

In some earlier notes, I asked whether the worker co-operative form is suitable for a university in light of how the international co-operative movement [defines](#) the 'character' of worker co-operatives and the re-conceptualisation of academic labour that this organisational form would imply. I asserted that the university is already a means of production which capital employs together with academic labour to reproduce labour in the form of students, and value in the commodity form of knowledge. A worker owned co-operative university would therefore control the means of knowledge production and potentially produce a new form of knowledge.

I also [summarised](#) the values and principles of the co-operative movement as a whole, noting that they are (for most individuals) aligned with academic values and principles. I highlighted the emphasis among worker co-operatives on 'common ownership' as a form of property relations which overcomes the distinction between 'public' and 'private' to produce an 'academic commons'. I pointed to the ways in which such a worker co-operative university might be governed, the integration of co-operative values and principles into the curriculum and other organisational practices (cf. Facer (2011)) and outlined three 'routes to co-operation': conversion, dissolution, creation. Finally, I suggested that the distinction between teacher and student would necessarily be dissolved and with it the division of labour, too. Assuming this was the case, a radically different method of curriculum development and pedagogy would be required. Drawing on [Kasmir's](#) reflections on Mondragon, the Spanish worker co-op, that we should "be skeptical of models that make business forms rather than people the agents of social change", it follows that the organisational form of a 'co-operative university' should itself be derived from the pedagogical relationship between teacher-student-scholar-members i.e. 'scholars'. I suggested that the basis of this pedagogical relationship might be work I have been involved in referred to as 'Student as Producer'.

### **Student as Producer**

“The idea of student as producer encourages the development of collaborative relations between student and academic for the production of knowledge. However, if this idea is to connect to the project of refashioning in fundamental ways the nature of the university, then further attention needs to be paid to the framework by which the student as producer contributes towards mass intellectuality. This requires academics and students to do more than simply redesign their curricula, but go further and redesign the organizing principle, (i.e. private property and wage labour), through which academic knowledge is currently being produced.” ([Neary & Winn, 2009, 137](#))

In these notes I want to review the work of my colleague, [Mike Neary](#), who conceived and developed 'Student as Producer' and has subsequently led a [project](#) to implement research-based teaching and learning across our entire institution. Here, I want to focus on the theoretical development of Student as Producer and consider its *suitability* and *utility* as the pedagogical basis on which a worker co-operative for higher education *might* be developed. In order to do this, I work my way chronologically through several substantive pieces of writing about Student as Producer.

In each reading, I try to glean specific features of Student as Producer as it has developed, which seem relevant to my overarching question: 'Is the worker co-

operative form suitable for a university?' I do not attempt to fully answer the question in this series of posts, but rather identify points, issues, questions and considerations for further exploration.

Linked to this blog post are seven subsequent sets of notes, covering seven of Neary's articles and one keynote transcript. Click on the article title to go to each set of notes. It amounts to around 15,000 words and so it may be preferable to read it in PDF format. If you wish to cite them, please treat them as "preliminary notes". Thank you.

- 1a. Neary, Mike (2008) [Student as producer – risk, responsibility and rich learning environments in higher education](#). Articles from the *Learning and Teaching Conference 2008*. Eds: Joyce Barlow, Gail Louw, Mark Price. University of Brighton Press. Centre for Learning and Teaching
- 1b. Neary, Mike and Winn, Joss (2009) [The student as producer: reinventing the student experience in higher education](#). In: *The future of higher education: policy, pedagogy and the student experience*. Eds. Bell, Neary, Stevenson. Continuum, London, pp. 192-210.
2. Neary, Mike and Hagyard, Andy (2010) [Pedagogy of Excess: An Alternative Political Economy of Student Life](#). In: *The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer*. Eds. Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon. Routledge, Abingdon, pp. 209-224.
3. Neary, Mike (2010) [Student as Producer: a pedagogy for the avant-garde; or, how do revolutionary teachers teach?](#) *Learning Exchange*, Vol. 1, No. 1.
4. Neary, Michael (2012) [Teaching politically: policy, pedagogy and the new European university](#). *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 10 (2). pp. 233-257.
5. Neary, Michael (2012) [Student as producer: an institution of the common? \[or how to recover communist/revolutionary science\]](#). *Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences*.
6. Neary, Mike and Amsler, Sarah (2012) [Occupy: a new pedagogy of space and time?](#) *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 10 (2)
7. Neary, Mike (2013) [Student as Producer: a pedagogy for the avant-garde; or, how to revolutionary teachers teach? \[v2\]](#) Paper presented at *Walter Benjamin, Pedagogy and the Politics of Youth conference*, London. [unpublished]

**1a. Neary, Mike (2008) [Student as producer – risk, responsibility and rich learning environments in higher education](#). Articles from the *Learning and Teaching Conference 2008*. Eds: Joyce Barlow, Gail Louw, Mark Price. University of Brighton Press. Centre for Learning and Teaching**

**1b. Neary, Mike and Winn, Joss (2009) [The student as producer: reinventing the student experience in higher education](#). In: *The future of higher education: policy, pedagogy and the student experience*. Eds. Bell, Neary, Stevenson. Continuum, London, pp. 192-210. ((This book chapter generously names me as co-author. My actual input was confined to the last section on the 'General Intellect' and the Conclusion, both of which we worked on together.))**

This book chapter (and keynote from the same period) lays out the rationale for Student as Producer. It draws on the work of a number of other scholars of higher education who, despite the apparent success of modern universities, have identified an 'apartheid' between student and teacher (Brew); the intensification and regularisation of academic labour (De Angelis and Harvie; Nelson and Watt); and the reconfiguration of the student as a consumer (Boden and Epstein), who is increasingly under-employed, unemployed and indebted (Bonfeld; Warmington). The chapter reviews the changing 'nature and purpose' of the modern university and draws parallels with the ideas of Wilhelm Humbolt in the early 19th century and more recent work by Robbins in the 1960s, and Boyer in the 1990s, who to different degrees argued for the reconfiguration of teaching and research and in doing so, a reconfiguration in the relationship between teacher and student. In particular, Humbolt argued that lectures should be dropped in favour of seminars, that students should be encouraged to think speculatively in close contact with their tutors with an emphasis on Socratic dialogue, flexible curricula and the inclusion of students in research groups.

Similarly, in a keynote talk from 2008, Neary refers to a formative Student as Producer project called the Reinvention Centre. He describes this as an attempt "to re-create the notion of an inclusive academic community where learners, teachers and reserchers are all seen as scholars in common pursuit of knowledge." ([Neary 2008: 8](#)) For Humbolt, this was a political project intended to guarantee academic freedom and the separation of the university from the regulation of the state. In doing so, a 'Culture State' would be established by a cultured population able to think and act as autonomous citizens.

The middle section of the chapter discusses the work of Walter Benjamin, who wrote an essay titled 'Author as Producer', from which 'Student as Producer' was conceived. Neary discusses this essay and an earlier work titled 'Life of Students' and from these develops the main theoretical argument for his own project. Like Humbolt, Benjamin argued against the lecture format and to a large extent seminars, too, arguing that "it makes little difference whether the speakers are teachers or students." (Benjamin 1915: 42) In a key passage for Neary, Benjamin states that:

"The organisation of the university has ceased to be grounded in the productivity of its students, as its founders envisaged. They thought of student as teachers and learners at the same time; as teachers because productivity implies complete

autonomy, with their minds fixed on science instead of the instructors' personality." (Benjamin 1915: 42)

In his later essay, 'Author as Producer', Benjamin was concerned with the relationship between author and their readers and how to actively intervene in "the living context of social relations" so as to create progressive social transformation:

"[For]... the author who has reflected deeply on the conditions of present day production ... His work will never be merely work on products but always, at the same time, work on the means of production. In other words his products must have, over and above their character as works, an organising function." (Benjamin 1934: 777)

For both Benjamin and Neary, that 'organising function' is the

"social relation of capitalist production, defined through the logic of waged labour and private property. For Benjamin, the imperatives of capitalist production had led to the horrors of Bolshevism and Fascism. Therefore, any alternative form of the organising principle must be antithetical to these extreme types of political systems and be set up on the basis of democracy, collectivism, respective for legitimate authority, mutuality and social justice." (Neary and Winn 2009: 133)

Neary highlights how for Benjamin, this organising principle would involve the reader (i.e. the 'consumer') in the process of production so that they are not only "the producers of artistic content, but collaborators of their own social world; the subjects rather than the objects of history." (Neary and Winn 2009: 133-4) Benjamin argued that

"What matters is the exemplary character of production, which is able, first, to induce other producers to produce, and, second, to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers - that is, readers or spectators, into collaborators." (Benjamin 1934: 777)

In his keynote written around the same time as the book chapter, Neary argues that

"it is possible to apply Benjamin's thinking to the context of the contemporary university by applying it to the dichotomous relationship between teaching and research, as embodied in the student and the teacher; and, using Benjamin's formulation, to reinvent the relationship between teacher and student, so that the student is not simply consuming knowledge that is transmitted to them but becomes actively engaged in the production of knowledge with academic content and value." (2008: 8)

How is this achieved in the context of a modern university?

"By providing more research and research-like experiences as an integral part of the undergraduate experience. In doing this students can become productive collaborators in the research culture of the departments of their universities. This is particularly important in a context within which students have been forced into the position of consumers in a service culture that many academics regard as antithetical to the academic project of the university." (Neary 2008: 9)

This was said in the context of a keynote speech at a learning and teaching conference. In its postscript, Neary refers to the wider context in which Student as Producer is being developed as a response to i.e. the global ecological crisis and the related worldwide financial crisis. He refers to the work of David Orr to appeal for a more holistic, anti-disciplinary experience of the academic project; one which encourages students and teachers to see things in their entirety.

"My point, like David Orr, is that we need to fundamentally rethink the nature of academic enquiry. As academics working in universities, we can start by looking at ways in which we engage with the world, and, in particular, how we engage with our students. By taking more progressive risks with our teaching and learning, and by treating students as responsible members of our academic community we might be able to create not just richer learning environments, but also to invent new approaches to some of the very real emergencies that are confronting both the university and society as a whole." (Neary 2008: 12)

In the book chapter, Neary argues that the 'organising function' of the modern university is "the law of market economics, redefined in the contemporary period as the neo-liberal university." (Neary and Winn 2009: 134) He then asks, "what kind of alternative organising principles might be invented as progressive alternatives." (*ibid*)

The last section of the chapter points towards such alternatives, drawing on Marx's idea of the 'general intellect' and its reformulation by later Marxist writers as 'mass intellectuality'. The point in this section is to identify in his notebooks, how Marx saw the development of knowledge become objectified as fixed capital (i.e. automated machinery, transportation, communication networks) such that "general social knowledge becomes a direct form of production." (Marx 1993: 706) The form of labour (i.e. 'general intellect') that produces such knowledge

"is increasingly a social, co-operative endeavour. As we come to realise this, the organising principles on which capitalist production is based, wage labour and private ownership, become increasingly irrelevant." (Neary and Winn 2009: 135)

Drawing on the work of Dyer-Witford (1999), we argue that in fact, the 'general intellect' has not become 'general' at all but, rather, "structured and hierarchical. Knowledge remains contained, under control and restricted to the privileged under the logic of the information society and the knowledge economy." (Neary and Winn 2009: 135) In the university, as Noble has argued, attempts are continuously made to attempt a "systematic conversion of intellectual activity into intellectual capital, and, hence, intellectual property." (Noble 1998)

The notion of 'mass intellectuality' is proposed as a more current reformulation of Marx's 'general intellect'.

"This is the social body of knowledge, modes of communication and co-operation and even ethical preoccupations which both supports and transgresses the operation of a high-tech economy. It is knowledge created by and contained within the university, but is the 'general social knowledge' embodied by and increasingly available to all of us. The quintessential expression of this general social knowledge or 'mass intellect' is, Dyer-Witford argues, the Internet." (Neary and Winn 2009: 135-6)

Dyer-Witheford points to 'hacking' as the original creative source of the Internet and

"despite all the admitted banalities and exclusivities of Internet practice, one at moments glimpses in its global exchanges what seems like the formation of a polycentric, communicatively-connected, collective intelligence." (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 498)

We then argue that the most recent expression of 'mass intellectuality' is the emergence of the Free Culture movement which has grown out of hacker culture within the university context (cf. Winn 2013) and used traditional property law (e.g. copyright) in a subversive way so as to guarantee a type of 'common ownership' of knowledge and its derivative products. We argue that

"the Free Culture movement, based upon collaboratively producing intellectual and creative works under Creative Commons style licenses, therefore resists the restrictive control of traditional forms of legal protection designed to support the notion of 'intellectual property' and the 'permissive' economic model by which capital trades in such questionable assets. (Lessig 2004) This enables both students and academics to do more than restructure curricula and pedagogy, but to challenge the very organising principles upon which academic knowledge is currently being transmitted and produced. In this way, the student can truly be seen as a producer of knowledge." (Neary and Winn 2009: 136-7)

We conclude:

"Through these efforts, the organizing principle is being redressed creating a teaching, learning and research environment which promotes the values of openness and creativity, engenders equity among academics and students and thereby offers an opportunity to reconstruct the student as producer and academic as collaborator. In an environment where knowledge is free, the roles of the educator and the institution necessarily change. The educator is no longer a delivery vehicle and the institution becomes a landscape for the production and construction of a mass intellect in commons." (Neary and Winn 2009: 138)

This book chapter was the foundational (and most highly cited) rationale and theorisation of Student as Producer. It points towards a number of key themes that Neary goes on to critique and develop in later articles and which I want to draw out in my consideration of the 'co-operative university':

- The political origins and formulation of Student as Producer as a negative critique of capitalist social relations
- The collaborative relationship between teacher and student, which leads to the conversion of consumers/students into producers/teachers
- The emphasis, not only on the qualitative nature of the product, but also the process and means of production as the 'organising function' of social relations that are antithetical to the organising principles of capitalist social relations (i.e. private property and waged labour)
- The evidence, as seen in the development and uses of the Internet (i.e. hacking and the Free Culture movement), of the productive capacity of social, co-operative labour to directly challenge waged labour and private property

- The potential for a new form of social knowledge (i.e. mass intellectuality) to produce new organisational forms

In the conclusion of this book chapter, we said that

"further attention needs to be paid to the framework by which the student as producer contributes towards mass intellectuality. This requires academics and students to do more than simply redesign their curricula, but go further and redesign the organising principle (i.e. private property and waged labour), through which academic knowledge is currently produced."

In my consideration of the worker co-operative as a suitable organisational form for a university, I am attempting to elaborate such a 'framework'. A problem with this early book chapter, which Neary addressed more recently, is that we were too optimistic in pointing to the Internet as an expression of an emancipatory form of 'mass intellectuality' and we neglected to apply a negative critique to the seductiveness of Dyer-Withford's identification of the "formation of a polycentric, communicatively-connected, collective intelligence." Neither mass intellectuality nor the Internet, as "its quintessential expression" provides the political basis for an organisational form for the social production of knowledge which challenges capital. It can, of course, inspire and enable new institutional forms, but it is not itself such a form. As I have [noted before](#), "the logic of the Internet is administration by protocol." Galloway was correct to argue that "Protocol is a type of controlling logic that operates outside institutional, governmental, and corporate power; although it has important ties to all three." (Galloway, 2004: 122)

Along similar lines, Neary later develops his work on Student as Producer in favour of bureaucracy over the participatory culture of social networks, influenced in part by Kreiss, Finn and Turner's paper on [The Limits of Peer Production](#). In that article, drawing on Max Weber and Paul du Gay, they "challenge the consensus around peer production and argue that the form is not bringing about the idealized society many consensus scholars suggest." (244) I will return to this [later](#) when discussing Neary's more recent work. The point here is that Marx's 'general intellect' and later Marxist's 'mass intellectuality' are not amoral nor post-political categories but rather they depend on the development of an 'organising function' and a 'framework' through which they can be expressed and protected. For Neary, one such framework is Student as Producer and in our more recent work through the [Social Science Centre](#), its complementary institutional expression points towards the worker co-operative. It is necessarily a *transitional* organisational form, but still one in which the concept and theory of Student as Producer can be more fully realised as an experiment in human emancipation and the discovery of a new form of social wealth.

In future notes, I will continue to look at Neary's more recent work in light of how it might help us think about the relevance and usefulness (or not) of the worker co-operative form for higher education, a form which might help constitute a framework where the student becomes 'the subject of history rather than the object' and through which 'humanity becomes the project rather than the resource'.

"We acknowledge the cooperative movement as one of the transforming forces of the present society based upon class antagonism. Its great merit is to practically show that

the present pauperising, and despotic system of the subordination of labour to capital can be superseded by the republican and beneficent system of the association of free and equal producers... We recommend to the working men to embark in *co-operative production* rather than in *co-operative stores*. The latter touch but the surface of the present economical system, the former attacks its groundwork." (Marx, [1866](#))



**2. Neary, Mike and Hagyard, Andy (2010) [Pedagogy of Excess: An Alternative Political Economy of Student Life](#). In: *The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer*. Eds. Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon. Routledge, Abingdon, pp. 209-224.**

In this book chapter, Neary argues for "an alternative political economy of student life" and extends the concept of Student as Producer to that of the 'Pedagogy of Excess'. Much of this chapter can be read as both a critique of the earlier chapter and its direct development.

He begins with the premise that "re-engineering the forms in which teaching and research are configured in universities has the potential to transform the nature of higher education in ways that undermine the current consumerist and marketised model." ((Note that I currently do not have access to the original page numbers for this book chapter)) In contrast and in opposition to Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), who was the historical source of inspiration for the earlier book chapter, here Neary focuses on the more recent radical history of higher education and the 1968 student protests. Now, Neary intentionally distances himself from the "laissez-faire liberalism that underpinned Humboldt's political project to create the University of Berlin in 1810", stating that "if carried through by contemporary universities, [it] will make the appearance of the student as consumer more rather than less likely."

This chapter begins by asking:

"Is it possible to create a radical pedagogy based on the links between teaching and research to counteract the identity of the student as consumer? A radical pedagogy can be designed around another version of the student life, based on events in Paris, France in 1968. By making connections between the university and its own political history, and by developing a pedagogy that connects teaching and research at the undergraduate level, it is possible that a radical new pedagogy might emerge. It is the possibility of this new radical pedagogy that is described as a pedagogy of excess."

The significance of this chapter to my question about the suitability of the worker co-operative form is the importance it places on recovering the radical political history of higher education and the importance of students' looking "beyond their own self-interest and identity as students." For Neary, "this academic activity can include exploring the origins of – as well as progressive responses to - the general social crisis out of which the attempt to reduce students to the identity of consumer is derived." It can be aligned with at least one of the activities of the co-operative movement identified by Facer (2011), that is "*Teaching about co-operation* – making visible the alternatives and challenging the social and economic status quo." It also aligns with Kasmir's emphasis placed on recovering the importance of politics in worker co-operatives and arguing that "if workplace democracy is to be genuine, it seems that it must be premised on activism." In this book chapter, Neary is appealing to teachers and students to become *activists* and connect their current work with "their own radical political history."

"The pedagogy of excess emerges in a period that has seen strikes by academics and students around the world against the proposed marketisation of their higher education system (Klimke and Scharloth 2008). The pedagogy of excess does not

look for a repeat of 1968, but seeks to develop a critical academic project that builds on the radical political history of the university, inside and outside of the curriculum – in and against the current version of higher education."

Notably here, the work of academics and students (i.e. 'scholars') is extended beyond the curriculum and beyond simply the involvement of students in the research culture of university departments. Neary argues that it is necessary for radical scholars to work "in and against the current version of higher education." As this chapter was being written, students and academics were responding to the austerity measures imposed following the Great Recession and in advance of the rise in tuition fees and further marketisation of higher education in the UK. Events were running ahead attempts to theorise what was happening.

The book chapter covers some of the same ground as the 2009 chapter. Neary makes clear that Humboldt's "impeccable liberal credentials make him no figure on which to base a critique of the concept of student as consumer."

"At the core of liberal theory lies the fundamental principles of consumerism: the concept of the individual freedom and pursuit of self interest in a context which promotes the self organizing nature of markets and denigrates state intervention. Schemes based on liberal social theory are, therefore more likely to move higher education further in the direction of marketisation (Zizek 2009)."

Having abandoned Humboldt's liberalism, the chapter draws on the protests of 1968 and the subsequent work of scholars to identify the significance of the events. Neary refers to issues such as

"the relationships between the student and the teacher, the relationship between intellectual and manual labour, the relationship between the student movement and other social movements and the relationship between the university and its external environment. At the centre of these issues lies the question about the representation and production of knowledge, raising the question about the nature and role of the university, suggesting that a new form of university is possible based on democracy, self-management and social justice."

In addition to the earlier influence of Walter Benjamin, Neary draws on other Marxist writers: Jean-Paul Satre, Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord and in particular, Badiou's description of the events of 1968 as:

"something that arrives in excess, beyond all calculation... that proposes an entirely new system of thought" and which "led infinitely farther than their education... would have allowed them to foresee; an event in the sense of real participation... altering the course of their lives."

Later in the chapter, Neary argues that a "fully developed pedagogy of excess would look beyond student issues, to matters of more general social concern, 'common affairs', in which the interests of students are not the main issue." The events of 1968 provided the context for a new subjectivity of students to emerge, one which is still active today as seen by the student protests and occupations over the last few years. The events of 1968 gave rise to

"the emergence of a new form of university: democratic (Scott 1995), postmodern (Lyotard 1999 ) and multiverse (Kerr 1963). The key feature of this new type of university was that universities had now become sites of contested space, not only for the control and management of the higher education, but in relation to the meaning and purpose of knowledge itself (Delanty 2001)."

During this time, students were engaged in the design of curricula and forms of assessment and "through the proliferation of independent study programmes, a recognition that undergraduate students were capable of creating knowledge of real academic content and value (Pratt 1997)."

By now, 'Student as Producer' has been extended to a 'Pedagogy of Excess', both synonymous with a radical, negative critique of the modern university which is grounded in the historical struggle of students and academics, and always suggestive of a "framework" through which "the organising principle for institutions of higher education as a whole" can be re-engineered. The theoretical basis for that framework began with Walter Benjamin and is further developed through Marx's labour theory of value, with "the category of excess... offered 'as an alternative to the rationalist calculation of capitalist exchange' (Kosalka 1999)."

Excess is identified as 'surplus' and the way by which a society handles its surplus product. Neary argues that the acts of giving, sharing, gifting, and generosity are forms of distributing surplus that are "instantly recognisable as being at the core of the academic enterprise (Fuller 2002)." Yet, following Marx, Benjamin and Debord, "the key to the transformation of capitalist social relations lies not in the politics of consumption, but the politics of production". An identification of 'excess' with the process of production allows Neary to argue that 'excess' can be theorised most adequately through Marx's theory of surplus value, grounded in the process of capitalist production, where surplus value (profit) is created by the exploitation of waged labour. "In the world of capitalist work excess equals exploitation."

In the face of Fascism and Bolshevism, Benjamin saw the urgent need to turn the consumer into producer. In the face of ecological crisis and global recession, Neary argues that higher education's direct role in "the development of technology, science and the production of knowledge" (i.e. the production of surplus value) requires the student-academic to reassert herself as "both the producer and personification of this form of knowledge". The academic labour of both teachers and students is the

"foundation for a pedagogy of excess, whose main learning point is that the production of surplus value through the politics of oppression, scarcity, poverty and violence, is to adequate to the sustainability of human life. The pedagogy of excess is a learning process which promotes the creative capacity of people in accordance with their needs as social individuals (Kay and Mott 1982)."

In the final section of the book chapter, Neary argues that a pedagogy of excess would attempt to overcome the "fragmented agendas" of existing curricula and be re-framed as "a course of action" which grounds the concept of excess in "an alternative political economy, involving a critique not simply of the politics of consumption but the politics of production." That is, the organising principle for the entire institution of higher education would be negotiated through the political struggle of academic

labour, which finds its creative expression through new research projects of social value, rather than surplus value.

In this book chapter, Neary clearly distances Student as Producer from any liberal historical precedent and instead traces its practical expression back to the 1968 student protests and its theoretical basis in Marx's labour theory of value. There are a number of points that are worth drawing out from this as we consider the suitability of the worker co-operative form for a university:

- A radical pedagogy that is adequate to the challenges facing humanity must be grounded in the politics of production rather than distribution/consumption. It requires the reorganisation of intellectual and manual labour, rather than its continued division.
- The modern university is fragmented, through its division of labour (hierarchies of management; management vs. academics), division of disciplines, division between teachers and students, and in its current form, cannot produce the knowledge required for the sustainability of human life.
- The production of new forms of knowledge requires a 'framework' (not a blueprint) that is negotiated through the political struggle of student-teacher-academics (i.e. 'scholars').
- Higher education must be politicised, or rather, the politics of higher education must be made apparent.
- The purpose of higher education is not the production of students for waged labour (i.e. employment), but rather the production of knowledge appropriate to the needs of humanity (in the face of emergency).
- Research is demystified as "work anyone can do". Higher education is therefore open, inclusive and accessible.
- All research should be informed by its own radical history. This does not simply apply to the Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, but also the theoretical and applied Sciences which have their own radical history e.g. [Engineers for Change](#) and [Science for the People](#). One way to connect (or dissolve) traditional disciplines is through their shared radical histories.

**3. Neary, Mike (2010) [Student as Producer: a pedagogy for the avant-garde; or, how do revolutionary teachers teach?](#) Learning Exchange, Vol. 1, No. 1.**

This 2010 article is significant for its focus on the work of the Russian constructivist and "revolutionary scientist", Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky is introduced as an influence on Walter Benjamin who, although providing the initial inspiration for Student as Producer, Neary states that Benjamin's "pedagogical theory was not fully schematised. In order to develop his approach further it is necessary to explore more deeply into the work on which his own formulations were derived." ((There are no page numbers in this article.))

Neary argues that Vygotsky's science was based on Marx's historical materialist theory of capitalist society.

"Marx insists that all forms of social existence, e.g., identity, consciousness and class, are grounded in the social context out of which they are derived. For Marx the individual is the 'social individual', i.e., the form that individuality takes is not separate from the form of society, so that it makes no sense to talk about 'individuals' in abstraction from the social world." (Neary 2010)

Vygotsky understood labour to be

"the fundamental organisational principle for the social and natural world, and is responsible for the consequences that flow from these arrangements, including the development of intellectual thought (Newman and Holzman, 1993). At the same time, it was seen that the barrier to intellectual development lay in the way in which industrial production was organised within the capitalist factory. Vygotsky was interested in how to restore the connection between intellectual and manual labour through the process of education, in ways that would further the development of human intellectuality." (Neary 2010).

Neary draws on Vygotsky to further argue for the role of the student to be connected to their social context; their relationship with the teacher to be reconfigured so that "the student educates himself... the real secret of education lies in *not* teaching" (Vygotsky 1997) Intellectual development should "be associated with practical tasks" (Neary 2010) and the lecture format "mirrors the alienating labour process of the capitalist factory." (Neary 2010)

For Vygotsky, then Benjamin, and most recently Neary, the social context of learning must be understood as its "own process of production" In the production of knowledge, the student should not simply be consuming someone else's labour but rather actively "involved with the entire process of production of knowing... Knowing and meaning are created, and the student is remade, by reconnecting intellectual and manual labour." (Neary 2010)

"For Vygotsky, in the factory of the future the labour process takes on a pedagogic function and the student merges with the worker to become: the student-worker; the pedagogic function does not teach the student-worker various skills, but rather enables the student-worker to understand the overall scheme of the production process, within which they will find their own place and meaning, as a process of

learning and development. By situating themselves within a pedagogical process, whose meaning and purpose they understand, the production of knowledge is revealed not as something that is already discovered and static ( i.e., dogmatism), but is uncovered as ‘ the dynamic context of its own appearance’ (Vygotsky, 1997)." (Neary 2010)

Out of the social context, the student is transformed "into the subject rather than the object of history" and therefore social history is remade, too. Thus, the point of education is not to create an 'educated' individual who meets a set of 'learning outcomes', but to critically situate the subjectivity of the individual in "the politics and ethics of the social system out of which the education process is derived ... 'education is not about adaptation to an already existing environment, but the creation of an adult who will look beyond his own environment'. (Vygotsky 1997)." (Neary 2010)

"Vygotsky argues that a progressive educational system must be based on a progressive social context, and any attempt to construct educational ideas in a society within which its social contradictions are not resolved is a ‘utopian dream’ (Vygotsky, 1997). The point is that pedagogy can not be ‘politically indifferent’ and that education follows a basic pattern depending on its dominant social class (Vygotsky, 1997)." (Neary 2010)

Such education is practised through teachers and students collaborating in the process of education. The teacher "guides" the student, who acts as an "investigator" in their own educational process, thereby overcoming the alienation of the traditional forms of received learning.

Drawing on later work by Vygotsky, Neary argues that Student as Producer is, by its very nature, a ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development), that is,

"not a place at all; it is an activity, an historical unity, the essential socialness of human beings expressed as revolutionary activity (Newman and Holzman 1993). The point of ZPD is to establish a space where students perform beyond themselves so as to make history, not simply knowledge . It is a vision for a new society and a new human being (Newman and Holzman, 1993). In Vygotsky’s ZPD all science is revolutionary science and all teaching is revolutionary teaching: in other words, a pedagogy for the avant- garde." (Neary 2010)

Despite Vygotsky's unrealised optimism, Neary reaffirms the "possibility for human intellectual development if the forces of technology and science can be reprogrammed to construct an alternative and sustainable social world within which humanity is the project rather than the resource." Similar examples are given to those we provided in the 2009 book chapter. A version of Vygotsky's work has been accepted in the mainstream of educational theory and practice. "The issue now becomes what is the extent to which Vygotsky’s work can be re-radicalised and turned to the purpose of social revolution for which it was intended." (Neary 2010)

From this, it is clear that the purpose of Student as Producer is nothing less than "social revolution" The production of knowledge is at the heart of the production of science and technology and therefore the reproduction of human social life. The separation of intellectual and manual labour is found in the separation of the student

from the processes of research and the separation of the teacher, confined to their subject disciplines, from "the total institutional process of the production of knowledge and meaning." (Neary 2010) In contrast to this, Student as Producer, while a critique of the modern university, is also articulated as its re-constitution, a collective effort by "the academic community to design an alternative model for the university, as a rehearsal for an alternative social world in which it might subsist." (Neary 2010)

"By creating alternative models for higher education Student as Producer is experimenting with the history of the idea of university, drawing on the heritage of higher learning. The purpose is to reinvent the contemporary significance of students and the university so as to provide, as Benjamin (1996) might have it, a real time example of the highest metaphysical state of history." (Neary 2010)

Compared to the original 2009 book chapter and its focus on Humboldt, the 2010 book chapter above drew inspiration from the more contemporary events of 1968 and recent student protests. By contrast, this latter article goes deeper into the history of revolutionary scientific and educational theory to discover and recover the origins of Benjamin's argument in his essay 'Author as Producer', the foundational text for Neary's Student as Producer project. So far, he has established a genealogy starting with Marx, then Vgotsky, Benjamin and then later Marxist writers such as Debord, Lefebvre and Badiou. In a [related conference paper](#), Neary critiques the 'productivism' of Benjamin and Vygotsky through the work of two other Marxist academics, Moishe Postone and John Holloway. Here, I want to briefly summarise the significance of this article, which given the very short life of the journal it was published in, is in danger of being overlooked. The paper underlines the following, which is of relevance to the development of a 'co-operative university':

- The basis for transforming institutions of higher education is the transformation of the role of the student. For Vygotsky, the student becomes the student-worker.
- The role of the student is not simply that of becoming a 'collaborator', or the learner of skills, but as an active contributor to the labour process of the university (i.e. the production of knowledge), within which they find their own purpose and meaning.
- The division of intellectual and manual labour is overcome through the recognition of education as a form of productive labour itself.
- By revealing the organising principle of knowledge production, the university becomes grounded in the productivity of its students.
- Through the transformation of the student and subsequent transformation of the organising principle of higher education, science and technology can be employed to transform society. The student becomes the subject rather than object of history - they make history - and humanity becomes the project rather than the resource.
- Teaching begins from the student's experience in a particular social context "so that the student teaches themselves" and are no longer alienated from the production of knowledge. So that students "recognise themselves in a world of their own design." (Debord)

**4. Neary, Michael (2012) *Teaching politically: policy, pedagogy and the new European university*. Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies, 10 (2). pp. 233-257.**

In 'Teaching Politically', Neary is largely concerned with discussing the work of the Edu-Factory collective. Student as Producer is aligned with the work of Edu-Factory and discussed briefly as one of two "radical pedagogic projects" illustrative of "a movement to create a radical new model of higher education in Europe and beyond". Here, I will focus only on what is written about Student as Producer.

Student as Producer is aligned with the work of the movement through "the way in which it seeks to ground its theoretical concepts with real practical action" and because it "demonstrates aspects of militant/co-research and self-education as a form of praxis." (Neary 2012: 245)

Student as Producer is described as working on two levels:

1. At one level it is a curriculum development model across all subjects areas at the University of Lincoln
2. At another more foundational level it has the ambition of reinventing the European University as a radical political project

Neary summarises how Student as Producer was conceived and developed and describes it as a "programme" that

"has been developed with full consultation between academics and student groups. This programme is being embedded within the university's infrastructure, including bureaucratic processes and procedures, strategies for educational technologies, the design of teaching and learning spaces as well as by intensifying levels of student engagement (<http://studentasprodcer.lincoln.ac.uk>). The programme is under a constant critical review to prevent it becoming another managerialist imperative and to avoid recuperation (Neary and Haggard 2010)... The success of Student as Producer will be the extent to which it manages to transform the concept and practice of higher education." (Neary 2012: 247)

Neary makes the claim that "the institutional form of the University of Lincoln is being transformed by re-engineering the relationship between teaching and research." (*ibid*) To what extent this transformation is actually happening is of lesser interest to me than the underlying point in this paper, that the "institutional form" for "a radical new model of higher education in Europe and beyond" should be derived, first of all, from a political, pedagogical project that aims

"to enable students to see themselves as subjects rather than objects of history, as teachers, writers and performers, rather than recipients of knowledge, and be able to recognise themselves in a social world of their own design." (*ibid*)

That is, the institutional form should not determine the design of curricula or the pedagogic relationship between teacher and student, but rather it should be an expression of it. This again reminds me of one of the concluding points made by [Kasmir](#) in her book about the "myth" of the Mondragon worker co-operative in Spain,



that we should "be skeptical of models that make business forms rather than people the agents of social change." (p.196) By contrast, I would argue that the neoliberal form of mainstream universities is being imposed on the design of curricula and choice of pedagogical methods as can be seen in the course design and validation processes, the procurement of technologies and use of data, the imposition of an 'employability' agenda, and so on. Student as Producer is an attempt to counter this (in a later paper, Neary refers to it as "an impossible project") and at the same time suggests that simply redesigning curricula and having students working alongside academics on research projects is insufficient to effect radical change. What is required is the emergence of an institutional form which adequately expresses the radical aspirations of academics and students who see themselves as subjects rather than objects of history: the worker co-operative, perhaps?

**5. Neary, Michael (2012) *Student as producer: an institution of the common? [or how to recover communist/revolutionary science]*. Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences.**

This is a key paper in Neary's theoretical development of Student as Producer. In it, he again engages with the work of the Edu-Factory collective, or rather a recent book by one of its main spokespersons, Giggi Roggero, called *The production of living knowledge: the crisis of the university and the transformation of labour in Europe and North America*. Neary also draws on Paul du Gay's work *In praise of bureaucracy*, which I have found helpful in my exploration of whether the worker co-operative form is suited to higher education. Finally, the paper also explores the history of "revolutionary science", connecting the 19th c. work of Marx to the work of 13th c. Bishop of Lincoln and first vice-chancellor of Oxford, Robert Grosseteste.

Whereas in an earlier paper, Neary distanced himself from the liberalism of Humboldt, he begins this paper by stating that

"Student as Producer is reclaiming the progressive vision of German Idealists in the 19th century for a liberal humanist university as a site for speculative philosophy, ie a social encyclopaedia of knowledge at the level of society (Lyotard 1984). Student as Producer is grounding this 'ideal of the university' in the radicalised student-worker uprisings of 1968 and the ways in which this student protest has re-emerged at the beginning of the 21st century against the privatisation of university life, now packaged as the 'student experience' where the most predominant imperative is employability." (Neary 2012: 2)

He argues that the recent privatisation of higher education in the UK is "nothing less than a reactionary political act of intellectual vandalism and a declaration of war against critique." (*ibid*)

"The purpose of Student as Producer is not to maintain higher education as a social science fiction about the struggle over the false dichotomy between its public and private function: after all both are complementary forms of capitalist regulation (Neary 2012a). The aim of Student as Producer is to "dissolve" (Holloway 2010) or better still "detonate" (Lefebvre 1991) the social relation of capital out of which the current version of the university is derived (Neary 2012a), so as to recreate the university as a new form of social institution, what Giggi Roggero calls an "institution of the common" (Roggero 2011)." (Neary 2012: 3)

His engagement with Roggero's work is very complementary. In particular, he regards Roggero's chosen method of 'militant enquiry' or 'co-research' as "fundamentally constitutive, where 'the production of knowledge is immediately the production of political subjectivity and the construction of organisation.' (Roggero 2011: 138)". However, he finds Roggero's distinction between "the commons" as a resource emerging out of the natural world and the idea of 'the common' as something that is socially constructed" problematic in the way that it separates the natural and social world. The issue is grounded in Roggero's conception of labour as the radical subject in capitalist society. Conceived as such, labour is reified and its activity constitutes

the social process that produces 'the common', that is "the organization of something that did not exist beforehand, or the new composition of existing elements in a subversive social relationship" (Roggero 2011: 8)."

Neary takes issue with this conception of labour and Roggero's separation of the natural world ('the commons') from the social world ('the common'). He argues that revolutionary science is, quoting Marx, "one science".

"This one science, or communism, does not rely on speculative or philosophical solutions, but is a scientific method of enquiry and reason based on an awareness of the historical development of humanity as the alienation from nature (Foster 2000: 114). This alienation can only be overcome through "the significance of revolutionary practical critical activity" (Marx's theses on Feuerbach, quoted in Foster 2000: 112)." (Neary 2012: 9)

Neary ends his critique of Roggero by relating the "schism" between the natural and social world to the "schism in bourgeois science", reflected in the schism of subject disciplines within the modern university. On this, says Neary, the "key issue for Student as Producer is how the natural and social sciences might be reconnected as a curriculum for practical revolutionary action." (*ibid*)

In contrast, Neary draws inspiration from Paul du Gay's work on bureaucracy in his attempt to counter the understanding of Student as Producer as a "change management project", where students are conceived as "change agents". (Neary 2012: 4)

"change management sets itself firmly against bureaucracy, which is characterised in the change management literature as red tape, procrastination, indecision, big government, the nanny state and a tendency towards indolence (Du Gay 2000)."

The world of change management is epitomised by Drucker's (1993) new role model of labour as the 'knowledge worker' whose necessary but antagonistic form is the 'service worker', both educated persons divided into intellectuals and managers, respectively. Neary argues that the underlying ethic of the 'knowledge economy' and the university as a "knowledge factory" is that of the market and the idea that organisations have to become increasingly entrepreneurial and innovative in order to survive.

In opposition to the imperatives of "change management", Neary explores Paul du Gay's work on bureaucracy as "a set of protocols and processes grounded in a set of morals and ethics that are highly valued in our society" (*ibid*). Following the work of Max Weber, bureaucracy for du Gay is

"a site of substantive ethical domain" (Du Gay 2000: 2) and "a particular ethos ... not only an ensemble of purposes and ideals within a given code of conduct but also ways and means of conducting oneself ... the bureau must be assessed in its own right as a particular moral institution and the ethical attributes of the bureaucrat be viewed as the contingent and often fragile achievements of that socially organised sphere of moral existence" (Du Gay 2000: 4). In this way, the bureaucratic environment

contains its very own rationality and sense of purpose (Du Gay 2000: 75)." (Neary 2012: 4-5)

With this, Neary argues that the "repurposing" of bureaucracy could lead to

"a rational, moral and ethical principle a clear intent to collectively and democratically deconstruct the role of vice-chancellors as the charismatic leaders on whose vision the future prosperity and reputation of the entrepreneurial university appears to depend (Goodall 2009)."

At Lincoln, Student as Producer,

"creates a radical framework for debates and discussion about policy and strategy for teaching and learning across the university, based on a radicalised political vernacular. Given the extent to which the language of managerialism has overwhelmed the discourse of higher education, this is no mean achievement." (Neary 2012: 6)

As such, it is a "subversive" project based on values and ethics that "have not had to be reinvented but are conjured out of the activities of academic workers at Lincoln and elsewhere." It is subversive because it

"starts with a negative critique of higher education based on the dysfunctionality of its core activities, teaching and research, where the priority and status given to research divides institutions, and sets staff and student against each other (Boyer 1990; Brew 2006) This negative critique forms the basis of Student as Producer's attachment to the notion of research-engaged teaching (Jenkins and Healey 2009): re-engineering the relationship between teaching and research so that undergraduates become part of the academic project of the university. This is how subversion works, by using the language and protocols of the enterprise university against itself...

This subversive ethic and academic-valued approach is written into the bureaucratic framework for teaching and learning at the University of Lincoln, through its teaching and learning strategy, and in the documentation for staff and students that shapes the protocols and procedures for quality validation, monitoring and reporting procedures, including the Student as Producer [user guide](#).

The problem is how to maintain subversion in a context in which student as consumer is the operational imperative among providers of higher education. Part of the answer to that question lies in constantly radicalising the practice and principles of Student as Producer to avoid recuperation" (Neary 2012: 7)

The final section of the paper represents one attempt to radicalise Student as Producer through the idea and practice of "one science". Neary presents this by connecting the scientific method of Marx and Grosseteste through the work of Aristotle. Neary describes Grosseteste as "a key figure in the development of the method of experimental science through practical applications and as being central to the creation of the modern university (Southern 1992; McEvoy 2000)." (Neary 2012: 11) The point Neary wants to make here is that the origins of the scientific method were disruptive, subversive, and indeed revolutionary and that they were so because figures

like Grosseteste and Marx did not distinguish between the natural and liberal social sciences (e.g. economics, philosophy, sociology) and each made connections between the inductive and deductive methods of Aristotle. They were fixed on the idea of "one science" which, through the power of abstract thought grounded in the real world, they aimed to discover the "substantive matter" of their respective social worlds i.e. one governed by the Divine and the other by Capital. For Grosseteste, this substantive matter was God as the "divine light" and for Marx, Neary argues, it was found in the concept of 'capital', which he presented as a "unifying logic for the expansion of value". In place of Grosseteste's metaphysics, Marx's historical materialist method discovered capital as "the automatic subject" of human society. Through his exposition of capital, "Marx's most important discovery is that the crisis of capital is the power of humanity reasserting itself and recovering the natural world." (Neary 2012: 12) This is an important point that Neary picks up in a [later paper](#) where he discusses the work of John Holloway in the context of Student as Producer.

Neary ends the paper with a "research question":

"A key point for the students and academics to consider is the extent to which revolutionary science is undermined by a scientific enterprise based not on the development of knowledge but rather the development of academic capitalism (non-revolutionary science). In order to recover the substance of communist revolutionary science, it is necessary to reinvent the ideal of the university on the principles of revolutionary science. How can we redesign the idea of the university to enhance and support this vision of revolutionary science? This is the main point and purpose of Student as Producer." (Neary 2013: 12)

From this paper, we can draw out the following points so as to help determine the institutional form for a university, "reinvented" on the "principles of revolutionary science."

- It is fundamentally a political project. Political subjectivity is "the essential objective reality out of which practical, critical knowledge is derived." The institutional form itself support (i.e. be partisan to) this political project.
- Bureaucracy is valued as a moral and ethical process which does not exist independently of the political project but guards its constitution.
- It exists *for* knowledge and *against* the "knowledge worker".
- It uses the language and protocols of the university subversively (i.e. as a way to 'interoperate' with the neoliberal university, the State, markets, etc.) without taking on its form.
- It recognises that "the production of knowledge is immediately the production of subjectivity and the construction of organisation." (Roggero 2011: 138) The institutional form is therefore constructed from the subjectivity of its members, which is formed through the co-operative, social production of knowledge.
- It attempts to overcome labour in its capitalist form, which is a "fabrication" of the social relations of capitalist production. "Labour, as such, does not exist but is constituted only as a real abstraction." (Neary 2012: 9) The issue for the worker co-operative is to discover a way to practice non-alienated, non-abstract labour. This is at the heart of its research project: the discovery of a new form of social being.

**6. Neary, Mike and Amsler, Sarah (2012) *Occupy: a new pedagogy of space and time?*. Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies, 10 (2)**

In this paper, Neary and Amsler present the ideas and practices of the Occupy movement in terms of its "explicit" pedagogical purpose and intent. In doing so, they formulate Occupy as a prefigurative curricula for the production of a new politics of space and time. They offer Student as Producer and the Social Science Centre, Lincoln, as existing forms of this critical curricula; projects which by altering "the relationships of the production of educational space and time by producing them otherwise... constitute a direct threat to the logics of capital".

Student as Producer is introduced as a project which is not so much concerned with 'student engagement' and 'student satisfaction' but rather "the meaning and purpose of higher education, or 'the idea of the university', as a 'collective intellectual' project (Waquant 2007: 57)." (Neary & Amsler 2012: 108)

In the context of Neary's writing about Student as Producer, the article is important for its critique and development of Lefebvre's argument that the social relations of capitalist production result in the "violence of abstraction", and the source of this violence lies in the production of value experienced in the real abstraction of exchange value as revealed by Marx.

"For Lefebvre, the substance of time-space is Marx's labour theory of value, by which use value is converted into exchange value in a process dominated by both the violence of abstraction and resistance to abstraction, which Lefebvre describes as 'counter-projects'." (Neary & Amsler 2012: 118)

The authors are not satisfied with Lefebvre's argument that the site of resistance to the abstraction of exchange value is in its counterpart: use-value, nor that in contrast to this abstraction, "use value constitutes the only real wealth" (Lefebvre 2008: 341). In essence, the problem for Neary and Amsler is that radical subjectivity is aligned with the production of use-value; that is, 'concrete', 'natural', 'material' wealth. Ultimately, they argue, this is to fetishise the concrete (i.e. use-value) as a form of anti-capitalist resistance. Although widespread, it is a limited theoretical position which in practice

"perpetuates the approach it is attempting to critique ... replicating and repeating struggles in more fragmented forms without posing a fundamental challenge." (Neary & Amsler 2012: 119)

Their argument draws on the work of Moishe Postone, who has argued that this "hypostatization of the concrete" leads to a sense of [helplessness](#):

"The hypostatization of the concrete and the identification of capital with the manifest abstract underlie a form of "anti-capitalism" that seek to overcome the existing social order from the standpoint which actually remains immanent to that order' (Postone 2000: 18)." (Neary & Amsler 2012: 120)

The source of this helplessness can be found in Lefebvre's privileging of use-value over exchange-value, whereas for Marx, Postone, Neary and Amsler, value should be understood as "value in motion": "the explosive contradiction between use-value and exchange/abstract value, in a process of commodification dominated by the violence of abstraction." (Neary & Amsler 2012: 120). Whereas for Lefebvre and other 'anti-capitalists' who hypostatise and fetishise one side of the value-form, here the authors argue that surplus-value, "the substance through which the social universe expands" (*ibid*) can only be "detonated" by over-coming the abstract violence of value through struggle in time and space i.e. "anti-value in motion".

"And so it becomes possible to conceive of radical subjectivity as being located not in use value, but in the production of new forms of critical knowledge in everyday life, or practical reflexivity. Critical practical knowledge is formed from the same social substance as 'anti-value in motion': just as time inheres in space, use value inheres in exchange value, so to does theory inhere in practice as critical reflexivity or living knowledge, including life itself." (*ibid*)

What sets apart 'critical practical knowledge' from the category of use-value is not entirely clear. Earlier in the paper, they say that

"Our purpose is to re-appropriate ('detonate'), 'occupy', these moments of space-time through 'a new pedagogy of space and time', which can be characterised as the production of critical knowledge in everyday life. The basis of this critical knowledge is critical practical reflexivity. Critical practical reflexivity adheres to our space-time formulation in that theory and practice are considered as immanent to each other (Gunn 1989). The essential aspect of critical practical reflexivity is that it questions the validity of its own concepts, which it does by recognising itself as inhering in the practical social world emerging out of, and inseparable from, the society it is attempting to understand. This process is expansive, creating new knowledge and meaning, avoiding circularity and infinite regress: 'good conversations' (Gunn 1989)." (Neary & Amsler 2012: 108)

I take it to mean that the power of "critical practical reflexivity" (i.e. negativity) conceived as political struggle, is that which Marx referred to as 'communism': "the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things" (Marx, 1845) Just as our fetishisation of exchange-value (i.e. money and other 'rights' of equivalence) has led to the social and ecological emergencies of the 21st century, so the fetishisation of its dialectical counterpart, use-value, will lead us to similar [horrors](#). The related production of both must be abolished through the conception of a new form of social being - a new "social universe" - based upon the application of social knowledge produced through a new curriculum, which acts "as a pedagogy of space and time". (Neary & Amsler 2012: 116)

Indeed, following Marx, the authors assert the meaning and purpose of education as the "ruthless critique of all that exists, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be" (Marx 1843). This fundamental approach to the production of knowledge, does not allow for the fetishisation of any social form. It is dynamic, reflexive, "anti-value in motion". (Neary & Amsler 2012: 120)

How can education be constituted in this form? The authors provide the two examples of Student as Producer and, in some ways its development, the Social Science Centre, Lincoln.

Student as Producer is described in terms of its practical implementation at Lincoln and, as is the case of all of Neary's writing on the subject, it is discussed more broadly and deeply in terms of a political project within the "wider social-political crisis defined by the politics of austerity and precarity". It is likened to Occupy in a number of ways (Neary & Amsler 2012: 121), for example: it is "a political, progressive project"; it is inspired by the history of radical politics; it "has links with revolutionary educational projects"; it "is framed within a broad idealistic framework"; it is "grounded within an explicit critical pedagogy"; it "is an anti-curriculum...

"whose substance is not simply teaching and learning but the production of knowledge as a revolutionary political project: 'the theoretical and practical knowledge of social life in the community' (Lefebvre 1969: 155), or 'living knowledge' (Roggoro 2011)." (Neary & Amsler 2012: 121)

Student as Producer is "for the production of new knowledge and not simply as a pedagogical device." (Neary & Amsler 2012: 122) It is a "framework" in which the curriculum is contextualised; "spatial learning landscapes within which teaching is set" and where "students are made aware of the politics of machinic production"; a "horizontal space within which collaborations can multiply." (*ibid*)

In what, I think, is a key passage with which we can contextualise Student as Producer, the authors refer to Merrifield's work on Lefebvre describing the crisis the university is undergoing:

"Abstract space started to paper over the whole world, turning scholars and intellectuals into abstract labour and turning university work into another abstract space. Suddenly free expression and concrete mental labour – the creation and dissemination of critical ideas – increasingly came under the assault from the same commodification Lefebvre was trying to demystify. Suddenly and somehow, intellectual space – academic and ideational space in universities and on the page – had become another neocolony of capitalism, and scholars at once the perpetrators and victims, colonizers and colonized, warders and inmates" (Merrifield 2011: 119). (Neary & Amsler 2012: 123)

It is against this "turning scholars and intellectuals into abstract labour and turning university work into another abstract space" that is at the core of Neary's critical project. As the institutional form of the highest achievements of human knowledge, the university is now occupied by capital, subsumed to the logic of value production, a [means of production](#) through which labour '[performs](#)' against labour, increasingly alienated from its own product: social knowledge, the general intellect, mass intellectuality.

Neary and Amsler want to take the "territorial" project of occupying space and time with critical reflexive knowledge and turn it into an existential project such that we understand ourselves as the university; we *become* the resistance to abstract labour



and its abstract spaces; we become "collective individuals" that exceed the institutional and idealised form of the university:

"The limit of Student as Producer is that the student does not exceed its own institutional and idealised form: 'the idea of the student' (Neary 2010). In order for the student to become more than themselves, the neoliberal university must be dissolved, and reconstituted as another form of 'social knowing' (Neary 2011)." (Neary & Amsler 2012: 124)

The last section of the article discusses the [Social Science Centre, Lincoln \(SSC\)](#), as an attempt "to create a new form of social knowing." (*ibid*) The SSC is "an emerging educational cooperative that aspires to create opportunities for advanced study and research in the social sciences which are both free of charge, and intellectually and politically democratic." (Neary & Amsler 2012: 125) It is a formally constituted co-operative, based on non-hierarchical, democratic principles. It is a "protest" an "experiment" in "dissolving higher education into a form of mass intellectuality" (Neary & Amsler 2012: 126, quoting Hall 2011). It has "radical political aspirations", hoping that "students as scholars become revolutionary social beings within open, socially-driven spaces, rather than becoming institutional agents." (*ibid*) For the authors, the SSC as a nomadic co-operative is not simply an attempt to re-order space and time, but

"to create a radical form of space-time by unleashing the social power of humanity locked up in the commodity- form as a way of appropriating the future as something other than crisis and catastrophe (Neary 2004)." (Neary & Amsler 2012: 127)

Whereas Student as Producer "remains committed to working within and against the existing university system in order to transform it", the SSC,

"although in no way escaping from the institution entirely, seeks to construct spaces, times and relations of learning which are autonomous from the neoliberal university, in opposition to the abstraction of social relations through monetary exchange, and embedded in the everyday life of local communities. Both are ongoing experiments. What resonates between them is an understanding that desires to reinvent the contemporary university for human purposes 'mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space' (Lefebvre 2008: 59), and that the production of such spaces – and times, and relationships, and ways of knowing – is ultimately a political project." (*ibid*)

This article, more than any other by Neary, develops the political, pedagogical project of Student as Producer as a critique not only of "what the university has become", but of how our capacity as social individuals has been occupied by the logic of capital and turned into an alien, anti-social power against humanity. On such terms, what possible institutional form could it take? What does it mean to *be* non-alienated labour, to dissolve the dialectic of both use-value and exchange value, to "create a radical form of space-time by unleashing the social power of humanity locked up in the commodity-form"? (*ibid*) Is the worker co-operative form anywhere *near* adequate for such a project?

- What this article, more than another other by Neary has emphasised, is the need to conceive the neoliberal university as a peculiar expression of commodified space-time. It is an "abstract space" ruled by the logic of abstract labour, whereby the pedagogical relationship between teacher and student is configured for the production of value. An opposing organisational form would seek to overcome the power of these abstractions by, first of all, re-configuring the pedagogical relationship so as to abolish knowledge in its commodity-form (use-value and exchange value).
- Education "cannot be separated from 'life' in institutions." I take this to mean that all aspects of the institution must be understood to be educational or pedagogical. Cleaning the floors, teaching, installing IT, etc. The division of this labour in time and space is conceived holistically and materially as having a pedagogical purpose for society, for humanity, as a whole. All aspects of this co-operative production of knowledge are understood as appropriations of space-time thereby gradually overcoming the logic capital.
- If we "have rather lost control over the form, structure and function of academic knowledge" (Neary & Amsler 2012: 116), worker co-operatives might be a conscious attempt to *assert* control, *constitute* an organisational form, and *define* a different (i.e. democratic, horizontal, consensus-based) social structure for the production of academic knowledge. The SSC is one such experiment.
- If "the space of the university is mobilised for the purposes of production through its commodification, abstracting, converting into exchange value, fetishizing and modularising" (Lefebvre 2008: 338), how can the worker co-operative form resist these imperatives? Is it simply a "diversion" rather than an "appropriation" of a different space and time? ([Egan and Jossa](#) provide a preliminary, though not entirely satisfying, indication).
- Must a worker co-operative for higher education *possess* a physical space in time, or can a new space-time be *constituted* through its legal form and extend to the whole of the "social universe"? If "it's not about possessing territory. Rather it's a matter of increasing the density of communes, of circulation, and of solidarities to the point that territory becomes unreadable, opaque to all authority" (The Invisible Committee, quoted in Neary & Amsler 2012: 123-4), can the worker co-operative form be conceived and constituted existentially and ontologically? That is, how can we *become* the university rather than 'go to university'?
- Student as Producer and the SSC are presented as examples of producing an "appropriate space" for their political objectives. Can the worker co-operative form be employed as an expedient means for the "production of such spaces - and times, and relationships, and ways of knowing"? (Neary & Amsler 2012: 127)

**7. Neary, Mike (2013) Student as Producer: a pedagogy for the avant-garde; or, how to revolutionary teachers teach? [v2] Paper presented at [Walter Benjamin, Pedagogy and the Politics of Youth conference](#), London. [unpublished]**

In the [2010 article of the same title](#), the avant-garde Marxism of Benjamin and Vgotsky is referred to as an "antidote to the dogmatic assumptions of traditional Marxism, as well as the psychologism and the positivism of empirical social science, both of which dominate current research into higher education." (Neary 2010) This later 2013 'v2' conference paper is an attempt to critique the 'productivism' which characterises traditional Marxism and from which even Benjamin and Vygotsky did not escape. Yet key to the work of Benjamin and Vygotsky and subsequently Neary is the transformation of the student into a radical subject, one who understands their central place and purpose in the process of knowledge production. In undertaking this, Neary concludes that

"an important aspect of the fabrication/construction of the radical subject lies in the reappropriation of 'general social knowledge': or, the recovery of 'the idea of the University', as a radically new form of social institution grounded in an historical and materialist pedagogy which can provide the basis for a revolutionary form of teaching." (Neary 2013: 2)

He introduces Student as Producer as a project that works on a number of different levels:

1. A model for curriculum development
2. A framework for while institutional change
3. The reinvention of the 'idea of the university' as a radical political project.

Outwardly, the project "appears quite mundane", as "it involves embedding research and research-like teaching across all aspects of the undergraduate curriculum, so that students become part of the academic culture and practice of the institution." (Neary 2013: 3)

As we have seen from earlier papers, the purpose of Student as Producer extends beyond the routine processes of university life. It is not confrontational but rather, a subversive project, a "negative critique" of higher education that exists within the context of a number of constraints:

1. The labour contract
2. Management structures
3. Government regulation (QAA protocols) around student engagement
4. External social, political and economic crises

Neary draws attention to the work of Benjamin, providing much more insight into the formulation of the original ideas behind Student as Producer. I will not reproduce the passages here, but needless to say, *The Life of Students and Author as Producer* remain key texts for a deep appreciation of Student as Producer, and although it would be going over old ground here, this 2013 conference paper is the clearest expression yet of the relevance of Benjamin to our current moment.

What is new to this paper is Neary's critique of Benjamin and Vygotsky's 'productivism'. Writing the paper for a Benjamin conference, Neary reviews the work of other Benjamin scholars and concludes that while it can be

"rich and revealing... it tends to lack the avant-garde Marxist spirit that informs this crucial period of Benjamin's work: with a tendency for taking on the melancholy and pessimistic characteristics for which Benjamin is renowned." (Neary 2013: 14)

The latter half of the paper is devoted to an engagement with 'avant-garde Marxists' ("by which I mean Marxist scholarship that seeks to get beyond Marx through Marx").

The work of Moishe Postone is introduced and highlighted for the way in which the concept of abstraction (i.e. non-empirical reality), rather than alienation, lies at the centre of his interpretation of Marx:

"This focus on the non-empirical aspect of Marx's theory demonstrates the violence of abstraction, as a real (im)material process of social mediation out of which emerge the repressive structures and institutions of capitalist modernity." (Neary 2013: 16)

Postone undertakes a sustained critique of what he calls the "productivist paradigm" of "traditional Marxism". By this he means the dominant version of Marxism that has affirmed labour (i.e the proletariat/working class) as the revolutionary subject. Postone's critique is against this paradigm, arguing for a critique *of* labour in capitalism. Neary states that,

"he does this by a reconstruction of capitalist forms, including value, abstract labour and capital itself, to reveal them as the outcome of a very determinate set of social relations, grounded in the commodity form. These capitalist forms include the apparently independent structures through which capitalist modernity is regulated: money and the state. His conclusion is that post-capitalist communist society is not the realisation of labour, but its historical abolition/negation." (Neary 2013: 16)

Postone does not have much to say about Benjamin, but Neary connects the work of both writers through Benjamin's friend, Georg Lukacs, who Postone engages with at length in much of his work. The critical point that Neary draws out is that through Lukacs' influence, Benjamin succumbs to the tendency of traditional Marxism to reify and fetishise the proletariat. Despite their advances on orthodox Marxism, even avant-garde Marxists of the early 20th century like Benjamin and Lukacs, saw revolution "in terms of class relations structured by market economy and private ownership of the means of production." (Postone 2003: 82)

"Relations of domination are understood primarily in terms of class domination and exploitation. Within this general framework, capitalism is characterized by a growing structural contradiction between that society's basic social relations (interpreted as private property and the market) and the forces of production (interpreted as the industrial mode of producing).

The unfolding of this contradiction gives rise to the possibility of a new form of society, understood in terms of collective ownership of the means of production and economic planning in an industrialized context – that is, in terms of a just and consciously regulated mode of distribution adequate to industrial production. The latter is understood as a technical process that, while used by capitalists for their particularistic ends, is intrinsically independent of capitalism; it could be used for the benefit of all members of society." (Postone 2003: 82)

The error of this, argues Postone, is that it offers no explanation for the problems faced by Socialist planners of the 20th century and is forever "in danger of reinventing another form of labour-producing society in less mediated forms: more immediate, violent and terrorist." (Neary 2013: 18)

Benjamin's work in *The Life of Students* and *Author as Producer* is concerned with the process of production and the realisation of historical subjectivity through the consumer assuming the creative role of producer. Drawing his Marxism largely from his friend Lukacs, Benjamin, too, remains stuck in the productivist paradigm.

Postone argues that the subject of the capitalist mode of production is capital itself, the self-valorisation of value; leading to a series of "quasi-independent" processes which subsume all of social life. "Therefore, it is not that the proletariat must be realised; but, rather, that the capital relation in total must be abolished." (Neary 2013: 19) Neary examines what was at the centre of Marx's work and subsequently developed by Lukacs and Postone: the commodity-form. Despite the commodity-form usually being characterised as use-value and exchange-value (i.e. value), Neary states that for Postone, what is key to understanding and overcoming the commodity-form is "the immanent nature of the value relation within which use value and exchange value are integrated. Or, to put it another way: abstract labour is the substance of value which must exist in a concrete form as a use value." (Neary 2013: 19)

Abstract labour exists as a "real abstraction"; that is, a "quasi-independent" abstract determinate force which has real, historical and material outcomes. The 'logic' of capital is a totalising logic whereby labour as the substance of value, takes on abstract forms that reduce humanity to a resource for capital, rather than the project itself. Neary argues that,

"In capitalism human labour is essential for the valorisation process; however, in the process to increase productivity and avoid labour conflict, workers are expelled from work with their knowledge and capacity increasingly automated; this gives rise to intensification of work, unemployment, poverty and technological development; and forms of resistance, including the real possibility of a society of abundance rather than the logic of scarcity on which capitalism is based. Postone argues that the way in which work is organised is the logic of other quasi-independent structures that dominate and oppress workers, e.g., the Capitalist State." (Neary 2013: 19)

The recurrent (i.e. permanent) contradiction and crisis of capitalism generates the possibility for the radical subject to emerge, "not as some intrinsic capacity that is inherent within the proletariat, but as a dynamic negative aspect of the capital relation." (Neary 2013: 19)

"In a society where people have been controlled by the logic of production (Postone 1993: 284), it is likely that a new human emancipation will be a world that is not dominated by production, but a new form of human sociability with a new logic of social wealth. This will be political but the organisational/institutional forms have yet to be decided. Humanity can recover itself through different form of social wealth based on a different concept of usefulness/[uselessness] not defined within the capital relation (362)." (Neary 2013: 19)

The exact nature of this "different form of social wealth" is unknown but likely to be discovered in the "'latent potential' (364) of the use value dimension, no longer constrained and shaped by the value dimension..." not in a utopia of labour, but 'disposable time': non-working time not dominated by the logic of work (leisure) but through a communist concept of wealth and sociability (the social individual)." (Neary 2013: 20)

In light of this, Neary argues that the university can be reconsidered

"not as an autonomous reified institution, but as form of the social relations of capitalist production, whose real nature has emerged out of the crisis ridden and contradictory organisational principle on which it is based: the commodity-form. Using Postone, the University can be seen as a quasi-independent structure that dominates academic labour and students through the way in which it exists as a factory for the commodification of knowledge. The domination of this quasi-independent structure endures only to the extent that 'the latent potential' of the use value relation can be contained, to prevent commodified knowledge being re-functioned as accumulated general social knowledge appropriated by the academic labour and students who have produced it." (Neary 2013: 25)

Neary points to an [article](#) I have written which attempts to show how the university has indeed become a quasi-independent structure gradually subsumed during the 19th and 20th centuries under the logic of capitalist valorisation; a complex expression of the capital relation in the form of the 'industrial-military-academic complex'. Yet within and out of this context, the contradictions of the academy produce the opportunity for the production of knowledge in a non-alienated form; knowledge which 'escapes' the valorisation process of the academy and carries with it intrinsic use-value for the production of a commons.

Following his discussion of Postone, Neary focuses on the work of John Holloway who, like Postone, attempts to "undermine the productivist reading of Marx, while maintaining the centrality of labour as the organising principle of capitalist society. This is done by taking the value/capital relation rather than the relationship between classes as the starting point." (Neary 2013: 20-21)

Whereas Neary draws on Postone to understand capital as an 'abstract determinate logic', he draws on Holloway's "critical reinterpretation of the law of value... as a social theory of everything". (Neary 2013: 21) Both writers, argues Neary, are similar in their negative conception of the commodity-form as expressing the "intrinsic, immanent, contradictory and antagonistic relation between use and exchange value" (*ibid*) With this understanding of the commodity-form, which Marx referred to as the basic 'cell-form' of capitalist society, Neary points to Holloway's focus on the

*necessity* and *potential* for struggle amidst the contradictions and antagonisms of social life. Whereas Postone identifies the problem through theory alone, Holloway provides a practical way forward, or as Neary states:

"In order to find an attempt to connect revolutionary theory with revolutionary practice through a reading of avant-garde Marxism we need to look elsewhere. [i.e. Holloway]" (Neary 2013: 20)

For Holloway, the working-class (i.e. the creative capacity of human labour to produce use-values) "exists as negation of capital... in the form of being denied" (i.e. as abstract labour quantified as exchange value) (*ibid* 21-22). While he shares much of Postone's emphasis on the real presence and force of abstraction in capitalist society as well as his anti-productivist/anti-labour critical standpoint, Holloway asserts the negative (i.e. positive), destructive (i.e. creative) 'logic' that is also intrinsic in the "uncontrollable and uncontainable alien force that extends beyond the act of economic exchange to all aspects of social life". (Neary 2013: 23)

In conclusion, Neary argues that

"Holloway and Postone offer powerful accounts of Marx's revolutionary theory against the productivist paradigm. Writing on the edge of the dialectic, each has a tendency to privilege one side or the other: with Holloway focussing on the concrete aspect of 'doing' and Postone on the power and violence of abstraction. What neither of them can do, is resolve or overcome the contradiction in their writing, because this is not only a theoretical problem, it is always and everywhere intensely practical." (Neary 2013: 24)

The final section of this conference paper reflects on this "intensely practical" problem.

"Student as Producer feels like an impossible project. Almost everything about the current situation makes it impossible, but it is that very impossibility that makes it so necessary. And even in the face of impossibility it feels like much has been achieved. More than could have been imagined. Notably, the fact that the title for an English University's teaching and learning strategy is a ripped off slogan from a 20th century Marxist feels like something of a triumph." (Neary 2013: 25)

Neary goes on to discuss Student as Producer in terms of a "series of techniques": "Re-engineering the process of production"; the creation of "real networks and forms of association"; the "recovery of a moral and ethical principles as academic principles, and linking them to the bureaucratic processes"; and attempting to "astonish academics, students and administrators through a revelation of the radical history of the university." He argues that we must "recognise, with a teacherly attitude, that all of these devices are not merely technical instruments but are derived out of a peculiar social, material and historical process which must be theorised." (Neary 2013: 25) Out of this peculiar, contradictory, antagonistic context, Neary argues that other institutional forms will emerge as a result of struggle that are themselves likely to express the *negation* of the commodity-form. Just as for Marx, capital contains the seed of its overcoming, so the institutional form of the modern university as an expression of capital also contains the revolutionary potential of accumulated

knowledge which resists and [exceeds](#) the current institutional form of higher education.

"The substance which deconstructs or melts this institutional form is the creative doing of academic labour, a form of production based on the rage of academics and students against the capitalist machine; or as Holloway might put it the moment of life against the living death of capitalist production.

In these ways the university is a form of the crisis, which is part of a much wider social political and economic crisis, the outcome of which is far from certain. What happens inside of the University, including Student as Producer, depends on the outcome of this crisis. We should be in no doubt about the increasing economic and political violence that will be inflicted, is already being inflicted, as the crisis intensifies. During this time academics are being/will be forced to assess their own position and to make a choice...

This is a condition in which nothing is fixed: new revolutionary forms are already being cast, even if they might not appear revolutionary at the time." (Neary 2013: 26-7)

The latter 2013 conference paper represents the most developed theoretical statement about Student as Producer and also reflects on the way Student as Producer has been practised both inside formal higher education and outside. since 2007. Starting out from the work of Benjamin, Neary has now found a way to go beyond the productivism implicit in 'Student as Producer' and the helplessness and potential dangers of hypostatising the 'real', the concrete, without a full, critical understanding of the "violence of abstraction". There are a number of points that we can distil from this paper with regards to the suitability of the worker co-operative as an organisation form for a pedagogy based on Student as Producer.

- Early avant-garde Marxists, Vygotsky and Benjamin, provide the pedagogical foundations for Student as Producer, which Neary has developed. With this paper, he argues with reference to Postone and Holloway's work, that the 'productivism' of their Marxist theory should be the subject of critique in developing Student as Producer. This implies that the organisational form for Student as Producer should itself be anti-productivist or post-productivist. A worker co-operative would have to reflect on how this redefines 'work' and how the organisation can be constituted in a way that works towards abolishing exchange-value while asserting use-value as the form of social wealth derived from the concrete labour of its members. It would be a worker co-operative that sought to abolish capitalist work. [Jossa and Egan's writing on Labour Managed Firms](#) are worth returning to.
- The organisational form need to support ways to reconnect intellectual and manual labour and theory and praxis. Learning should take place through 'practical tasks', i.e. research-based learning that is grounded in historical and material conditions.
- The distinction and divide between teachers and students should be addressed through a reconfiguration of the division of labour so as to ensure that both roles contribute according to individual capacity and need in the process of knowledge production. This does not deny that there are people who can teach



and people who can learn from others, but the organisational form can constitute each as 'scholars' (i.e. members) whose needs and capacities are each recognised as part of the knowledge production process.

- Student as Producer is a ZPD and the organisational form should be constituted so as to protect the ZPD and create a 'safe' space for members to contribute creatively.
- The organisational form should support and express a number of reflexive techniques: "Re-engineering the process of production"; the creation of "real networks and forms of association"; the "recovery of a moral and ethical principles as academic principles, and linking them to the bureaucratic processes"; and attempting to "astonish academics, students and administrators through a revelation of the radical history of the university."