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Capitalist Contradiction and the Spiritual Crisis: On the Fetishistic Structure of Total Crisis

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Crisis represents the ultimate form through which contradiction manifests in capitalist society. From an activity-based materialist perspective, contradiction—at a general (indeterminate) level—expresses the possibility of cognition. It serves as the point of departure that grounds the emergence of thought. Contradiction necessitates activity; activity, in turn, becomes the mode of existence of contradiction—the form through which contradiction generates movement and transformation.

Labour, understood as productive and purposeful human activity, constitutes the manifestation of the essential contradiction in being. It is the ongoing process through which thought is actualized as reality, and conversely, reality is internalized as thought. Labour embodies the unity of opposites: thought and being, human and nature (in their metabolic relation), knowledge and the object of knowledge. While labour is a manifestation of contradiction, it is also contradiction itself. It enables the emergence of the subject as an agent of action, even as it simultaneously negates both the object in its given form and the subject—since the subject must conform to the determinations of the object in order to negate it. In this dialectical process, human subjects negate objectivity in order to constitute themselves as subjects and to establish objectivity as a social reality.

As labour takes on specific historical and social forms, and as it requires cooperative structures appropriate to its mode, it becomes responsible for constituting the human subject as the ensemble of social relations—particularly those of production. From this follows the idea that the conceptualisation of contradiction and negating activity is itself

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historically determined. Crisis, in this context, is the form in which human negative activity exists—manifesting within the metabolic relation between human beings and nature under capitalism.

Hegel's formulation that regards *thought as the negation of the immediately given*, despite its revolutionary potential, represents a *perverse expression* of the critical relation between historically specific forms of human thinking (and cognition and activity) and reality. In the Hegelian system, *nature* ultimately becomes posited as the *absolute other* of thought. Hegel depicts the historically specific movement of thought—though mystified and ontologised—as unfolding in several stages. At the first stage, external stimuli (*experience*) provoke a reaction in the subject, leading to inductive inferences. At the second stage, genuine thought emerges through the negation of these external stimuli. At the third, *ideas*—resembling scientific concepts—are constituted in contradistinction to phenomena. Subsequently, scientific concepts stimulate thought to overcome their own multiplicity, as this plurality is seen as a mere conglomerate lacking necessary connection. Finally, thought moves beyond the illusory form of its own realisation and advances toward *actual realisation* by incorporating scientific ideas and concepts, compelling them to imitate the original creative action of thought. In this sense, thought's movement toward its own realisation is mediated by its negative—the *other of thought*, *nature as given to the senses*. As Hegel puts it: "For mediation means to make a beginning and then to have proceeded to a second item, such that this second item is the way it is only insofar as one has arrived at it by starting with something that is an other over against it." (2010, 40, §12).

Still, *thought* requires a *negated object* in order to mediate its own negative movement. It thus depends on *sensory percepts*—not to affirm or identify with them, but precisely to negate them, to posit them as its *other*, and thereby constitute itself *as thought*. With the advance of the sciences, philosophy simultaneously develops, as scientific notions and concepts do not arise merely from generalisations of perceptible facts; rather, they emerge through the *negation of apparent similarities*. This is what necessitates philosophy's incorporation of scientific material into itself. In turn, philosophy grants empirical sciences the *freedom of thought*, endowing them with an *a priori* character—meaning that the contents of science become *warranted as necessary* and no longer dependent upon observable facts alone. As Hegel puts it: "insofar as philosophy owes its development to the empirical sciences, it bestows upon their contents the most essential shape of the *freedom* of thought

(i.e. the shape of the *a priori*) and, instead of relying on the testimony of their findings and the experienced fact, provides their contents with the corroboration of being necessary, such that the face becomes the depiction and the replication of the original and completely independent activity of thinking". (2010, 41, §12).

Given that, for Hegel, *dialectical negation* is not mere denial but a form of *positivity*—in the sense that, through such negation, thought absorbs the negated as a moment of itself (2010, 128, §81)—it ultimately becomes transubstantiated into an *affirmation of the existing state of affairs*. From this follows Hegel's orientation toward a "*matter of logic*" rather than a "*logic of the matter*." As Ilyenkov observes, "The profound flaws in the Hegelian dialectic were directly linked with idealism, due to which the dialectic was readily transformed into ingenious, logically subtle apologies for everything that existed" (2017, 133).

Although Feuerbach's contention that "The Hegelian philosophy is, uniquely, a rational mysticism" (Feuerbach 1839) is correct in its essence,[1] the foundation of Hegel's misconception lies not in the uncritical acceptance of religion *per se*, nor merely in the religiosity of his philosophical system—a theology in philosophical guise—but in his uncritical acceptance of the *existing state of affairs*, particularly the prevailing mode of division of labour in which *manual* and *intellectual* labour are entirely severed. This condition reflects the social form of the division of labour wherein the *products of labour* confront the labourer as an autonomous force—*alienation*. The philosophical expression of this condition is *idealism*, understood as the *self-consciousness of alienated thought*.

In Hegel's philosophy, *thought* is said to arise from *contradiction*. However, by failing to provide a clear account of the *reality*, *truth*, and *power* of thought, Hegel ultimately undermines the revolutionary potential of his own insights. He posits *reality*—or *nature*—as the *other* of thought, such that thought's negation of reality becomes a matter of *substance*: *thought* is defined as *non-nature* or *non-matter*. In this way, Hegel attempts to assert contradiction, but only by abstractly opposing thought to its material other, thereby severing it from the concrete conditions of its emergence.

1. "Feuerbach's great achievement is: (1) The proof that philosophy is nothing else but religion rendered into thought and expounded by thought, i.e., another form and manner of existence of the estrangement of the essence of man; hence equally to be condemned" (Marx 1975, 328).

But if *thought* and *matter* are treated as two mutually exclusive substances—each *other* to the other—then not only can we not speak of their *relation*, we cannot speak meaningfully of their *contradiction* either. In doing so, Hegel undermines his own dialectical promise: he reduces the *unity of opposites*, *thought* and *matter*, to a pseudo-contradiction in which *matter* is ultimately dissolved into *thought*, both conceived as substantial entities. As Ilyenkov notes, "[Hegel] considers thought not only and not simply as one of man's abilities but also as the substantional source of all the other human abilities and kinds of activity, as their essential foundation. He treats the ability to change practically the external world, nature outside man, also as a manifestation of the mental principle in man" (Ilyenkov 2017, 156). Hegel thus falls into the pit of *substantialism*, and the apparently *active* category of thought becomes *pacified*. In this way, *thought*, in Hegel, assumes the status of a *fetish*.

Fetishism is the inevitable form that consciousness assumes under capitalism. Unless science is transformed into a genuinely *critical* endeavour, it cannot escape complicity with this fetishism. *Money*, for example, though a commodity, is fundamentally a *social relation*. However, once it is treated as a thing *in and of itself*—precisely because its essence lies in being a social relation, that is, an *artefact* that inhabits the social universe (which itself signifies the totality of *human-to-human* relations)—it begins to appear as though it enters into social relations with other things on its own. It presents itself as an *agent*. Consequently, rather than conceiving of social relations as *relations among people mediated by things*—such as money as the *universal commodity*—people begin to appear as mere functions of purported *relations among things*. In this inversion, the objectivity of social relations becomes mystified, and the products of human activity take on a life of their own.

Fetishism is the conceptualisation of a thing as a *thing-in-itself*, independent of the social universe. In reality, however, things—*as artefacts of the social universe*—are *social relations* in the sense that they carry social significance; they are meaningful as *things* only within the context of historically specific social relations. Fetishism is thus the *mystified form of appearance* in which social relations present themselves as relations among *thing-agents*. Social relations become mystical precisely when they are conceived as inherent properties of things *in and for themselves*—as in the case of *value* being attributed to *gold* as

its intrinsic property, or to any commodity as if value were intrinsic to that commodity.

The point is that fetishism cannot be dissipated by reference to the things themselves because fetishism is the necessary mode of appearance of social consciousness under capitalism, which determines a specific mode of activity appropriate to its own form of organization and cooperation. Nature is perceived by a historically situated individual engaged in active, practical relations with the world, not by a passive, abstract observer. Consequently, social and historical aspects of objects often appear as natural, eternal traits. These fetishistic illusions—such as commodity fetishism—are not merely mental constructs but emerge from the actual structure of bourgeois social relations. Thus, simply observing objects does not dispel these abstractions, as bourgeois society presents them as they seem. As Marx noted, the contemplative mindset shaped by this society obscures a true understanding of reality (see Ilyenkov 2017, 127).

Idealisms of various kinds are the inevitable form of philosophical consciousness under capitalism. The dissolution of *reality in thought* (just as the dissolution of *thought in material reality*) amounts to the disappearance of the intrinsic *contradictions* inherent in the unity of *thought and being*. The consequent dismissal of contradiction—by collapsing one pole into the other—manifests itself as the *impossibility of the movement of the Absolute*. The *Absolute*, in this sense, becomes the manifestation of a crisis of inaction. As Ilyenkov notes: "By elevating thought to the status of a divine force that internally drives human historical action, Hegel effectively treated the lack of an answer to the legitimate question—why the Absolute, or Thought, should think—as if that very absence were the only possible answer" (Ibid., 137).

Hegel responds that *thought simply was*; questioning its origin in something else, he insists, is meaningless (Ibid., 128). Thought existed, functioned through human beings, and gradually became conscious of its own processes, structures, and laws. Yet while it is true that *thought was (and is)*, the critical issue remains: *how can we account for the transition from mere thought to the act of thinking*—from *being* to *activity*, or from *is* to *ought*?

The crisis of the inactivity of the absolute is accompanied by an epistemological crisis stemming from Hegel's mystification of the movement of the concept as self-expanding and self-developing knowledge. Such mystification is the necessary outcome of Hegel's uncritical endorsement of the existing order of things and the state of affairs: mystification

of knowledge is the other side of the coin to the sanctification of the existing order. Ironically, the matter of Hegel's logic, which is rooted in his dismissal of the logic of the matter, happens to be nothing other than the materiality that appears before him. Hegel's dismissal of matter entraps him in that very matter—matter over mind. The alleged knowledge of the absolute, therefore, is reduced to the knowledge of mere appearance, to the effect of rendering Hegel's "Science" superfluous. This uncritical affirmation of what is, is the source of his false *positivism* and is exactly in contradistinction to his promise of explaining the logic of the appearance of the essence; he betrays his own thesis that thinking, first and foremost, is the negation of what is—hence his inability to grasp the essence. He arrives at a conceptualization of the essence that is merely empiricist—essence as that which stands behind and not as that which develops and manifests—not a concept, a concrete universal, in the real sense of the term, but mere generalizations is what he finally arrives at.

In the realm of politics and social life, Hegel's *false positivism* culminates in his *sanctification* of the bourgeois state—even in its most "imperfect" form—and of bourgeois (civil) society more broadly. Hegel is correct in recognising the state as an entity distinct from civil society. While he acknowledges civil society as a domain of conflicting and antagonistic forces, and derives the necessity of the state from these tensions, he fails to conceptualise the state itself as a historically specific *expression* of those contradictions. Instead, he treats the state as their *resolution*. For Hegel, the state embodies a condition of social *equilibrium*, and its autonomy provides the foundation for its mediating role in social conflicts, including those between estates and classes. Yet, despite his critique of the naturalist view that posits a perpetual state of war among individuals, Hegel ultimately lapses into an equally uncritical position—remaining confined within the realm of *appearances*.

In Hegel's view, civil society is grounded in the pursuit of individual self-interest, where persons—conceived as abstract, formally "free" individuals—engage with others primarily as means to their private ends. These individuals are modeled after the bourgeois subject: "burghers" whose identity is rooted in property and exchange. The state, in turn, is theorized as the universal that mediates and realizes these particular interests, appearing as an impartial guarantor of social cohesion. For Hegel, the formation of the state represents the ethical culmination of individual development: the transition from the immediacy of private desire to the universality of rational will. Through education and civic

integration, individuals internalize the values of bourgeois society, thereby becoming bearers of universal freedom. However, this process effectively masks the historical and class-specific character of civil society and the state. The individual appears as a universally free subject, but in truth is shaped and constrained by the social relations of capitalism. Hegel's conception thus obscures the fact that the state functions to sustain and reproduce the very class divisions it claims to transcend.

By portraying the state as the embodiment of universal ethical life, Hegel effectively sanctifies the existing order, presenting the capitalist state not as a historically contingent form of domination, but as the realization of reason itself. In doing so, Hegel offers a philosophy in which the bourgeois state appears as the necessary and rational guardian of social harmony, while concealing its role in perpetuating systemic unfreedom.

Hegel's account presents the state as the rational resolution to the contradictions of civil society—a harmonizing force that mediates competing interests and establishes ethical unity. However, what Hegel treats as resolution is in fact a misrecognition of the real function of the bourgeois state. Rather than resolving contradictions, the state embodies them: it institutionalizes the conflicts inherent in capitalist society, particularly the class antagonism between labor and capital. The appearance of equilibrium that Hegel describes is a form of mystification—one that conceals the state's role in reproducing the very inequalities and crises that define capitalist relations.

From this perspective, the state does not transcend the contradictions of civil society; it materializes them in political form. Its "independence" is not a neutral, universal standpoint but a structural necessity for managing class conflict and enforcing the conditions of capitalist accumulation (e.g., the reproduction of "doubly free" labor, the protection of private property). Hegel's abstraction of individuals into formally equal legal subjects mirrors the way capitalism abstracts labor into labor-power, obscuring concrete social realities with ideological universality. This contradictory structure—where formal freedom coexists with material unfreedom—is not accidental; it is the political expression of capitalism's permanent crisis, as Marx identified. The state appears to stand above society, but in fact it is the legal-political form through which capitalism reproduces its structural crises and contradictions.

Thus, Hegel's idealist conception, by presenting the state as a realization of ethical life and universality, aligns philosophically with the real-world function of the capitalist state as a mechanism for stabilizing

crisis without resolving it: what appears as stability (the rational state) is actually the political form of unresolved and perpetual instability inherent in capitalist social relations.[2]

The contemporary erosion of the capitalist state and its institutions can be understood through the theoretical lens developed by Marx. Hegel's conception of the state as the rational embodiment of ethical life—mediating civil society's contradictions through universality—is a mystification of the capitalist state's true function: to institutionalize, not resolve, the contradictions of bourgeois society. In today's world, the declining legitimacy of state institutions, the rise of authoritarian populism, and the dismantling of welfare protections illustrate the state's increasing inability to maintain the appearance of neutrality or universality. Rather than standing above class struggle, the state is exposed as its political form—an apparatus for managing the crisis tendencies of capital accumulation. Austerity regimes, emergency laws, and militarized policing reflect the return of the "strong state," which paradoxically intensifies social unrest and undermines its own legitimacy. In this context, the state no longer even pretends to represent a universal will but functions more transparently as the guarantor of capitalist order. The Hegelian promise of the state as the realization of freedom gives way to its Marxian reality: a mechanism for the reproduction of unfreedom, now faltering under the weight of its own contradictions.

In reality, the capitalist state not only institutionalizes contradictions but often intensifies them, functioning as both the generator and amplifier of crisis. This is evident in how contemporary states manage systemic inequalities, suppress class conflict, and facilitate the ongoing accumulation of capital—all while maintaining the ideological appearance of neutrality. Thus, the state's proclaimed role as a stabilizing force collapses under the weight of its real function: to maintain a social order fundamentally structured by antagonism. Rather than transcending contradiction, the state becomes its most concentrated expression, embodying the crisis tendencies inherent in the capitalist mode of production.

What I aim to emphasize, however, is that the dismissal or occlusion of the contradictory nature of bourgeois society does not eliminate contradiction itself; rather, it merely displaces it, only for it to re-emerge in the form of critical ruptures and crises. In masking the antagonisms

2. The last six paragraphs draw on (Azeri 2009).

that structure capitalist social relations, such philosophical abstractions ultimately fail to account for the periodic and systemic breakdowns—economic, political, and social—that are intrinsic to the reproduction of the bourgeois order. Contradiction, in this view, is not resolved through ideal reconciliation but returns in intensified and destabilizing forms, thereby exposing the limits of any theory that denies its constitutive role.

This conceptual prejudice—the portrayal of the state as a neutral arbiter or guarantor of social harmony—is not unique to Hegel's system. It is symptomatic of a broader philosophical and ideological orientation that pervades much of liberal and idealist political thought. From Kant's moral idealism to Rousseau's general will, and even in contemporary theories that treat the state as a regulatory or administrative mechanism ensuring justice or efficiency, there persists an assumption that the state operates above and outside the sphere of material contradictions. These traditions often reify legal equality and political formalism while disregarding the class dynamics and structural antagonisms embedded in capitalist society. Such frameworks mystify the real function of the state: its role in mediating, managing, and reproducing social domination, particularly under capitalist conditions. In this sense, Hegel's philosophy is not an outlier, but rather a sophisticated articulation of a more general ideological tendency to naturalize and legitimize bourgeois political forms under the guise of reason or morality.

The idea of *equilibrium* and the suppression of *contradiction* is also a central tenet in philosophical trends such as *positivism* and *Bogdanovism*, both of which are inspired by *Kantianism*. In Kant's system, *logic* is reduced to a matter of *form*, indifferent to the *content* of knowledge; what matters most is the internal *coherence* and *non-contradictoriness* of a logical sequence—even if its content is pure absurdity (Ilyenkov 1968, 86).

The central issue in Kant's system is that reason inevitably collapses in the face of logical contradictions and antinomies. This failure is not limited to novel experiences; it extends even to past ones, since reason inherently encompasses both identity and its polar opposite—difference. For instance, in Kant's account, alongside the category of "necessity" within the schema of objective judgments (i.e., the table of categories), there appears the equally valid category of "accident." Each category holds the same epistemic legitimacy as its counterpart, and the range of its applicability extends as far as experience itself (ibid., 93).

Critical reason, in this view, recognizes both the legitimate scope of its application and the boundaries it must not transgress. It refrains from attempting a "complete synthesis" or crossing into the transcendental domain. Instead, it acknowledges that, in relation to the "thing-in-itself," two logically and empirically valid conceptualizations may coexist—neither of which can claim final authority. Therefore, reason must resist the impulse to eliminate one in favor of the other. As Ilyenkov states: "Theoretical opponents, rather than engaging in perpetual conflict, should establish a kind of peaceful coexistence—mutually acknowledging each other's right to relative truth and to a 'partial synthesis.' They must come to understand that, regarding the thing-in-itself, both are equally mistaken, for the thing-in-itself will forever remain unknowable—an 'X'—that gives rise to diametrically opposed interpretations. Yet, while equally wrong in their claims about things-in-themselves, they are equally right in another sense: in that 'reason as a whole' harbors within itself conflicting interests that are equivalent and equally legitimate" (Ibid., 96–97).

Thus, the highest *a priori* postulate—the fundamental law of "correct thinking"—is the well-known "prohibition of logical contradiction," functioning as a kind of categorical imperative, not only in the realm of morality, as in Kant's ethical philosophy, but also within the domain of logic. As a logical imperative, it sets the ideal for theoretical reason: the complete and absolute consistency of knowledge, understood as the total identity and coherence of all individuals' scientific conceptions of the world and of themselves (Ibid., 97).

The ideal of non-contradictoriness that underpins Kant's epistemology finds its counterpart in his moral and political philosophy. His categorical rejection of the right to revolution can be understood as the political manifestation of his broader effort to suppress contradiction. Just as the principle of non-contradiction serves as the foundation for Kant's theory of knowledge—ensuring logical coherence and systematic unity—his political thought demands the same consistency and formal integrity within the legal and institutional order. In both domains, contradiction is treated not as a moment of productive tension or transformation, but as a threat to rational structure and normative stability. The political sphere, no less than the epistemological, is governed by an imperative of systemic closure and the preservation of order.

This structural parallel reveals a deeper homology between Kant's epistemological and political commitments. In his framework, the revolutionary act constitutes a contradiction internal to the legal order: it

seeks justice by overturning the very form that defines the conditions for justice. As contradiction invalidates knowledge in logic, so too does revolution delegitimize law in the political domain. For Kant, the legitimacy of the state lies in its formal constitutionality, not in the moral substance of its outcomes. Thus, the prohibition of revolution is not merely a conservative political stance; it follows necessarily from the same philosophical imperative that animates his theory of reason—namely, the safeguarding of unity, form, and consistency against the destabilizing force of contradiction.

Yet Kant's ideal of non-contradictoriness is, by his own admission, ultimately unattainable—a fact he acknowledges in his treatment of the antinomies of pure reason. The same applies to his vision of social coherence and political equilibrium. Just as contradiction cannot be fully eliminated from theoretical reason, social antagonism cannot be eradicated from the political domain. The right to revolt, expelled in principle, returns in practice—through recurring social and political crises that expose the instability of the very order Kant seeks to preserve. As a result, the gradual, rational development of human society envisioned by Kant—culminating in the realization of liberty, equality, and human dignity—proves unrealizable. The contradictions that his system seeks to suppress re-emerge as the structural conditions of social life, undermining the possibility of a stable reconciliation between moral ideals and political reality.[3]

The Machist rejection of contradiction as an objective condition—which manifests in the denial of thinking as negation (i.e., the negation of immediacy)—and its emphasis on equilibrium as an ideal, understood as the absence of conflict within any organism, whether biological or social, constitutes a continuation of Kant's ideal of non-contradictoriness. Ilyenkov aptly characterizes this ideal as "the philosophy of lifeless reaction," where "the goal is to reach a state where the organism feels no needs whatsoever, but exists in a steady state of rest and immobility." (2009, 315)

The practical significance of the quest for equilibrium becomes particularly evident in both Bogdanov's techno-capitalist utopia, as portrayed in his novel *Engineer Menni*, and in his response to the political situation following the February 1917 Revolution in Russia. In the novel, the development of capitalism—understood as the advancement

3. For a comprehensive evaluation of Kant's rejection of the right to revolt and its place in his general philosophical outlook, see Azeri (2009).

of the so-called forces of production—is presented as a necessary precondition for the transition to socialism. Engineer Menni, who leads the ambitious project of constructing an enormous canal system on Mars—a project introduced as a solution to capitalism's economic crisis—eventually passes his responsibilities to his son, Engineer Netty. Netty, facing an inner contradiction—being physically part of the working class but assuming the managerial role typically associated with the capitalist class—accepts the position only on the condition that managerial authority remains with the capitalist elite. In doing so, he avoids internal conflict while overseeing a project that contributes to the expansion of Martian capitalism, which is portrayed as progressing inevitably and automatically toward socialism, without the disruptive intervention of social revolution or uprising. Netty refrains from assuming direct administrative power because the productive forces, in his view, have not yet reached a sufficient level of development to support socialist transformation. The influence of Menshevism and economism in Netty's (and Bogdanov's) position is unmistakable.

Bogdanov's own position after the overthrown of Tsar and the formation of the interim government simply replicates Netty's position. The core of Bogdanov's position can be summarized as follows: The February Revolution established a bourgeois-democratic regime in Russia, thereby resolving the principal political question left open since 1905. Full stop. Given that the Russian proletariat is not only numerically weak but also lacks sufficient education and cultural development, any discussion of seizing political power in the name of socialist transformation is dismissed as utopian and unrealistic. According to this view, political power—understood as administrative authority—should remain in the hands of the bourgeois democratic leadership. The immediate task is not socialist revolution, but rather to ensure that this national government fosters rapid industrial and technological development. To that end, the working class must support the regime by contributing its scientific and technical expertise, thereby facilitating the expansion of productive forces and the gradual growth of the proletariat itself.

In this framework, the working class is encouraged to make use of the democratic rights it has newly acquired to raise its cultural level, acquire scientific knowledge, and prepare itself intellectually and politically for a future moment when it might be deemed ready to assume administrative control. Only then, it is argued, can socialism in Russia become a realistic prospect. "Until that time, there is only one road –

state capitalism, which is seen to be the most 'balanced system', corresponding to all the necessary criteria: the minimum of contradictions, and the maximum of equilibrium and economy" (Ilyenkov 2009, 341-342).

It goes without saying that, in this framework, contradictions are not viewed as internal to the system—in this case, to capitalism. The source of imbalance and the loss of equilibrium is instead attributed to subjective (individual or social) attitudes toward social reality. The task, then, becomes the construction of a maximally balanced—therefore "rationally" organized—social experience. There is no acknowledgment of objectively existing class contradictions, nor of the internal contradictions within capitalist relations of production that give rise to cyclical economic crises. Chaos is instead seen as the result of the absence of a "mathematically uncontradictory schema," one that must be externally imposed upon the system.

As with any form of idealism—which often emerges as a symptom of theoretical crisis or a theory in crisis—reason or rationality (*Thought*) is not understood as embedded in the actual social relations among people. Rather, it is posited as a substance existing in and of itself: a divine principle that remains intact and pure despite the impurities introduced by material life and conditions. Contradiction is suppressed and excluded from the scene so that God—or Reason—can enter the picture as a miraculous remedy in moments of crisis, offering a metaphysical fix to what are, in reality, structural contradictions.

The total crisis of capitalism, some features of which have been discussed above, also manifests itself in the form of what may be called a "spiritual crisis."[4] This is evidenced by the widespread resurgence of religion, sectarianism, conspiracy theories, prevalence of different forms of philosophical idealism, and other irrational belief systems that increasingly shape the social imaginary. These phenomena are not merely cultural anomalies or psychological regressions; they are symptoms of a deeper systemic disorder embedded in the structure of capitalist social relations. What appears on the surface as a spiritual crisis is, in fact, a crisis of praxis—one rooted in the historical disempowerment and alienation of the masses under capitalism.

Fetishism, in this framework, must be understood in its full critical-theoretical sense—not merely as the attribution of agency to objects or

4. For a detailed and articulate account of the "spiritual crisis," see Azeri (2025).

external forces, but as the social logic that underlies such misrecognition. Under capitalist relations of production, where the value-form mediates all aspects of life and labor is systematically alienated, human agency becomes obscured, fragmented, and displaced. As capital assumes the character of self-valorizing value, it exerts a quasi-theological power over social life, rendering real social relations opaque and abstract. In this context, the proliferation of conspiracy theories, religious fundamentalism, and pseudo-spiritual movements reflects not a rejection of modernity, but its ideological consequence. These are the distorted cognitive responses to a real and lived powerlessness—expressions of a world in which people no longer experience themselves as the authors of their own social conditions.

Thus, the spiritual crisis is inseparable from both the general crisis of capitalism and the crisis of Thought itself. In an epoch where capital colonizes not only material production but also the symbolic and cognitive means through which reality is interpreted, the retreat into metaphysics and superstition signals a broader collapse of reason—or a rationality of a total collapse. The rise of idealism in philosophy, culture, and politics is not accidental; it is the ideological reflection of a world in which the rule of appearance over essence has become systemic. To address the spiritual crisis, therefore, requires more than secular critique; it demands a radical transformation of the material conditions that give rise to fetishism. Only by confronting and dismantling the social logic of capital can collective agency be reclaimed and emancipatory thought reactivated.

The resurgence of far-right and fascist movements must also be understood within this broader framework of spiritual and systemic crisis. Fascism is not an aberration external to liberal capitalism, but one of its recurring expressions in periods of deep structural breakdown. The spiritual crisis, characterized by mass disorientation and the retreat into myth, finds fertile ground in fascist ideology, which offers symbolic coherence, false agency, and the illusion of unity in a world fractured by capitalist contradictions. By re-enchanting social reality through national mythologies, conspiracy thinking, and authoritarian moral codes, fascism responds to the collapse of meaning produced by capitalist alienation—not by resolving its material basis, but by intensifying mystification. The far right does not aim to dismantle capital but to reinforce it through mythic forms of unity, racial or cultural essentialism, and the violent repression of class antagonisms. It is thus another ideological form of fetishism, in which systemic contradictions are displaced

onto scapegoats, and the possibility of genuine collective agency is further obscured. The rise of the far right is not an alternative to the spiritual crisis, but one of its most dangerous outcomes—a political crystallization of the very loss of agency and rationality that defines the crisis itself.

This spiritual crisis, as an ideological expression of the total crisis of capitalism, also finds political articulation in the erosion of international institutions—from the United Nations to the International Court of Justice—and in the utter indifference of ruling elites within the capitalist order toward the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people by the fascist government of Israel, as well as the suppression of women by Islamist forces such as the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic regime in Iran. The rise of authoritarian figures such as Trump, Modi, Putin, and Erdogan is not incidental, but symptomatic of a broader historical moment in which the ideals of justice, reason, and collective agency are subordinated to mythic authority, nationalist fetishism, and the cynical management of permanent crisis. These developments, taken together, constitute not discrete anomalies but expressions of a deep spiritual malaise—one that reveals the decomposition of the capitalist world order under the weight of its own contradictions.

As stated above, *crisis* is the mode of existence of *contradiction* under capitalism. In this sense—and only in this sense—it serves as the mechanism for the perpetuation of capitalist relations of production: the form in which social relations are incarnated in a system that has come into being "dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt" (Marx 1993, 926). Yet, crisis also signals the possibility of *radical change*—the potential to constitute social relations that transcend the limits of capital and move toward the formation of a truly *human society*, or *social humanity*, in which human beings reclaim their own collective destiny.

To put it in a nutshell, the spiritual crisis emerging under contemporary capitalism is not a cultural deviation or ideological accident, but the necessary ideological expression of the deeper material contradictions within capitalist social relations. Crisis, understood as the mode of existence of contradiction, manifests through the fetishisation of thought and labour, wherein abstract forms assume autonomous power over human agency. Fetishism is thus not merely a category of false consciousness but the lived form of alienation under capital—a structure that renders real social relations opaque, turns historical

antagonisms into metaphysical enigmas, and displaces material contradictions into symbolic or spiritual crises. By tracing this dynamic from the dialectical foundations of thought through Hegelian idealism and into the ideological terrain of modern capitalism, one may be able to illustrate how the suppression of contradiction leads not to resolution but to deeper and more mystified forms of crisis.

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The current issue (No. 7—Volume 4, Issue 1) of *Marxism & Sciences* has been devoted to the theme of the total crisis of capital. In "Capitalism as a Species of Automation", Devin Wangert argues that automation has always functioned as a temporal contradiction within capitalism, not simply as a technological evolution. He critiques the popular belief that full automation is an imminent, unprecedented future. Instead, he traces a long historical pattern in which automation is continually imagined as just on the horizon—each epoch repeating this expectation as though it were novel. Wangert shows that capitalism persistently rearticulates itself through these threshold fantasies of full automation, treating each moment of development as the one that will finally displace human labour. Yet paradoxically, this promise remains unfulfilled, which sustains capitalism's capacity to accumulate by always deferring the horizon of complete automation.

Wangert proposes that the logic of automation under capitalism is not linear and progressive, but iterative and recursive. He draws heavily from Marx—particularly the evolution between the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*—to show how the initial crisis posed by fixed capital (machinery replacing labour) is sublimated by the concept of *real subsumption*, wherein automation becomes a medium for generating relative surplus value by replacing technologies with newer technologies. Thus, automation is no longer primarily about replacing labour with machines; it is about replacing technology with more technology in a cycle that perpetually restages the disappearance of labour without ever resolving it. This iteration aligns with Wangert's central claim that capitalism is itself a species of automation, constantly re-performing its own identity through these anachronistic developments.

Wangert's contribution is particularly significant to understanding the total crisis of capital because it reframes the crisis not as a breakdown caused by external technological forces but as an internal

temporal contradiction essential to capitalism's reproduction. He critiques both utopian and dystopian readings of automation by demonstrating that the notion of a final, subsumptive stage of capitalism—after which human labour will be obsolete—is a mirage intrinsic to capitalist ideology itself. Through meticulous historiographical and theoretical analysis, Wangert shows that automation is not a rupture in capitalism but a recursive technology of crisis management, constantly mediating value, labour, and temporality in a mode of production always trying to become what it already is.

Peter Lesnik's article titled "Seeing Dialectically: Systemic Crisis and Prognostic Intelligence in John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea*" explores the capacity of multi-channel moving-image installations—specifically John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* (2015)—to confront the aesthetic and epistemological challenges posed by the current systemic crisis. He frames *Vertigo Sea* as a dialectical dispositif: a formal and conceptual mechanism that stages a counter-narrative to capitalist globalisation by exposing the historical and ongoing forms of exclusion, violence, and erasure underpinning modernity. The first part of the article analyses how Akomfrah's montage technique subverts dominant histories of the sea, mapping its role not only as a site of migration, slavery, and ecological devastation but also as a symbol of global connectivity forged through colonial violence. The artwork thereby resists the visual logic of capitalist modernity by foregrounding submerged histories and ruptured temporalities.

The second part of Lesnik's analysis develops the notion of "prognostic intelligence" as a mode of historical perception enabled by Akomfrah's aesthetic form. Through its three-channel montage, *Vertigo Sea* constructs a non-simultaneous temporal field, where past and present are not linear but entangled. Lesnik argues that this fragmented yet dialectically structured temporality confronts the viewer with the conditions of a systemic, multi-dimensional crisis—economic, ecological, and epistemic. Rather than representing crisis as a spectacular breakdown, the installation encourages a mode of critical seeing attuned to structural contradictions and latent futures. In doing so, Akomfrah's work displaces passive spectatorship and fosters reflective engagement with the global capitalist condition.

Thus, Lesnik positions *Vertigo Sea* as a significant intervention in both contemporary art and political theory. Its refusal of narrative resolution and embrace of dialectical montage open up space for a renewed aesthetic of critique—one that can grasp the total crisis of capital not

through spectacle or moralism, but through a historically grounded, temporally complex mode of visual thought. The article ultimately affirms that such aesthetic strategies can contribute to the revitalisation of historical materialism, offering new perceptual and cognitive tools with which to understand—and potentially intervene in—our unfolding crisis-ridden present.

Xindi Li's "The Neotenous Image: On the Technical Adaptation of Alienation" explores how cinematic animation, particularly in its deployment of cuteness, mediates both intimacy and alienation under contemporary capitalism. Central to the argument is the concept of the "neotenous image"—a form of animated visuality that retains childlike or undeveloped features, yet functions as a highly adaptable commodity form. Drawing on Marx, Bataille, and Simondon, Li argues that such images do not merely represent alienation; they are technically and economically adapted to produce it, while simultaneously generating affective bonds with viewers. The neotenous image is therefore both reproductively powerful and ideologically compromised: it captures the tension between novelty and disposability, life and death, production and sacrifice.

Li's analysis centres on *Tamala 2010: A Punk Cat in Space* (2002), which she treats not just as a film, but as a parabolic model of animated commodity-life. Through its disjointed plot and visual repetitions, *Tamala 2010* reveals the underlying structure of cute media as sites where technical development is both historicised and re-enchanted. The neotenous image, in this sense, does not erase its own evolution—it remembers and recycles prior forms, thereby embodying the logic of the commodity that constantly reinvents itself to sustain novelty. Yet, this perpetual reinvention is inseparable from a cycle of symbolic death and rebirth, a ritual of disposability that mirrors capitalism's exploitation of temporal crisis as a means of expansion.

Ultimately, Li contends that the neotenous image is not simply a product of capitalist visual culture—it is one of its operative logics. Cuteness, in this framework, is not a benign aesthetic but a mechanism of reproductive power, capable of absorbing and repurposing alienation in the form of affective intimacy. The neotenous image thrives in capitalism's contradictory temporality, where the desire for novelty conceals the exhaustion and repetition that sustain the system. By locating this logic within the technical development of animated images, Li provides a compelling theory of how visual commodities do not just reflect crisis, but actively shape and prolong it.

In her "Authoritarianism in Crisis: Resistance in Turkey under Erdogan," Duru Selimkan offers a comprehensive analysis of the current political crisis in Turkey following the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoglu, situating it within the broader trajectory of Erdogan's authoritarian consolidation. The article critiques the transformation of Turkey's state apparatus under Erdogan—from parliamentary democracy to a personalised authoritarian regime grounded in political Islam and neoliberal economic policies. Selimkan foregrounds the generational experience of Turkish youth under perpetual authoritarianism and the structural limits placed on political participation. Drawing on both national and global comparisons (including to Trump's America), the article highlights how Erdogan exploits democratic institutions while hollowing them out, using judicial, security, and media apparatuses to suppress opposition. Yet, Selimkan argues that spontaneous protests—like those erupting across Turkey in response to İmamoglu's arrest—are insufficient without organised, class-conscious resistance. The author calls for a revolutionary alternative grounded in the working class, warning that electoralism and liberal reformism are inadequate to overcome the structural foundations of authoritarian capitalism.

In the short film *Common Courtesy (Nezaket)* and its accompanying reflective essay *The Silent Weight of Class: Hegemony and False Consciousness in Common Courtesy (Nezaket)*—both authored by Mesut Yüce Yıldız and published in the "Cultural Work" section of *Marxism & Sciences*—courtesy is interrogated as a historical and ideological structure that masks and sustains class domination. Yıldız shows that courtesy, far from being mere politeness, descends from aristocratic codes of courtly behaviour and has evolved into a mechanism of soft power: it naturalises hierarchy, moralises inequality, and renders exploitation emotionally palatable. In the film, the relationship between Halil, an ailing worker, and his employer at a small appliance store appears humane and even tender—but beneath this surface lies a quiet reproduction of class power. Courtesy becomes the film's true protagonist, the invisible conduit through which domination is made to feel righteous and mutual.

Drawing on Gramsci's theory of hegemony, alongside scholars such as Norbert Elias, Jean Anyon, and Ruby Payne, Yıldız demonstrates how class power is not only material but also affective and moral. Halil's silent loyalty and refusal to leave for better working conditions are not simply personal traits, but expressions of deeply internalised class ideology—forms of false consciousness wherein subordination is perceived

as virtue. *Common Courtesy* reveals how domination today often appears as kindness, how structural violence is maintained through moral narratives, and how well-meaning gestures can quietly reproduce inequality. In asking "What is courtesy?", Yıldız's work gives a stark answer: under capitalism, it is often the means by which exploitation becomes bearable, and therefore sustainable.

Vesa Oittinen's non-thematic article introduces Vladimir Iurinets, a little-known Soviet Marxist philosopher of the 1920s, whose early and sharp critique of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology has been largely forgotten due to political repression and historical neglect. Drawing on Iurinets's two-part article published in *Pod znamenem marksizma*, Oittinen reconstructs his materialist and dialectical critique of Husserl, particularly targeting the latter's ahistorical and anti-dialectical treatment of consciousness and eidetic intuition. Iurinets challenges the phenomenological notion of "givenness" by exposing internal contradictions in Husserl's claims about perception, object constitution, and the supposed immediacy of essence. He further characterises Husserl's thought as Platonist and metaphysical, lacking a theory of intersubjectivity grounded in material and historical relations. Oittinen situates Iurinets among other early Soviet critics of phenomenology, like Grigori Bammel, and contextualises his eventual repression under Stalinism. Despite the fragmentary nature of Iurinets's surviving work, Oittinen argues that his critique remains philosophically relevant today, especially in discussions on Marxism's relation to phenomenology.

In "Marx, Engels and the Communist Revolution between Determinism, Telos and Self-Emancipation" Joshua Graf revisits Marx and Engels's understanding of communist revolution in light of historical developments that appear to contradict their expectations—most notably, the success of the revolution in backward Tsarist Russia rather than in advanced capitalist societies. He argues that Marx and Engels did not conceive revolution as a deterministic or teleological inevitability, but rather as a historically contingent process rooted in the self-emancipation of the working class. Emphasising their rejection of doctrinal rigidity, Graf shows that Marx and Engels insisted on internationalism, strategic flexibility, and concrete analysis of concrete conditions, rather than proxy revolutions or abstract schemas. This methodological openness, he contends, renders their revolutionary theory still relevant under conditions that appear unfavourable, offering not a blueprint but a dialectical approach capable of navigating the contradictions of contemporary class struggle.

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Biography

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