Profit and Gift in the Digital Economy

DAVE ELDER-VASS
Loughborough University
Contents

Acknowledgements

Part I: Diverse economies

1 Introduction
An economy of diverse appropriative practices 5
Historical context and political strategy 12
Towards a new political economy 17

2 Diverse economies
Introduction 22
The discourse of the market economy 23
What is ‘the economy’? 27
The reality of the diverse economy 32
Real utopias 36
Conclusion 40

Part II: Political economies

3 Beyond Marxist political economy
Introduction 45
Political economy as critique 46
Modes of production 53
The labour theory of value 61
Conclusion 69

4 Mainstream economics and its rivals
Introduction 71
Mainstream economics: the neoclassical core 72
Beyond neoclassical economics 78
Mauss’s anthropology of the gift 84
Economic sociology 88
Conclusion 93
### Contents

5 Complexes of appropriative practices  
**Introduction** 96  
**Practices: the unit of economic form** 97  
**Appropriative practices** 101  
**Complexes of appropriative practices** 106  
**Conclusion** 114  

#### Part III: Digital economies  

6 Digital monopoly capitalism: Apple  
**Introduction** 117  
**Innovation and entrepreneurship** 118  
**Preferential attachment** 123  
**Constructing monopoly using intellectual property rights** 129  
**Constructing monopoly using technology** 134  
**Exploiting workers and suppliers, and avoiding taxes** 137  
**Conclusion** 142  

7 Co-operative peer production: Wikipedia  
**Introduction** 144  
**Encyclopaedic knowledge as a digital gift** 146  
**Wikipedia vs. Encyclopaedia Britannica** 148  
**Funding the gift model** 152  
**Why do people edit Wikipedia?** 154  
**Regulating quality: norms** 159  
**Regulating quality using technology** 162  
**Governance, legitimacy and participation** 164  
**Conclusion** 168  

8 Does Google give gifts?  
**Introduction** 171  
**Web search and advertising** 172  
**Gift capitalism?** 175  
**Resistance and attachment** 181  
**Personalisation, privacy and power** 185  
**Conclusion** 189  

9 User content capitalism  
**Introduction** 192  
**Neither commodities nor wage labour** 193  
**Securing attachment from contributing users** 199  
**UGC businesses and conventional capitalism** 202  
**The troublesome concept of prosumption** 206  
**Are amateur content contributors exploited?** 210  
**Conclusion** 214