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Expressions of the commodity form: alienation and mathematics education.

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Summary: This chapter refocuses Marxist debates on alienation and mathematics education around the unifying factor of the commodity. The various complex paths from the organisation of the economy to the mathematics classroom are traced in outline. This tracing touches on the historical birth of modern schooling in the UK, the roles that schooling plays in capitalist society, recent debates on the commodification of education itself, and dominant understandings of the nature of knowledge. If the form of economy does influence the classroom in these ways, it should be possible to find some expressions of the relationship within the world of school mathematics. An experimental methodological approach to finding and illustrating such expressions is adopted here, inspired by the work of the cultural critic Walter Benjamin. Extracted fragments of interviews with school students are presented, initially without commentary, in a montage format. As this approach to evidence is unusual, perhaps seeming closer to art than science, some attention is paid to explaining its usage. This explanation touches on the origins of the data and Benjamin's particular approach to fragments, montage and cultural expressions of the commodity form. Following the data, there is a brief analysis of the fragments, individually and collectively, in relation to the themes of the earlier sections, and methodological questions are returned to. Finally, implicit in the chapter's critique of mathematics education is a call for change, and a potential pathway to this is suggested in the conclusion.

Classification: D20 A40

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