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INTERVIEW

Interviews: Rethinking the Foundations of Marxism and Ilyenkovian Contributions

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Interviewed by Siyaveş Azeri and Ali C. Gedik

SIYAVEŞ AZERI (SA) & ALI C. GEDIK (ACG): The following text and the four questions below were sent via email to the authors and they were requested to answer all four or the ones they select.

The totality of the contemporary crisis of capitalism rather invites us to rethink the fundamental premises of Marxism in its totality, as the method of understanding and transcending capitalism and reflecting on the historical, present, and possible future forms of human-human and human-nature relations. In an age characterized by the urgent need for a “new beginning,” the quest for revisiting, rethinking, and clarifying Marxism’s foundational premises in different fields of science is crucial. In this vein, we would like to kindly ask you to answer one of the following questions, at least, preferably in relation to your expertise and optionally to the contributions of Soviet Marxist philosopher Evald V. Ilyenkov and his emphasis on the concept of “human activity” and “prioritization of activity/praxis,” materialist dialectics, and Marxist methodology to the foundations of Marxism (Upon the request, we welcome reformulations of the questions):

- 1) To what extent do you think the fundamental premises of Marxism are actual and viable in the wake of the “total” crisis of humanity?
- 2) In what respects the foundational premises of Marxism could inform a political strategy of exit from the contemporary crisis of capitalism?
- 3) How would you position some recent non-Marxist critiques of the contemporary state of the world, such as “Material turn,” posthumanism and new materialism, vis a vis Marxism? Do you think these paradigms represent a complete rupture with the fundamental premises of Marxism? Do you think a productive/critical engagement with these paradigms is possible? How should Marxist scholars respond to the epistemological tenets of these paradigms?
- 4) What is the most pressing task of Marxist scholars and intellectuals today in the wake of the total crisis of capitalism? To what extent the fundamental premises of Marxism could inform the possible roles that intellectuals are supposed to fulfill in such tumultuous times?

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Interview with Vladislav Lektorsky

SA & ACG: *To what extent do you think, the fundamental premises of Marxism are actual and viable in the wake of “total” crisis of humanity?*

VLADISLAV LEKTORSKY: In the context of ideas about “The Total crisis of Humanity” I would like to state that in reality the humankind has come to a turning point, at which there are two possibilities: its extinction or ascent to a new stage. The realization of each of them depends on a choice of a strategy of life. I think that a strategy of human salvation and development are connected with Marx’s main ideas. I mean his ideas about the creative nature of the human being, his conception of “real humanism,” his critique of capitalism as a society of total alienation, his understanding of praxis as transforming the world (natural and social one) and the human being herself/ himself. It is connected with the understanding of the human being, with a search for an answer to an old question: “What is the human being?”

I think that now contemporary human sciences, in particular cognitive sciences are rediscovering a number of Marx’s ideas. I mean in particular a popular movement in cognitive sciences “4 Cognition.” It is the understanding of cognition as “embodied” (connected not only with a brain, but with a whole body of epistemic agent), as “embedded” (connected with an outer surroundings), as “enacted” (connected with activity of an epistemic agent), as “extended” (using different artifacts, beginning with tools and finishing with language, cultural norms and scientific theories). But this approach to understanding the human being, her/his cognition and subjectivity has been elaborated in the Soviet philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century, proceeding from Marx’ ideas. It has been made first of all by the outstanding philosopher Evald Ilyenkov in his theory of Human Praxis and the understanding of “The Ideal” as a result and a form of collective Human Activity. In psychology this understanding of the human being has been elaborated by the outstanding Soviet psychologist L.Vygotsky, who based his “Cultural-historical theory” of human mind on Marx’s ideas. Now Vygotsky is recognized as a classic of the psychology and the cognitive science.

I think that a discussion of current human situation in the face of global digitalization and the role of artificial intelligence can be fruitful only if one uses principal Marx’s ideas, which certainly should be specified and developed in the contemporary context. Marx’s ideas are not the past of human culture, but its present and its future states. They give a strategy and a guide to social and human sciences.

Vladislav A. Lektorsky is Professor (1979), Full Member of the Russian Academy of Education (1995), Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (1997), Full Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (2006), Member of the International Institute of Philosophy (Paris, France) (2001), Member of the International Academy of Philosophy (Yerevan, Armenia) (2003), Foreign Member of the Center of Philosophy of Science University of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, USA) (1995), Honorary Professor of the Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing, China) (2005), Full member of the International Academy of the Philosophy of Science (Bruxelles) since 2006, Foreign Member of the Academy of sciences of Republic Kazakhstan since 2005, Head of the Scientific Council of The Russian Academy of Sciences “Methodological problems of Artificial Intelligence and cognitive sciences” since 2019, Head of the International Advisory Board of the journal “Problems of Philosophy” since 2009.

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1996 – till now - Professor of Faculty of Philosophy of the State Academic University of Humanitarian Sciences (GAUGN) (RAS), annually during two semesters reads the lecture course “Introduction to Epistemology,” conducts seminars, manages projects and dissertations, and also he is Head of the Department of Epistemology and Logic at this faculty. From time to time lectures at the Russian Academy of Public Administration (the President of RF). In 2004, he read the lecture course “The Philosophy of subjectivity,” Faculty of Philosophy, the Ural State University (Yekaterinburg). In 1997 he developed the program of the lecture course “Introduction to Epistemology,” which won an award of institute “Open Society.” Led by V. Lektorsky about 20 people successfully defended their doctoral and dissertations. Now he manages two postgraduate students, and two doctoral candidates.

Interview with Katarina Kolozova

SA & ACG: *To what extent do you think, the fundamental premises of Marxism are actual and viable in the wake of “total” crisis of humanity?*

KATARINA KOLOZOVA: I understand Marx’s humanism as fundamentally non-anthropocentric—its focus is science of the ecosystems (an ecology?) of technology and nature, and its definition is embedded in social relations and productivity rather than (human) subjectivity. In both early and later Marx, subjectivity centered-thought as romantically centered on the idea of the endlessly expanded human subject transformed into ersatz objectivity is declared the essence of all philosophy. Thus, all philosophical, including philosophical posthumanism that is subjectivity and identity centered, is the opposite to the objective and scientific thought Marx’s project aspires to be. We find the same arguments in favor of thus presented thesis in young Marx (*Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy in General*), in the transitional stage (*German Ideology*) but also in the *Communist Manifesto* and the first volume of *Capital*. Thus, a de-culturalised and de-individualised posthumanism could find itself in a productive combination with a more orthodox (pre-Lenin orthodoxy) reading of Marx. In fact, only this combination can save the postmodern posthumanism from itself, whereas Marx’s non-anthropocentric humanism can be indeed enriched by the posthumanist turn, under the conditions just stated. This is something I am attempting to lay a modest foundation for in my book *Capitalism’s Holocaust of Animals: A Non-Marxist Critique of Capital, Philosophy and Patriarchy* (Bloomsbury UK, 2019).

SA & ACG: *In what respects the foundational premises of Marxism could inform a political strategy of exit from the contemporary crisis of capitalism?*

KATARINA KOLOZOVA: One has to simply forget the stage of “vulgar socialism”—the former socialist states we had in Eastern Europe, including the country I grew up in, Yugoslavia—as a model, as well as its interpretation of the idea of dictatorship of the proletariat, then its bureaucratization (and, through that, alienation from the working class), the tension between society and private life on the one hand and the state on the other hand. In an article I wrote for *Outspoken*, to be published by McGill Press in the upcoming months and edited by Santiago Zabala and Adrian Parr, I am uncovering, and piecing together scattered yet coherent passages in Marx that argue that “associations of producers,” emerging in the developed stages of capitalism, would be the islands of difference that would

constitute the bridges of change and transformation. Thus, the change in the political-economic production model is the source of transformation or revolutionary change, not the individual responsibility, responsible lifestyle, or stylized identity of a “responsible citizen,” and activism (mere reaction to crisis in a system that is unimaginable to change) of “resistance” (to what is here to stay). New models of economic production, changing the notion of ownership, transforming the wider social understanding of “production” and bringing it close to Marx’s original idea of production of the economic (and political) base as a matter of creativity, individual and collective fulfillment, technology’s reconciliation with nature and resolution of the tension between state and society (see *The Jewish Question, German Ideology, Communist Manifesto*, and other sources) would be the way to go. Questions of liberal value, respect for individual identity choices, should be resolved as if automatically, as an effect of the transformation of the production basis, as was the case in the previous socialist system of Eastern Europe—only this time more substantially and with true respect for individual freedom as the latter will not be opposed to the collective. Rather, the two will be merely sides of the same coin, if the economic base is transformed in the manner suggested here. So, transformation of the productive base—the economic base is more than “economy,” it is an ecosystem of the social relations of humanity and the natural resources, moreover a creative one. It is about production of social relations not only of means of subsistence—the prerequisite of any revolutionary change and exit from capitalism.

SA & ACG: *How would you position some recent non-Marxist critiques of contemporary state of the world such as “Material turn,” post-humanism and new materialism vis a vis Marxism? Do you think these paradigms represent a complete rupture with the fundamental premises of Marxism? Do you think a productive/critical engagement with these paradigms possible? How should Marxist scholars respond to the epistemological tenets of these paradigms?*

KATARINA KOLOZOVA: I believe I already responded to this question, at least in part and as far as the posthumanist turn is concerned, i.e., on the basis of what precondition —its decoupling from cultural theory—it can be (and should be) combined with Marxism. Materialism and realism are certainly not the same thing but there are also many crucial intersections between the two. Furthermore, let us not forget that Marx referred to matter and the real interchangeably, and in fact preferred the use of the term real to that of matter and material which he often linked with the

overly philosophical connotations thanks to Feuerbach. (I discuss this in detail in my book on Marx and Laruelle, published by Punctum Books in 2015). I believe that when materialist and/or realist foundationalist outlook is applied on the interpretation of the universe of social relations—or simply, on the analysis of the species being of humanity—dovetailing with the only materialist doctrine (or science as it purports to be one) of society, i.e., Marxism, is unavoidable.

SA & ACG: *What is the most pressing task of Marxist scholars and intellectuals today in the wake of the total crisis of capitalism? To what extent the fundamental premises of Marxism could inform the possible roles that intellectuals are supposed to fulfill in such a tumultuous times?*

KATARINA KOLOZOVA: Invent the conditions for transformation of the productive base or the economic infrastructure with the view in mind that economy is more than just economy in the sense studied by economics—as explained above. It is a matter of *oikonomia* in the etymological sense—the organization of social relations in the realm of material (re)production, i.e., the creation of the means of subsistence, implies a view of a society underpinned by values, thus an ideological trajectory and a reinvention of the conditions of social relations. Therefore, the transformation will be holistic even if departing from just one question, that of the economic base.

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Interview with Hans-Peter Krüger

SA & ACG: *To what extent do you think, the fundamental premises of Marxism are actual and viable in the wake of “total” crisis of humanity?*

HANS-PETER KRÜGER: First of all, we are involved in an ecological crisis today. The ecological damage is experienced by all. The short-term interest in profits disturbs a sustainable relationship to the external nature and to our own nature in the succession of generations. Marx addressed the relation to nature in his theory of production and reproduction in various ways, not only capital-economic. In works of the young Marx, the essence of man is conceived in an aesthetic-expressive continuity with nature as universalizing beauty. In the *Grundrisse* and the *Theories of Surplus Value*, he deals with post-industrial development potentials. Nature would then no longer have to be divided into parts corresponding to the division of labor among humans. It could be regulated as a whole process if the sciences functioned as a general productive force. For this, however, new relations of communication were needed in which the general intellect, the specifically intellectual character of production, was mobilized. Marx understood the specificity of the intellect (*Geist*) following Hegel’s conception of using language in a reflexive way. Lev S. Vygotsky therefore investigated how the unity of language and thought can emerge from a pre-linguistic cooperation. This linguistic coupling of cognition and communication enables culturally and historically different levels for individual activities, communal practices, and social formations (Krüger 1990).

Second, we are confronted today with the results of neoliberal deregulations over the last three decades. The deregulations have led to a global increase in socioeconomic and sociocultural antagonisms. Not only is the proportion of poor and poorly educated people in the overall population increasing. Large sections of the middle classes are also falling away. These antagonisms are masked and compensated for by nationalist, imperialist and religious ideologies. This gives rise to new wars and civil wars. Instead of freedom, equality and solidarity, people seek safety from them in large-scale empires. The post-democracies are supposed to fight against dictatorships. First one fights against an external enemy, then against the internal enemies. This, the relation, either friend or foe, becomes prevalent everywhere. Formal democracy is also infiltrated and dissolved in this way. This results in the need to form a broad alliance for all democratic forces that advocates transnational cooperation in the global-historical crisis.

SA & ACG: *In what respects the foundational premises of Marxism could inform a political strategy of exit from the contemporary crisis of capitalism?*

HANS-PETER KRÜGER: The critical situation of the present time thus also gives rise to two tasks for the Marxism: a new embedding of human society and culture in nature and a broad alliance of all democratic forces for the transnational solution of the global-historic crisis. In the traditional terminology of the Marxism this means: a rethinking of materialism, which must not be understood in a merely mechanical or otherwise reductionist way, and a rethinking of dialectics, which can include not only forms of antagonistic competition but also communicative cooperation. This materialism is open not only to the connection between natural and sociocultural evolution, but also to the inorganic limits of evolution on Earth. This dialectic not only criticizes antagonistic competition, but also shows the productive evolutionary potential of communicative cooperation.

SA & ACG: *How would you position some recent non-Marxist critiques of contemporary state of the world such as “Material turn,” post-humanism and new materialism vis a vis Marxism? Do you think these paradigms represent a complete rupture with the fundamental premises of Marxism? Do you think a productive/critical engagement with these paradigms possible? How should Marxist scholars respond to the epistemological tenets of these paradigms?*

HANS-PETER KRÜGER: Some authors conceptualize posthumanism as an anti-dualistic understanding of nature and human life. Forms of life are hybrid. Many representatives of the material turn also want to overcome the separation of human subjects from their organizations, artifacts, and material conditions of life. Insofar as these two currents turn against the constitution of the world by the subject alone (Descartes, Kant, Husserl), they help to rediscover forms of life and forms of cooperation.

However, this new thematization of forms of life and cooperation took place earlier and in parallel in the natural philosophies of John Dewey and Helmuth Plessner (Krüger 2019a) and today in the evolutionary anthropology of Michael Tomasello. The latter anthropology examines the transformation of natural evolution into sociocultural evolution by comparing apes with humans from different cultures. Tomasello sees his reconstruction of the phylogenesis and the ontogenesis of modern humans as a neo-Vygotskian theory (Tomasello 2019, 304). Here, nature is understood not only as a mechanism of determinants, but as a potential for development under certain structural conditions (Krüger 2016). This potential includes forms of „shared intentionality“ that emerge in pre-linguistic cooperation

as “joint intentionality” and can be further developed and institutionalized into “collective intentionality” through linguistic communication (Tommasello 2019). However, these developmental potentials in communicative cooperation are blocked and abused by social antagonisms.

Dewey and Plessner embedded the personal forms of human life in inorganic and organic nature. “Nature” is broadly understood as the interrelation of three levels of interaction, the physical-chemical, the physiological-psychological, and the bodily-spiritual levels (Krüger 2019a). “Life” does not consist of separation, but of the hybrid coupling of physis and psyche. “Mind” exists only in the symbolic coupling to body and living body, in embodiments and representations of bodily movement. Persons are “body-minds” (Dewey 1982a) in an “excentric positionality” (Plessner 2019). They act from outside the center that lies in the interaction between a living being and its environment. Therefore, persons can and must play roles and act with them. But this acting of person-roles has limits, which are experienced in laughing and crying (Plessner 2020). The critique of society starts from the point of view of such borderline experiences. It promises no paradise on earth, but an improvement of conditions if we cooperate in problem solving. The future remains open because there is no finished essence of man. The essence of the human lies in the excentric rupture with the centric life form, a rupture that always makes history possible and requires it anew. There is no longer an end of history in these philosophical anthropologies, as it was in Hegel’s absolute spirit (Krüger 2019b).

In “high-capitalism,” there is a struggle for “forms of life-power,” for instance, in integrating pharmaceutical industries, life sciences, medical care and public health services, political and juridical regulations of norms for healthiness (Plessner 1982, 97-102). Therefore, one needs democracy on a highly qualified level of scientific deliberation in order to make the right difference in publics and decision-making processes (Dewey 1982b, regarding present dangers Habermas 2022).

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Hans-Peter Krüger was Professor of Practical Philosophy at the University of Potsdam, Germany, and co-editor of the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* (German Journal of Philosophy) 1993–2022. He has been working in retirement since 2020.

Krüger studied philosophy and psychology at the Humboldt University in Berlin where he also took his PhD about the philosophical development of young Hegel. His second book involved a communicative reconstruction of Marx in a debate with Habermas. Since the 1990s, Krüger has participated in the renaissance of philosophical pragmatisms (particularly that of John Dewey) in Europe, and he has reinvented philosophical anthropologies (especially that of Helmuth Plessner) in present philosophical discussion.

He has served as Fellow at UC Berkeley, the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Institute for Advanced Study Berlin), and the University of Pittsburgh Center for Phi-

losophy of Science. Krüger has served as guest professor at the Jagiellonen University of Krakow (Poland), at the University of Vienna (Austria), and at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in Uppsala.

Among his books are: *Kritik der kommunikativen Vernunft (Critique of Communicative Reason)*; *Demission der Helden (Resignation of Heroes)*; *Perspektivenwechsel. Autopoiese, Moderne und Postmoderne (Changing Perspectives. Autopoiesis, Modernity, and Postmodernity)*; *Zwischen Lachen und Weinen. Bd. 1: Das Spektrum menschlicher Phänomene (Between Laughing and Crying. Vol 1: The Spectrum of Human Phenomena)*; *Bd. 2: Der dritte Weg Philosophischer Anthropologie und die Geschlechterfrage (Vol. 2: The Third Way of Philosophical Anthropology and the Question of Genders/Sexes)*; *Philosophische Anthropologie als Lebenspolitik (Philosophical Anthropology as Life Politics)*; *Gehirn, Verhalten und Zeit. Philosophische Anthropologie als Forschungsrahmen (Brain, Behavior, and Time. Philosophical Anthropology as Research Frame)*; *Heroismus und Arbeit in der Entstehung der Hegelschen Philosophie (Heroism and Labor in the Origin of Hegel's Philosophy)*; and *Homo absconditus. Helmuth Plessners Philosophische Anthropologie im Vergleich (Homo absconditus. Helmuth Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology in Comparison)*.

Interview with Glenn Rikowski

SA & ACG: *To what extent do you think, the fundamental premises of Marxism are actual and viable in the wake of “total” crisis of humanity?*

GLENN RIKOWSKI: It appears, on the basis of this question, and coming at it from a certain perspective, that Marxism has failed. The implication is that if the “fundamental premises of Marxism” were actual, and if they were viable, then there would be no “total crisis of humanity.” Of course, this assumes that there is a “total” crisis of humanity (i.e. global warming and climate breakdown, with the concomitant annihilation of humankind on planet Earth). It also assumes Marxism has some ‘fundamental premises’, or at least ought to have them (as, maybe, by not starting out from them, we have indeed arrived at the ‘total crisis of humanity’). Thus: the ‘total crisis of humanity’ that we face seems to boil down to the weakness and underdevelopment of Marxism, with the hint that we, as Marxists, have strayed too far from Marxism’s ‘fundamental premises’. We should hang our heads in shame! Or not, and we take this sad bunch of propositions apart.

First, we might assert that the ‘total crisis of humanity’ will not be total. Articles on attaining sustainable life in giant domes for the rich can easily be found online. The rich will be fine: global warming (as opposed to Dick Chaney’s propagandistic ‘climate change’) may gradually lead to a spawning of these domes. More to the point is the ‘doming’ of entire cities, as discussed in various articles in *Nature*. It is easy to imagine some sort of capitalism surviving in these giant constructions. Malthusian ‘population shrinkage’ (gruesome death) for billions outside these exclusive domes is viewed as collateral amidst the survival of the shittest.

Secondly, we might argue that *capitalism* is the real enemy and that in order to combat global warming and its effects it is essential to move beyond this form of society. Capital is like a giant value vortex sucking in raw materials (especially fossil fuels) with devastating effects on the natural world. Nature (including human life), tied to capital, is being exhausted and defiled. Again, not only has Marxism failed to effectively address global warming, but it has not sunk its principal cause: *capitalism*. Thus: Marxism is a double failure.

One way out of all this collective despair and individual self-flagellation is to assert that Marxism is a *science*, and has no direct connection to changing the world. Yet, as we all know, this does not let us off the hook, as the ‘point is to change it’ (Marx). Science and revolution, revolutionary

science, come as a package. Then we might wring our hands and bemoan the disconnections between Marxist science, Left politics, and the billions of people whose understandings of Marxism are sadly lacking. Here we have a third failure: that is, the failure to forge mass and massive political parties that incorporate effectively Marxism's 'fundamental premises' (where effectiveness means the 'real movement of society' and the strengthening of the communist impulse), and where these parties are powered forward by millions, billions of workers. It could be argued that this is what is required to create a *crisis for capital*, rather than for humanity. But this situation looks to be a long way off, and the windows for addressing global warming and its effects are closing at an alarming speed (as Greta Thunberg and others keep reminding us). Too little, too late: in terms of avoiding climate breakdown, and also in terms of terminating capital and generating new forms of life and social relations.

Thirdly, there will always be discussion, and no doubt heated debate, about what are the 'fundamental premises' of Marxism. Yet in light of the above, this seems like piddling while the planet burns. Whatever these fundamental premises are, Marxism seems to lack actuality (insufficient real existence) and viability (there is no effective movement of millions or billions) in relation to the 'crisis of humanity' as outlined by Cenk Saraçoğlu in the previous issue of *Marxism & Sciences*.

This morbid outlook, flowing from the initial question, washes over significant work on Marx(ism) and ecology, such as the writings of John Bellamy Foster, Jason Moore and many others. In my own field of study, critical education, Simon Boxley, Peter McLaren and Mike Cole have made important strides regarding relations between revolutionary critical pedagogy and the development of ecosocialism. The debilitating and apparently hopeless account I have generated from the starting question also avoids the fact that capital is underdeveloped. It has not conquered humankind or quelled resistance to its rule over our lives, or stemmed the search for alternatives, or ended its reliance on us as labourers. In the event, we are not faced with the full development of capital but with moderated 'capitalism as we know it' (Andrea Micocci). In capitalist education, what Marx called the 'becoming of capital' can be viewed, studied, resisted and subverted – but it is still a process, the *capitalisation* of education that is far from complete in England and worldwide. 'We are the crisis of capital,' as John Holloway reminds us. Capital is reliant on our labour for its existence, and in that light we can unearth radical hope.

SA & ACG: *In what respects the foundational premises of Marxism could inform a political strategy of exit from the contemporary crisis of capitalism?*

GLENN RIKOWSKI: Here, I would agree with Helena Sheehan (interview from the previous issue) that: ‘First of all, it [Marxism] names capitalism,’ as opposed to neoliberalism. In these days of post- and neo-everything, the enemy, in the first instance, is capital and the society in which it exists: capitalism. Critiquing particular phases or paradigms of capitalist development fails to go deep enough, in my view.

Without holding out hostages to fortune regarding Marxism’s ‘foundational premises,’ I would offer a few pointers for consideration regarding exiting, not just the ‘contemporary crisis’ of capitalism, but capitalism *in toto*.

First, I would stress Marx’s commitment to the ‘ruthless criticism of all that exists’ (in a letter to Arnold Ruge, 1843). This includes the whole of capitalist society, not just its ‘economic’ phenomena. For me, this must include the works of Marx and Marxism. Dogmatism is to be avoided: there are no sacred categories.

Secondly, what is the point of Marxism? Why study Marx and Marxist theorists and researchers? Marxism is the best theory available, in my view, for locating *weaknesses* in the rule of capital. It exposes its weak points like no other theory I know, and it is these weak points that we must attack, through critique and through practical endeavours of all kinds.

Thirdly, dialectics is important for understanding capital and capitalism. This is because, following the ideas of Andrea Micocci, I would maintain that capitalism *develops dialectically*. However, if all we do is to mirror capital’s dialectical development in our research, thought and writings then this becomes allied with the *synthetics* of capital. It becomes what Andrea Micocci calls a ‘vulgar Hegelianism,’ an account assimilated to capitalist development. Thus, following Micocci, John Holloway and Harry Cleaver, I would advocate a negative dialectics (after Adorno) that aims to ‘rupture the dialectic’ of capital (Harry Cleaver), intellectually and practically.

Fourthly, and leading on from the previous points, I view Marxism not just as communist science, but simultaneously as a form of *intellectual attack* on capital, based on its critique. Critique sets out to undermine capital’s social relations; it is not just criticism, demystification, or demonstrating how capital’s social forms rest upon our labour, though it is also all of these. However, this is nothing without practical attacks on capital (informed by the critique).

Thus, the fifth point is that it is not just a case of ‘transforming institutions of civil society’ (Sheehan interview, previous issue), but more a case of forging new, *alternative* institutions that leave the old, capital-infested ones behind. Mike Neary (in *Student as Producer*), along with Richard Hall, Joss Winn and others, indicate how this can be done for higher education institutions. We must ‘destitute’ (Tari) capital’s institutional forms while creating *security* through the invention of new ones that incorporate oppositional and sustainable reality-settings.

Sixthly, intellectual attacks focusing on capital’s social forms disrupt and challenge capital. Capital’s *social forms*—e.g., value, class, money, state—are a kind of binding, weaving or web of capital’s social relations, and these are manifested in particular institutions. Institutions in capitalist society are concrete manifestations of capital’s social forms. But these social forms are not just ‘economic,’ i.e., the usual suspects: value, money etc., noted previously. As capital is the ‘general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity’ (Marx), then ‘educational’ social forms (e.g. qualification, curriculum, examination, test) must be viewed in the same light, for example.

Finally, conjoining points six and two above, where to start? In my own work on Marxist educational theory I have set out from the commodity-form (the ‘economic cell-form,’ Marx) and labour-power (the unique commodity), on the basis that these are capital’s *weakest* points. This is where I take a different path to John Holloway, Anitra Nelson and others who argue that we start out from the critique of money. Of course, strategically, it might be best if Marxists advance attacks on capital’s social forms and their institutional manifestations on as many fronts as possible.

I am also reminded of something that Paula Allman once said about her teaching methods. She argued that preparing people for revolutionary social transformation involved providing them with the necessary ‘tool kit’ of ideas, theories and analyses drawn from the works of Marx, Paulo Freire and others. Perhaps the notions of ‘fundamental premises,’ or ‘foundational premises,’ of Marxism can be seen in a similar light. For example, demonstrating how and why education in capitalism takes on a *capitalist social form* (as I have tried to do), why we can give substance to the notion of a specifically *capitalist* education, means we draw ideas, categories, theories and analyses from Marx and Marxists to do a particular job of intellectual work. We use a particular intellectual tool kit for this endeavour, and in this process the items we choose take on the roles of constituting ‘fundamental’ or ‘foundational’ premises.

SA & ACG: How would you position some recent non-Marxist critiques of contemporary state of the world such as “Material turn,” post-humanism and new materialism vis a vis Marxism? Do you think these paradigms represent a complete rupture with the fundamental premises of Marxism? Do you think a productive/critical engagement with these paradigms possible? How should Marxist scholars respond to the epistemological tenets of these paradigms?

GLENN RIKOWSKI: In 2002, with Dave Hill, Mike Cole and Peter McLaren, and I edited a book called *Marxism Against Postmodernism in Educational Theory*. In the late-1980s and 1990s, postmodernism was attracting young Left radicals in education and at the same time Marxism and other ‘grand narratives’ in social theory were being attacked and rubbished by postmodernist intellectual warriors. Our book was a critique of postmodernist ideas in education and set out various restatements regarding the value of Marxist educational theory. Initially, I was in two minds about the book. I felt that perhaps valuable time and effort was being wasted: why not just develop Marxist educational further rather than mess about with postmodernism? In the event, through the critique of postmodernist ideas in education and in general, I developed my own ideas. Thus, for me, the project was worth it. Marx developed his ideas through encounters with Hegel, Feuerbach, Adam Smith, David Ricardo and a host of other writers. His ideas did not arise *ex nihilo*. We have to make judgements about whether we engage with new materialism, posthumanism, transhumanism, ahumanism, accelerationism, speculative realism, black metal theory and actor network theory etc., in this light. If we feel such engagements can advance the richness and explanatory power of contemporary Marxism—then go for it. Of course, it is not easy to judge the utility of the extent of such engagements. How far do we ride with these theories? How deep do we have to go before realising any useful insights?

I have found Thomas Nail’s new materialism to be well worth engaging with. First of all, because his reframing of Marx’s *Doctoral Dissertation* through Lucretius showed that the ideas within it permeated through Marx’s later writings in ways I had previously been unaware of. Secondly, through bringing Marx together with Lucretius, Nail shows the significance of *flow*, *movement* and *social energy* throughout Marx’s works.

In my own discipline, critical education, the current trendy and seemingly cool theory is Post-Critical Pedagogy. Like the postmodernists of the 1980s-1990s in educational theory, Marxist educational theory and its sidekick, critical pedagogy, are undermined in post-critical pedagogy. The theory’s leading protagonists, Naomi Hodgson, Joris Vlieghe and Piotr

Zamojski have produced a *Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy* where mainstream critical pedagogy is attacked, firstly on the basis that educators are distanced from those to be educated as they are charged with ‘setting the unenlightened free,’ and secondly critical pedagogues are driven by ‘the passion of hate.’ The end point of their critique of critical pedagogy is ‘education for its own sake’—a position they acknowledge seems conservative, and that I have criticised myself. From time-to-time I have thought about combating this viewpoint, but as yet I am not convinced that doing so would advance Marxist educational theory very much.

SA & ACG: *What is the most pressing task of Marxist scholars and intellectuals today in the wake of the total crisis of capitalism? To what extent the fundamental premises of Marxism could inform the possible roles that intellectuals are supposed to fulfill in such a tumultuous times?*

GLENN RIKOWSKI: I think what I have to say on this is largely covered in my response to the second question. But I would like to add one final point. In 1998 or 1999 (I can’t remember when exactly), I emailed comrade Peter McLaren this: “What is the maximum damage I can do (given my biography, skills, talents, and physical health, etc.) to the rule of capital? This question needs to be asked frequently, as the answer may change (perhaps many times) during the course of one’s life.” Amongst our little gang of Marxist educators—Peter McLaren, Dave Hill, Mike Cole, Paula Allman, and I—this became known as the “Red Chalk Principle,” and it features in Peter McLaren’s Preface to our booklet, *Red Chalk* (2001). It can seem like a bit of a copout with all the caveats and qualifications, but in fact it carries a heavy load of responsibility.

Whatever we may decide regarding the ‘fundamental premises of Marxism,’ a key role for Marxist intellectuals is that of becoming a public intellectual. While Marxism is relatively weak in educational theory and research as compared with other disciplines, it can boast some impressive public intellectuals such as Peter McLaren, Dave Hill, Mike Cole and Mike Neary, who, in so many ways and through so many different media, have communicated Marxist ideas on education to a wider audience. The rising generations of Marxist educational theorists—and here I am thinking of Derek Ford, Curry Malott, Inny Accioly, and Alpesh Maisuria as examples—are carrying on this crucial work.

Glenn Rikowski is an Independent Researcher, based in Forest Gate, London. He was previously a Visiting Fellow in the College of Social Science at the University of Lincoln, UK (2016–2022), and a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Education at Anglia Ruskin University, Chelmsford, UK (2014–15). To October 2013, Rikowski was a Senior Lecturer in Education Studies in the School of Education at the University of Northampton. Prior to that, he was a supply teacher in east London (2001), a Senior Research Fellow in Lifelong Learning at Birmingham City University (1999–2001) and a Research Fellow in the School of Education, University of Birmingham (1994–1999). Glenn taught in further education colleges and schools in Essex and London (1985–1989), and at Epping Forest College (1989–1994). Dr. Rikowski's PhD thesis (University of Warwick, 1989) was on the recruitment of engineering apprentices in Coventry. His publications include: *The Battle in Seattle: Its Significance for Education* (2001), and (with Dave Hill, Peter McLaren and Mike Cole) the edited collection, *Marxism Against Postmodernism in Educational Theory* (2002)—which won an American Educational Studies Association (AESA) Critics' Choice Award for 2004. Dr. Rikowski has conducted empirical research on a number of topics: e.g. continuing vocational education, further education college finance, working students, and the UK horological industry. His writings include works on the social production of labour-power, social time, Marxism and transhumanism, crises in capitalist education, and the business takeover of education. Rikowski was a member of the Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators from 1994–2001. With Anthony Green (UCL Institute of Education), Dr. Rikowski co-founded and organised the Marxism and Education: Renewing Dialogues seminars twice-yearly from 2002–2007. Also with Green, he co-founded the world's first book series on 'Marxism and Education' with Palgrave Macmillan in 2004.

Interview with Andy Blunden

SA & ACG: *To what extent do you think, the fundamental premises of Marxism are actual and viable in the wake of “total” crisis of humanity?*

ANDY BLUNDEN: An understanding of the fundamental premises of Marxism are important for understanding the present total crisis of humanity, but in order to determine these principles and formulate them in a way appropriate for our times, two things are important: (1) placing Marx in the history of human thought, and in particular reading Marx critically in the light of a thorough knowledge of Hegel; (2) taking account of the transformation of the forces of production since Marx died, and the correlative transformation of the class structure of bourgeois society.

SA & ACG: *In what respects the foundational premises of Marxism could inform a political strategy of exit from the contemporary crisis of capitalism?*

ANDY BLUNDEN: It is particularly important that in studying the writing of Marx and other great figures that we go beyond textual interpretation to addressing the pressing political problem of our own times, without which the great works of the past are mere dead letters.

SA & ACG: *How would you position some recent non-Marxist critiques of contemporary state of the world such as “Material turn,” post-humanism and new materialism vis a vis Marxism? Do you think these paradigms represent a complete rupture with the fundamental premises of Marxism? Do you think a productive/critical engagement with these paradigms possible? How should Marxist scholars respond to the epistemological tenets of these paradigms?*

ANDY BLUNDEN: Marxists theorists must participate in the struggle for a just and sustainable world alongside the billions of others who also struggle. The final outcome is not the result of our activity alone, but of the combined activity of billions, the overwhelming majority of whom do not agree with Marxism in any of its versions, let alone the reconstructed Marxism based on Hegel, Marx and Vygotsky that I propose. There are too many currents of thought on the big social questions of the day to make generalisations, the point is to find how to collaborate with as many others as possible to a common outcome—sustainable democratic socialism.

SA & ACG: *What is the most pressing task of Marxist scholars and intellectuals today in the wake of the total crisis of capitalism? To what extent the fundamental premises of Marxism could inform the possible roles that intellectuals are supposed to fulfill in such a tumultuous times?*

ANDY BLUNDEN: Our task is to work side by side with others to foster universal solidarity.

Andy Blunden is an independent scholar in Melbourne, Australia, and a member of the Marxists Internet Archive Collective, with an interest in Hegel's philosophy and Activity Theory.