts that despite an increasing capacity to produce social wealth in the form of use-values, a reduction in the necessary input of human labour results in a corresponding reduction in the production of (exchange) value. The contradiction built into capitalism is thus the dialectical necessity *and* repulsion of human labour in the pursuit of value and this is regularly exposed through individual accounts of unemployment and precarious work, as well as periods of widespread socio-economic crisis.

Methodologically, my research is grounded in historical materialism and has become increasingly ‘form-analytic’ (Bonefeld, 2014). A form-analytic approach is distinct from traditional, ‘worldview’ Marxism, which gradually developed a simplified explanation of class relations and historical progress (Heinrich, 2013, 24-26). The traditional view offers a teleological, transhistorical understanding of historical forces of production that manifest historically specific modes of production. Crucially, such an approach, which characterises the mainstream of Marxism throughout the 20th century, retains a

naturalised, transhistorical view of the category of 'labour' and consequently understands it as the *basis* for an emancipatory critique of capitalism, rather than the historically specific *object* of critique. According to the form-analytic approach however, freedom is not equated with the freedom *of* labour, democratically controlling the means of production and distributing its product, but with the *abolition* of labour as a historically specific and structurally constituting social form. It argues that the limits of traditional, worldview Marxism are ultimately expressed in how it understands social domination as *external* to the processes of production (e.g. the exploitation of an alienated proletariat by the property owning capitalist class) rather than *intrinsic* to it. The traditional view sees the primary object of critique as the unjust mode of *distribution* rather than the mode of *production*, which is regarded as the necessary expression of the transhistorical forces of production (Postone, 1993, 4-10). The textual basis of a form-analytic approach is chapter one of volume one of Marx's *Capital* (Marx, 1976) where the implicit distinction between the historical development of society and Marx's dialectical presentation of its critical analysis can be found (Bellofiore and Redolfi Riva, 2015).

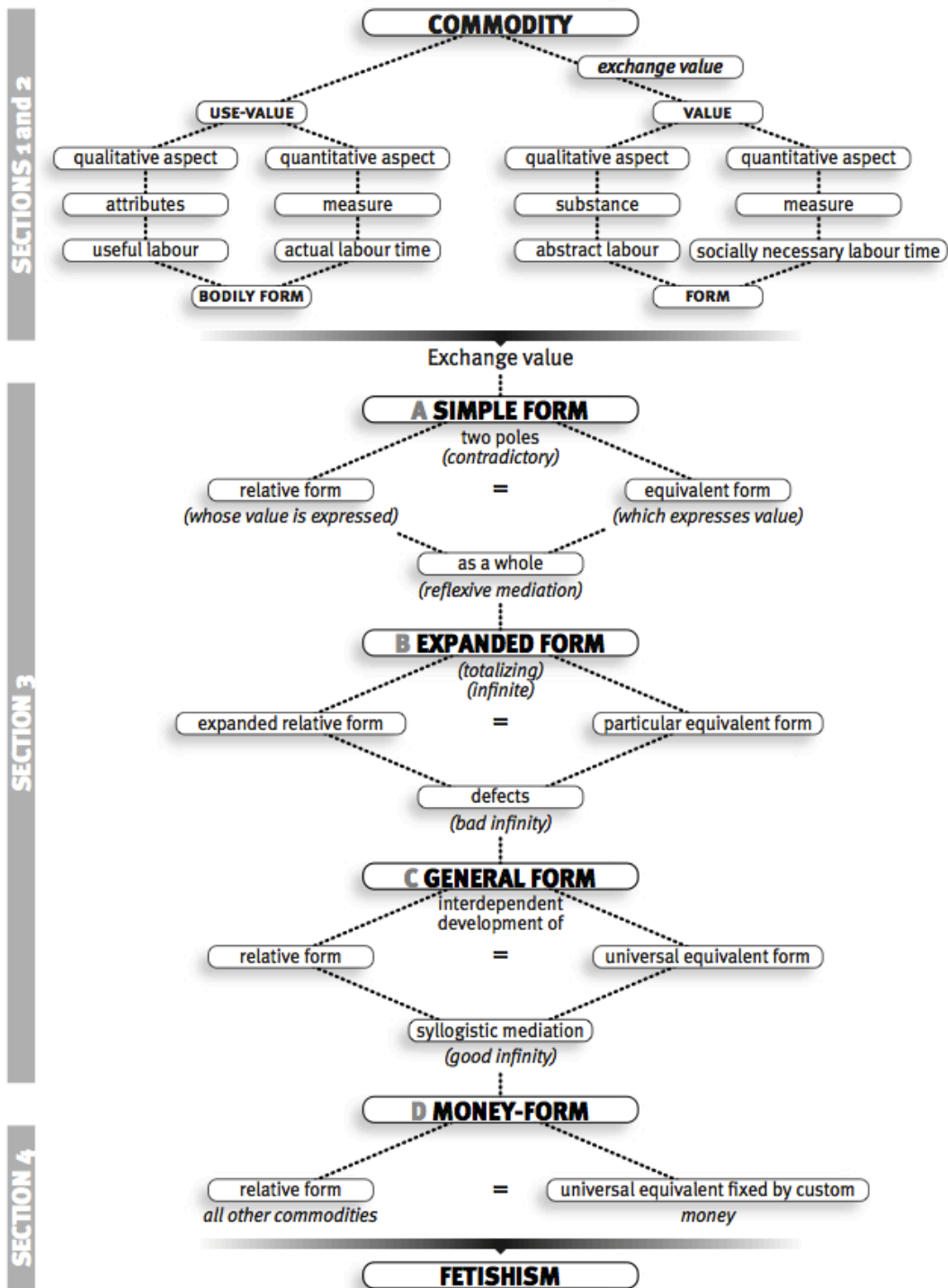


FIGURE 1: The social form of capitalism: Diagram of the structure of chapter 1 of Capital (Clever, 2000, 93. Used with permission)

An application of this form-analytic approach is demonstrated most clearly in my recent work (Winn, 2014; Winn, 2015a). In these articles I indicate the centrality of a value-form

analysis for understanding social relations in higher education, where the activities of teaching and learning can both be understood through the category of 'labour'. In discussing the commodity-form of open access publications (Winn, 2015a) I make a clear case for the way in which value mediates the production and exchange of knowledge in this specific form. In the preparation of this article, one reviewer questioned how something that is 'given away' for free, such as an open access article, can still be considered a commodity.

“If it is not exchanged on the market as a product for the realization of value, how then does it have exchange value? How does the manuscript produced for free sharing on an open access platform have exchange value? If it has no exchange value it does not have the dual character which would define it as a commodity.” (Reviewer 2, 26/09/2014)

The published version of my paper addresses this comment but I raise it again here because it highlights the difference between a form-analytic reading of Marx and a more traditional, economic reading of his work.

A form-analytic reading of Marx's critique of capitalism places an emphasis on the totality of social processes (economic, political, ideological) and aims to expose the reified categories of economics, which represent the fetishized forms of appearance of social relations (Clarke, 1991, 9). The reviewer above has implicitly distinguished between the exchange relationship (the sphere of circulation) and the productive relationship between capital and labour. He/she does not recognise that in the exchange (i.e. value) relation the open access journal article is reduced to nothing more than a product of social homogenous labour. From the economic viewpoint, it is as though the open access article has taken on a life of its own and if it is 'given away' for free, then there is no exchange relation and therefore no realisation of value. Yet, the social producers of

the article do not singularly work on discreet products that do or do not create value. They are advanced a wage for their contribution to the total social labour of their institution and the total social effort of that labour, including researching and writing the open access article, is the substance of value realised in exchange relations taking place across the institution. The open access article enters into circulation as capital and contributes to the production of total social value that is accounted for retrospectively in the money form.

The implications of a value-form analysis on our understanding of *all* social relations under capitalism is profound and as I have indicated (Winn, 2014), provides the theoretical justification for understanding the student as wage labourer and therefore the pedagogic relationship between teacher and student as one between divided labour, mediated by value, engaged with the means of knowledge production. Such a view informs my current research where, together with Mike Neary and other members of the Social Science Centre, we focus on the practical work of developing a democratically controlled, co-operative form of higher education, informed by a critique of the contradictory relationship between labour and capital and the emancipatory potential inherent in the capital relation (Neary and Winn, 2015). Such an approach understands the role of labour dialectically as both socially constituted and mediating (Postone, 1993) and the methods of our research are understood to be constituted by our immanent social conditions but also prefigurative of the emancipatory potential of our collective work.

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