

The Economics of Academic "Values"

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Abstract

At first blush, values such as diversity appear to be worth striving for. The question is whether or not such values—which have become increasingly prevalent in university mission statements—are values as such, which is to ask whether they are things of moral worth (*Value*, n.d.), or are something else altogether. My unpopular suspicion leans toward the latter. Personal opinions, of course, are hardly a justification for an impassioned critique, however, my opinions mirror those held by moderate and conservative witnesses to the sociopolitical climate of academia (Pew Research Center, 2017) as well as individuals who would typically be considered classically liberal such as Peter Boghossian (2021). Because of this concordance and in order to understand the constitutive relations of academic production, it becomes necessary to critically examine the nature of institutional values, separate from polemical rhetoric that either seeks to construct a "straw man" of them in order to lay them low or insulate them from outside reproach altogether. Since "diversity" seems to be the chief concern among interested groups both in the academic setting and the world at large, **this article's point of access to the relations of production in academia** will be anchored by a Marxian assessment of diversity as a product of social labour in the academic environment.

Keywords: diversity, commodity, Marx, academia

The Economics of Academic "Values"

Preliminary Remarks

Academia has changed since I first entered the halls of Wilkes University all those years ago. It was a thriving environment devoid of obvious or excessive bureaucratic influence that seemed to me to be an imperfect epicenter of individual development. Since then, academia has seen a revolution of sorts, not necessarily concerning the knowledge and theory it seeks to imbue in its attendees (although, arguably, that has certainly changed as well) but of its essential constitution and structure. Inclusivity, diversity, and equity have, to a greater or lesser extent, become featured concepts of contemporary, Western educational institutions and their respective credos. At first blush, such values as *values* appear to be worth striving for: John Stuart Mill (2004) made that much clear in his quintessential work *On Liberty*, and as a voracious proponent of institutional heterodoxy myself, I cannot think of a goal more valuable than diversity. That being said, the question is whether or not such institutional values *are* values *as such*, which is to ask whether they are things of moral worth (*Value*, n.d.), or if they are something else altogether. My suspicion, a suspicion fueled by my own involvement, interactions, and disputes with various LGBT groups over the course of time, leans toward the latter. Personal opinions, of course, are hardly a good justification for an impassioned critique, however, my opinions mirror concerns held by moderate and conservative thinkers who are attentive to the sociopolitical climate of academia (Pew Research Center, 2017) as well as individuals who would typically be considered classically liberal such as Peter Boghossian (2021). Because of this concordance and in order to understand the constitutive relations of academic production, it becomes necessary to critically examine the nature of institutional values, separate from polemical rhetoric that either seeks to construct a "straw man" of them in order to lay them low or insulate them from outside reproach altogether. And since "diversity" seems to be the chief concern among interested groups both in the academic setting and the world at large, **this article's point of access to the relations of production in academia** will be

anchored by a Marxian assessment of diversity as a product of social labour in the academic environment.

However, seeing as the fundamental claim of this article is that "things" like diversity **take the form of an** immaterial commodity and possibly a form of capital as well,¹ it stands to reason that an explication of the nature of Marxian *commodities* is necessary in order to proceed. Commodities, says Marx (1978a), are external objects of consideration that placate some explicit want or need, not regarding the individual producer—such things merely represent what Marx refers to as *use-value*, or a thing's utility (p. 303)—but in a social sense. According to Marx, in order for a product to "become a commodity [it] must be transferred to another, whom it will serve as a use-value, by means of exchange" (p. 309), and this *exchange-value* represents, to a greater or lesser extent, some mutual equivalence of value between one commodity and another. Marx best illustrates his understanding of the matter in his discussions about the comparative value of a certain amount of linen with respect to a singular coat, a discussion deepened by his analysis of how value is increased through capitalist innovation over time. In short, the value of a commodity extends beyond the *labour-power* accumulated into it by the means of production and individual workers; it encompasses the entirety of the processes of production leading up to the production of the product itself. So in the case of Marx's coat, the value of "the coat" is not simply the value of its production in the moment, but the value of every moment of production leading up to the development of the most current means and worker involved in that singular "coat." The coat *as commodity*, therefore, is both historical and material in essence; the temporal compounding of means and the employment of means by workers into a chronicle of similarly useful items resulting in the most current iteration to be sold at market in the circular pursuit of capital. This, of course, says nothing about the *price* of the commodity, a matter that will be discussed at a later point.

¹ As suggested Vaughn (2018) of Diversity Training University International.

The Commodification of Values

Taken at face value, it is hard to imagine how Marx's understanding of commodities might be applied to notions such as diversity. In its purest form, "diversity" is little more than the synthetic judgment of a *concept* (n.d.), "the immediate object of a thought . . . conceived" and made present entirely in the abstract, and as such would seem to be beyond the realm of Marx's fundamentally materialistic worldview. However, diversity and similar judgments have long-since transcended pure conceptual application, especially in academic institutions. They have become part of social *praxis*, objects of "reflection and action [imposed] upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1993, p. 33), and as such have lost their distinction as mere abstractions by becoming institutional productions or, as I refer to them, *social works*. Here *work* (n.d.) stands in accordance with its Old English root as "something done"; some "discrete act performed by someone"; "actions (whether voluntary or required)" or "that which is made or manufactured, [viz. the] products of labor." It should be noted that specifying any work as *social* in this way undoubtedly comes across as tautological, at least in proximity to Marx's (1978a) philosophy, which specifically concerns itself with "the social element," to wit, the exchange-value of any particular commodity. In comparable fashion, my **definition of** "social work" operates under similar conjugality, albeit conjugality of labour as opposed to conjugal exchange among interlocutory trading partners. As such, a social work like diversity holds twofold social significance: it occurs through an explicitly social process of production, and its value, at least in theory, is socially determined.

The question is **whether** can "diversity" be a commodity, which requires us to ask: does diversity have exchange-value and does the value of diversity "manifest itself in [a] social relation" with another commodity (Marx, 1978a, p. 313)? Furthermore, if it is the case that social works such as diversity can be commodified, are the exchanged commodities—in this instance diversity and whatever other commodity it interacts with—fundamentally altered by their station in the underbelly of the capitalistic (or more appropriately neocapitalistic) machine in which they

circulate? Are there any other hallmarks of this relationship, a *money-form* for instance, that can be observed and talked about in a meaningful way? All of these questions will, of course, be addressed in due time, but only after discussing the use-value of diversity, and whether or not that use-value translates into exchange-value, thus making it a commodity. One simply cannot presume these aspects of commodification to be clear and present.

What precisely is the practical utility of diversity? From a biological standpoint, very little: opinions about naturally occurring diversity observed in studies of genetic mutations and the production of viable evolutionary adaptations would seem to suggest that the effects of mutations are, at most, modest in their ability to create meaningful change (Sprouffske et al., 2018), if not wholly detrimental to individual outliers in certain instances (Hamilton, 1971; Viscido, 2003). However, biological diversity is not the kind of diversity under consideration at the moment, but diversity as a social work derived from a conceptual framework progenerated by human rationality. In many ways, diversity has been something of a constant feature in philosophical thinking of the not-so-distant past: Nietzsche (2006), in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, advocates for the "seeing of another vista" as preparation for an "objective" intellect aimed at "the advancement of knowledge" (p. 87)²; for Gadamer (2013) the mutual, well-intentioned interaction between diverse perspectives—what he refers to as a *fusion of horizons*—is an essential aspect of coming to understanding both for individuals and the species as a whole. Mythopoetically, it is the emergence of the "heroic individual," the personification of divergence from the established order that "serve[s] as a human transformer of demiurgic potentials" (Campbell, 2008, p. 276). In short, diversity in social structures is an essential element for continued (or renewed) societal prosperity; its utility, therefore, is observed in the longevity of whatever culture considers it worthy of appreciation.

² Obviously, the crux of Nietzsche's (2006) discussion of diverse-thought hinges upon his perspectivist claim: "There is only a seeing from a perspective, only a 'knowing' from a perspective, and . . . the *more* eyes, different eyes, we train on the same thing, the more complete will be our 'idea' of that thing, our 'objectivity'" (p. 88).

The problem is that these examples of diversity are either entirely incidental in nature, as is the case with nature and myth, or some incidental element of a higher aim, as is the case with Nietzsche's perspectivism and Gadamer's hermeneutics of understanding. In many ways, diversity can be seen as a natural *means of production* in its own right, each instance producing some other thing whether that be an improved organism, a renewed civilization, broader personal "objectivity," or an increased mutual understanding of a given concern. Diversity of this sort is not a produced thing in itself. Institutional diversity, on the other hand, is an entirely different matter. It is an end result in itself that is evidenced, among other things,³ by the emergence and growing demand of bureaucracies and individuals, namely "Chief Diversity Officers," dedicated to its reproduction and maintenance (Pihakis et al., 2019; Cutter & Weber, 2020). This is not to say that the marketing of such productions is misaligned with more fundamental considerations. Outwardly the benefits of diversity programs on campus are heralded as "[contributing] to the richness of the environment for teaching and research" as well as "offer[ing] students the breadth of ideas that constitute a dynamic intellectual community," effectively championing diversity in a sense proper to the academic milieu: *intellectual diversity* (Fine & Handelsman, 2010).

That said, what these programs claim to produce and what they *actually* produce seem endemically opposed. If sociopolitical temperament, which has been repeatedly measured using different albeit interrelated metrics,⁴ describes an individual's moral framework for viewing the world, and if the temperament of academic professoriates skew heavily left—by a ratio of one-

³ Studies such as those conducted by Wilson et al. (2012) have focused on the rate of mention of terms such as "diversity" in university mission statements, noting that of the 80 schools examined, 75 percent specifically mentioned the value. Furthermore, of the 80 schools, 65 percent had diversity statements separate and distinct from their university mission statement. Admittedly, drawing on data from a 2012 study would not normally be something I would consider for an analysis such as this, but given the change in societal concerns over the past decade, I do not believe it would be beyond the pale to suggest that the incidence of institutionally codified diversity pledges would be similar, if not greater than the study's findings.

⁴ Most prolifically the Big Five/NEO model of personality (Costa Jr., & McCrae, 1995; DeYoung et al., 2013) and Moral Foundations Theory (Graham et al. 2011; Haidt 2012).

hundred-to-one in six out of eight examined disciplines according to the National Association of Scholars (Langbert & Stevens, 2020)—then it stands to reason that the propagation of ideas derived from left-leaning meme pools⁵ is more likely to produce similarly left-leaning progeny than right-leaning progeny, with the exception of, perhaps, the occasional reactive (likely retrogressive) anomaly such as those described by Sprouffske et al. (2018). If the use-value of diversity as a social work is developing or extending the longevity of a particular environment by fostering novel, viable ideas, then a system predicated on controlled diversity, as seems to be the case in contemporary academia, is bound to fail, unless, of course, the use-value described here is not necessarily the use-value that matters most. Perhaps the true utility and thus commodity of academic diversity programs is that they produce or ensure an environment *that can be sold*—an environment that purports to be diverse in word alone but one that, in action, sequesters itself and its constituent "workers" behind an increasingly thin shield-wall of ideological platitudes that will henceforth be known as the *environment of commodified diversity*.

Given this understanding, the next questions to be asked are: "who stands to gain from bringing this form of commodity to market," or more precisely, who is the "capitalist," and "who stands to be exploited by its process of production and consumption" viz. who are the workers in this particular scenario? Furthermore, it must be asked: "what result, if not capital, comes from the circulation of said commodity?" To the question of who the workers are, the matter is as simple as discovering who parcels themselves out in the production of a "diverse" environment; the people who nickel-and-dime their souls away using alienated means in order to attain some alienated material "thing" that ultimately alienates them from others and the world at large (both in the process and as an end result). If the essential aim of the university is the "offering" [i.e. the opportunity to consume] and production of ideas, then the requirement for labour

⁵ Here I am employing Dawkins (1990) conceptualization of memes, namely the notion that "memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (p. 172).

necessitated by the academic environment falls on the shoulders of two particular kinds of worker: the professoriate and student body. As will be shown, this trend of duality is persistent both in manifestation and in its accordance with Marx's own observations, and as such it warrants deeper consideration. However, at this juncture, the primary consideration moving forward must be the student-workers.⁶ This is not to say that the exploitation of the working-professors is any less important. Far from it. Future research would do well to examine this issue, but having said that, it must also be recognized that any attempt to concomitantly analyze both academic working classes would slow the overall endeavor to a standstill, metaphorically derailing the present train of thought in the process.

Academic Relations of Production

Essential presupposition: Historically, student-workers have always existed and exist today in *particular* academic environments. *These produced environments are also the commodities for which they trade, as well as the means of production, means they no more own than any other worker in any other factory.* It has already been established that what this environment produces, at least in theory, is knowledge and ideas or at the very least a series of capabilities aimed at producing ideas at some point in time. But what commodity does the student-worker sell to our yet unnamed "capitalist" proxy in order to gain access to such an environment? While there will undoubtedly be similarities between the 19th century workers, workers Marx (1978a) describes as "nothing more than personified labour-time," and the student-workers we are concerned with here,⁷ it is important to understand that there is nuance

⁶ In discussions of this matter with cohorts of mine, the question was raised as to whether the student-workers being referred to here are simply students whose classwork is exploited for some other person's ends or actual student-workers who are paid, such as graduate assistants who perform a specific task for other students? In a way, neither or these assumptions are technically wrong. Having said that, the reason I refer to students as "student-workers" is to make analogous students *in generalis*, and the factory workers Marx was concerned with.

⁷ Especially Marx's (1978a) observation that "[a]ll individual distinctions are merged in those of 'full-timers' and '[part]-timers'" (p. 367).

between the labour of student-workers and their 19th century factory counterparts, namely the lack of a rigid work day,⁸ and a general lack of oversight by their less-alienated coconspirators, the working-professors. However, what is shared between workers new and old is the alienation each group experiences in their given arena of production: 19th century workers, who viewed the earth as the necessary prerequisite for labour, did not own the machines they worked on; they were not proprietors as such, nor did they own the products of their labour. Likewise, student-workers—despite the literal price they pay for their schooling, namely their capacity for free association—ultimately perceive their environment as a means to an end; they do not "own" the ideas that they use to complete what I cautiously refer to as "busywork," and with very few exceptions do they own any of the projects they produce in any kind of meaningful way.⁹ As far as alienation between peers, one need only point to the competitiveness of university admission rates: prestigious Ivy League schools such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia only accept between five and fifteen percent of their total applications in a given year (Miller et al., 2014), and a joint researcher team from the Universities of Scranton and Pittsburgh observed as little as a seven percent acceptance rate to psychology programs to 232 research-oriented, psychology doctoral programs (Norcross et al., 2010, p. 103).¹⁰

The New Bourgeoisie

Who stands across from the student-workers in the contemporary, Western academy; who juxtaposes their labour? Who pays them their "wages," controls their production, and reaps the benefits of their labour, which, as will be argued, consistently and precipitously decreases in value across time? What shadowy cabal controls the rudder of academia while others stand at

⁸ This is not to say that the student-worker does not have a defined "work schedule." In academia this is referred to as a student's "program," and dictates, to a greater or lesser extent, what work will be accomplished at particular points over a specific period of time.

⁹ Obvious exceptions to this claim are graduate theses, and dissertations.

¹⁰ "[F]ree-standing PsyD programs, according to Norcross et al. (2010), had about a 50 percent acceptance rate. in comparison to the previously mentioned research-oriented programs (p. 103). This, of course, should not be considered a monolithic representation as a whole. Different programs undoubtedly have different admission rates. Still, this research demonstrates just how cut-throat academic admissions can be.

the bow? Clearly it is not the professoriate. Although some may be complicit in the act—like so many specialized apparatuses of the state (Althusser, 1971)—working-professors continue to toil under the banner of their institution while reproducing ideas and knowledge for consumption by student-workers in order to cultivate their generally modest although sometimes significant wages. These wages, however, do not free them from their alienation. The ideas they produce—take, for instance, "diversity"—are the products of a thought-producing person's labour, but not necessarily their own. Many of the traditional hallmarks attributed to Marx's conceptualization of labour, particularly the accumulation of labour-value via the means of production and the labour-power of the worker, are present in this conceptualization of a "social work," with the means of production being the educative structures put in place by various state and private institutions working in tandem with the historical body of thought—what Dawkins (1990) refers to as *memes* or cognitive "replicator" (p.171)—and the labour-power of the individual thinker in question. With respect to our particular point of concern, "diversity," the works of Michael Eric Dyson, Peter McLaren, and Ibram X. Kendi come to mind, although other works such as those by Rebecca Skloot and Gloria Anzaldúa might also be considered. Here it must be understood that this is not a qualitative assessment of any of these authors; I simply mean to point out that each author has had a hand to play, explicitly or otherwise, in the burgeoning push for "diversity" on campuses and in society at large. Each thinker adds labour-value to the preexisting means of production of the social work which is in itself the accumulation of value and labour-power of previous thinkers, building off of previous, less productive means of producing essentially similar, albeit more rudimentary forms of the commodity in question.

The problem is—as Marx (1978a) so exceptionally identifies—that as our yet-unnamed "capitalist" discovers new and inventive ways to increase the relative surplus value of the commodity itself by reducing the "necessary labour-time" needed to pave the way for increased production of the commodity, the real value of the commodity, that value in between the actual

and social values of the same (p. 381). Here it becomes clear that Marx's capitalists have lost their status as the main social adversary, and are instead replaced by the turgid bureaucracies of higher learning. In this region, "the capitalists" are not necessarily capitalists—although capital is still a primary concern—but the ever-expanding administrative staff, "bourgeois" departmental leadership and discipline specific "epistemic courts" as described by Lauer (1984), who determine what knowledge will be produced for consumption by future generations of students (p. 22). Again, the same pattern of production is found: in order to produce a commodified social work (diversity) for greater consumption and thus greater surplus value, production of that commodity (and its "use-value") must increase, and this occurs, as has been previously noted, through the reduction of necessary labour-time. This reduction of labour time in academia seems most prevalent, much to my dismay, in English departments (and other humanities departments), where so-called "Critical" courses spend as little as a week at a time on prominent philosophies concerned with diversity such as Marxism, feminism, and Critical Race Theory, often relying on secondary sources for educative purposes in the process despite the obvious complexity of the theories under consideration (Stroupe, 2013; Stevenson, 2015). This, as one might expect, is very effective at producing students with modest knowledge of the issues at hand, but this mass production of commodified-knowledge simultaneously serves to degrade the commodity twofold: (1) first, in the normal manner described by Marx (1978a), that being that the commodity, in "[commanding] a more [extended] market," experiences a "diminution of . . . prices" in relation to the growing discrepancy between the social value, the actual value and proximal competition (p. 381)¹¹; and also, (2) a palpable depreciation of the commodity's actual value due to the scaled back means of production for that work, in this example the theories that form the backbone of academic "diversity" in academia. In short, as the labour that produces knowledge of social works (such as diversity and equity) in students

¹¹ This, of course, is not meant to speak to the ever-inflating cost of tuition for higher learning, but is a statement about the depreciation of the ideas produced by higher education due in no small part to market over-saturation.

becomes more productive, the value of the labour embedded in that particular commodity decreases, both in theory and praxis.

"The co-operation of artificers of [a singular] handicraft . . . [split] up into its various detail operations," in this instance the division of labour between knowledge-producing working-professors and student-workers, constitutes the mode of manufacture responsible for the propagation of the academic environment at any particular point of time, which is precisely why I refer to the currently produced, diversity-minded environment as the environment of commodified diversity (Marx, 1978a p. 389). It is not unique in its production, but idiosyncratic to a particular time and place in human history. Although the neo-liberalization¹² of the academic milieu¹³ is hardly a new phenomenon let alone one that has gone unnoticed—Sauntson and Morrish (2011) are meticulous in their argument that "universities construct themselves, their students, and graduates in [a] desired image" governed by "lexical items . . . designed to propound a managerialist institutional narrative" based on incontestable positive social images (p. 83)—it would require quite the stretch of the imagination to believe that such a problem only came into being with the emergence of neo-liberalism. In all likelihood, a dedicated analysis of historical universities **and universities outside of the West**, their environments, and their productions would yield similar results contextualized by the popular "values" of their day. To my knowledge such research has yet to be conducted. Perhaps, at a later point, historiographies will be produced that will satiate the vitriol of critics keen to describe such endeavors as shallow attempts to utilize "institutional values" as forms of pseudo-marketing. This is not my claim nor some underlying intent, but a humble gesture toward the possibility that beyond the nobility of individual scholars, the motivation of the institutions they co-inhabit with their administrative

¹² In this instance I defer to the definition of neoliberalism provided by Chomsky (2017), that being that it is unchecked capitalism; the "[undermining of] governing mechanisms by which people . . . can participate" in the economic system through the transferal of decision-making power "to unaccountable private entities," in this instance, the university.

¹³ Slaughter and Leslie refer to this as "academic capitalism" (as cited by Sauntson & Morrish, 2011, p. 83).

counterparts is and always has been the interest of securing social and economic stability while simultaneously expanding the institution's influence. This can only be achieved by capitalizing on the exchange of whatever value happens to be fashionable at any given point in time, in the most recent case, "diversity."

The Tripartite Exchange

Exchange in this schema is not nearly as cut and dry as it is in the materialist schema posited by Marx (1978c): the price of labour is not nearly as simple as the immediate *wage minimum* dictated by a particular worker's "necessary means of subsistence," (p. 207) nor is the exchange value of the commodity in question, the price of a diverse environment that draws the

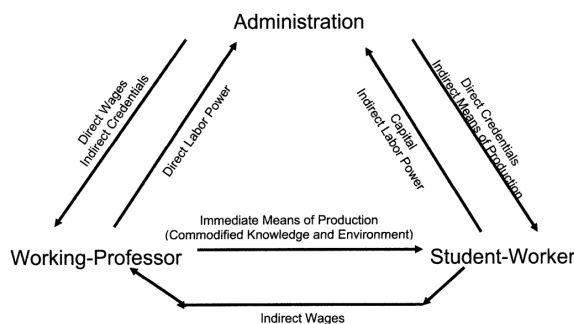


Figure 1
The process of academic production

indirectness (see Figure 1), namely indirect means of production, indirect labour power, and indirect wages. With the exception of indirect wages, which are effectively transferred capital from student-workers to the working-professors by way of the university administration (who take their cut of the profit in the process), these tangentially-related commodities describe aspects of the produced environment that are only indirectly tied to the production of capital, but

consuming student-worker in, merely expressed in money-form i.e. in terms of dollars and cents (although that certainly does occur). The infernal tripartition¹⁴ of the academic milieu imposes on Marx's original bipartite formulation a sublimated complication to the process of capital circulation. That complication is

¹⁴ Discerning readers may notice in my description of the academic economy a likeness to Marx's (n.d.) "Trinity Formulation." It would be interesting in future research to explore this relationship in-depth, but for the time being it will suffice to observe that the same partition and interaction of capital, land (i.e. a place of development), and labour occurs in academia.

contribute to the production of capital nonetheless. For instance, indirect means of production provided by universities are not the means of production themselves, to wit, the professors and the established theories they use to promulgate certain modes of thought, but bureaucratic *access to those means* by way of a litany of systems and subsystems of control student-workers *must* utilize in order to obtain their respective degrees. Similarly, the indirect labour power of the student-workers contributes to the production of the ideas and environments used to shepherd students like them through the university gates in subsequent generations, albeit obliquely, what some might call the allure of specific *campus cultures*.¹⁵ The point is that since neither of these commodities directly result in the production of capital—the student-worker paying the institution does not count here as that is the relation between a consumer and a product, not a direct producer, the commodity they produce and the revenue generated—direct wages i.e. money would be unsuitable as a means of reparation for the student-worker, and in fact counterproductive to the enterprise of higher education. Something else must be exchanged for the student-workers' alienated labour power: in academia this medium of exchange for indirect commodities manifests in the form of degrees and accolades.

This raises a question so seemingly asinine that it would be altogether better avoided in most instances if not for the seriousness of the current discourse: precisely what *is* a degree, that culmination of so many nights wiled away with one's nose in a book or face pressed up against the not-so-soft glow of a laptop computer? Etymologically speaking, the word historically references "a step" or "stair," but within the realm of academia it refers to a "stage of progress" or "academic rank conferred by diploma" (*Degree*, n.d.). In short, the word has always made some reference to a position in a particular hierarchy, but has seemingly changed in essence

¹⁵ A good definition of culture, at least as it pertains to academia, is provided by Eckel et al. (1999): "Culture is the 'invisible glue' that holds institutions together by providing a common foundation and a shared interpretation and understanding of events and actions. Institution-wide patterns of perceiving, thinking and feeling; shared understandings; collective assumptions; and common interpretive frameworks are the ingredients of institutional culture" (p. 22).

along with the modern era, especially in the 21st century where education is less an esoteric symbol of aristocratic rank, and more of a perceived avenue of advancement for working class individuals hoping to improve their lot in life. A degree in these times is not a symbol of station, but a form of *credential* (n.d.), a thing that inspires "belief" and "trust." It would be easy to construe this most time-honored tradition as little more than a wage good, some physical token of time theoretically well-spent in the pursuit of some higher form of being, but the modern degree is simultaneously far more and far less than that. Far less in the sense that they do not produce the kind of results often expected of them. To the contrary, the specifics of an earned degree often account for very little in the hiring process, and even if they do lead to gainful employment, quite frequently the monetary return on the investment can be described as "underwhelming" in all but the best of cases.¹⁶ Still, they are far more than mere esoteric things in the sense that they *grant access* to this environment or that; this capacity or some other, however limited in measure. A person with a degree is permitted into spaces and discussions where the "uneducated" are typically barred from entering. In short, this degree; this credential acts as a wage of sorts, the manifestation of alienated labour in "money-form" for a particular period of time in academia—usually four or more years for a baccalaureate degree. This is paid to student-workers upon completion of their bureaucratically specified work, and, as a form of delayed investment, satisfies some futural means of individual subsistence although a serious case can be made that this theory rarely works out in practice. What always seems to "work out," what *always* happens to be the case, is that each graduate ends up a shiny bauble on the prestige of their respective institution—"surplus value" as it were—positioned to attract as many students impassioned by the institutions' current value structure as possible in order to ensure that the structure continues to thrive like so many deep-sea anglerfish.

¹⁶ A thoughtful discussion of this matter is provided by Bond (2015), who highlights the disparity between earned wages over the course of a person's lifetime, accrued debt, and the effect these issues can have on an individual's opportunity to pursue momentous instances such as the purchase of a house.

Concluding Remarks

It should be obvious at this point that the initial goal of this article—the examination of diversity as an institutional **product**—has been subsumed by the more pernicious concern about the workings of higher education in general. Diversity, one might say, is just one value among a catalogue of historical values meant to ensure the survival of the institution. This survival is dependent upon the production of a cultural environment that is in-tune with the attitude of any particular society in time, in the case of the 21st century United States, an environment theoretically attuned to being diverse in order to produce inclusivity and equity. Having said all that, it would seem as though the value of these institutional values is only as deep as the character of the institution, and in the case of contemporary Western academia, that character seems to be increasingly tied to the values of the administrators who facilitate the productivity of the workers *en masse* in spite the good-intentions of the workers themselves. The commodity brought to market by the administrative bureaucracy of academia *is* the environment itself irrespective of the dominant value in power, and the "imminent object" of selling this environment "is to turn [their] commodity, or rather [their] commodity capital, back into *money capital*, and thereby to realize [their] profit" and the "appropriation of value . . . of abstract wealth" (Marx, 1978b, p. 446). One can only speculate as to what "revolutionary" value will replace "diversity" in the future.

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