

# **Marxism & Sciences 2023**

A Symposium of Nature, Culture,  
Human and Society

Marxism in the  
Age of Total Crisis

14-17 September 2023

Bilimler Köyü, Foça, Izmir, Turkey

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|---|--|--|
| <b>14.09.2023</b>                                   |  |  |
| <b>Crisis of Politics/Identity</b>                  |  |  |
| 10.00-12.00   | Arrival  |  |
| 12.30-13.45   | <i>"Conspiracy Theories, Fetishism, and the Spiritual Crisis: Marx on Religion Revisited"</i>  | <b>Siyaveş Azeri</b>                                   |
| 13.45-15.00   | Lunch  |  |
| 15.00-16.15   | <i>"The ascendance of Right-Wing Populism: Israel in Comparative Perspective"</i>  | <b>Yaov Pled</b>                                       |
| 16.15-16.30   | Coffee Break   |  |
| 16.30-17.45   | <i>"The Speech of Objects: Black Marxism(s) Revisited"</i>   | <b>Xindi Li</b>  |
| <b>15.09.2023</b>                                   |  |  |
| <b>Crisis of Techno-Economy</b>                     |  |  |
| 10.00-11.15   | <i>"Dehumanization and Techno- Fetishism: A Marxist Critique of Transhumanism"</i>   | <b>P. M. Duc, N. A Tuan and D. T. Dung</b>             |
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| 11.30-12.45   | <i>"Degrowth and Post-Capitalism"</i>  | <b>Yakup Atamer Aykaç</b>                              |
| 12.45-14.00   | Lunch  |  |
| 14.00-15.15   | <i>"(Mis)Reading Grundrisse"</i>   | <b>Devin Wagnert</b>                                   |
| 15.15-15.30   | Coffee Break   |  |
| 15.30-16.45   | <i>"Computation and Capitalism: How Can We Find a Link between Turing Machines and Marxism"</i>  | <b>Bruce Robinson (online)</b>                         |
| <b>16.09.2023</b>                                   |  |  |
| <b>Crisis of Theory (Complexity and Dialectics)</b> |  |  |
| 10.00-11.15   | <i>"Function and Totality: The Methodical Confrontation of Historical Materialism and Holism"</i>  | <b>Joost Kircz</b>                                     |
| 11.15-11.30   | Coffee Break   |  |
| 11.30-12.45   | <i>"Reducing Uncertainty by Marxist Abstractions in a Time Crisis"</i>   | <b>Erzsebet Pasztor</b>                                |
| 12.45-14.00   | Lunch  |  |
| 14.00-15.15   | <i>"Theories of Crisis, Complexity, Nonlinearity, and Marxism: Understanding the Interconnectedness of Economic and Environmental Crises."</i>                 | <b>Ari-Ofengenden</b>                                  |
| 15.15-15.30   | Coffee Break   |  |
| 15.30-16.45   | <i>"Symptoms of Asymptotic Knowledge: An Ecological Leninist Critique of the Mechanistic Worldview"</i>  | <b>Cameron Gamble and Kenny Knowlton, Jr. (online)</b> |
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| <b>Crisis of art and and Education</b>              |  |  |
| 10.00-11.15   | <i>"Music in Crisis and the Crisis in Ethnomusicology: Towards a Marxist Theoretical Framework for the Holistic Study of Music in the Age of Total Crisis"</i> | <b>Ali Cenk Gedik and Duygu Aralan</b>                 |
| 11.15-11.30   | Coffee Break   |  |
| 11.30-12.45   | <i>"Machines of Dialectical Vision: Systemic Imagination in John Akomfrah's Multichannel Installations"</i>  | <b>Peter Lesnik</b>                                    |
| 12.45-14.00   | Lunch  |  |
| 14.00-15.15   | <i>"On Political Epistemology: Revisiting Fact and Value in Science and Society"</i>   | <b>Sascha Freyberg and Senthil Babu D (online)</b>     |
| 15.15- ...  | Evaluation, open discussion and farewell   |  |

**Scientific Committee:**

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## **Conspiracy Theories, Fetishism, and the Spiritual Crisis: Marx on Religion Revisited**

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In his polemics against Bauer brothers and in his critique of Hegel's philosophy of right, Marx defines religion not as the source but as the showcase of human misery; for Marx religion is the expression of immiserating capitalist social relations that deprives human life from any significance and turns human beings into automatic agents—personifications—of capital. “The sigh of the oppressed”, “the soul of a world without a soul” is the perverse form of admitting such ineffectuality; the omnipotence of god—as the image of capital—is guaranteed by complete lack of volition on the side of human beings; hence follows human beings' total submission to the will of capital and its consequent dormitive effect—religion is the opium of the masses. Thus, the critique of religion as the critique of god-capital, the substance-subject of capitalist society, constitutes the ground for any criticism.

Religion, under capitalism, does not descend in Abrahamic-Biblical forms only. The immiserating capitalist social relations—the earthly kernel of religion—also become manifest in the form of conspiracy theories. This aspect has become clearer with the relatively recent, and still ongoing, pandemic. Many, from Trump to philosophers to ordinary people, depending on their political sidings, announced the outbreak of the covid-19 related ailments as a conspiracy plotted by Chinese or by states, including the US, for controlling the global economy or imposing new disciplinary measures on the masses. Some went further rejecting the reality of any such virus and related pandemic. Among the common features of all such expressions are the covert admission of lack of agency on the side of individuals and the anthropomorphic conceptualization of subjectivity and agency. I, this generic individual person, am not the agent behind the emergence and spread of this disease, nor do I possess such a capability. Since the disease itself also lacks agency, there might be powers behind the scene, the new gods, creating and spreading the virus. Such conspiracy theories have also been enforced in the face of the disease particularly targeting the elderly and people with chronic illnesses, that is, the “surplus-population” that not only does not “contribute” to economy but further is a “burden” to it.

We might speculate that conspiracy theories and fascist or political religious movements are somehow related as manifestations of a same essence. In a wider sense, conspiracy theories and fascist and/or political religious movements are complementary. Both approaches are forms of idolatry and therefore fetishistic with fetishism being the necessary form of appearance of

relations between people under capitalism. This means that conspiracy theories, like religions, are inevitable emanations of the capital-relation since under capitalism human beings are necessarily governed by the products of their brains, as in case of religion, as much as by the products of their hands, as in the case of commodities (Marx, 1992, 772).

Conspiracy theories are the mechanism through which the insignificant masses perversely attribute meaning and importance to their lives—accordingly, their existence is so significant that a conspiracy should be plotted against them in order to turn them ineffectual.

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# **The Ascendance of Right-Wing Populism: Israel in Comparative Perspective**

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As in several European countries, the general elections held in Israel in 2022 brought back to power a bloc of right-wing populist political parties, including three proto-fascist ones, headed by Benjamin Netanyahu. Populism, as I see it, is not a coherent ideology, not even a “thin” one, but rather a rhetorical device of political mobilization in formally democratic societies that can adapt to different ideologies depending on the political circumstances (Jansen 2011; Arato and Cohen 2022). The key concept of populism, “the people,” is defined through both vertical and horizontal exclusion, by ascriptive markers as well as by class position (“elite” vs. “the people”) (Brubaker 2017).

In 2019 Netanyahu was indicted for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust in three different cases. Netanyahu responded to his indictment in a series of speeches full of classic populist tropes: The indictment was nothing less than an attempted coup d'état, which the “deep state” – the police and the prosecutors – carried out under pressure from the “Left” and the media, which are one and the same; his enemies are trying to topple him judicially, since they cannot defeat him democratically; but “the public” has no confidence in the law enforcement system and stands with him (Shilon 2022). By “the public” Netanyahu meant his “base,” counting about 35% of the electorate, and consisting mainly of working- and lower-middle-class Mizrachim (Jews originating in Moslem countries).

Ethno-national populism normally feeds on economic and/or cultural insecurity caused by immigration or by the empowerment, real or imaginary, of an outside group characterized by ascriptive markers. The power of Israel's ethno-national populism, however, has persisted through bad and good economic times for its base and Israel does not accept non-Jewish immigrants to any significant extent. My argument, based on an attitude survey conducted right before the 2022 elections, is that, unlike in the US and Europe, in Israel right-wing populism does not feed primarily on economic deprivation or cultural fear of immigration, but rather on a combination of factors, negative and positive:

- Resentment against the Labor Zionist Movement, which governed the country at the time of the Mizrachim's arrival in the 1950s and 1960s and assigned them to economic, political and cultural marginality (Ben Haim 2022).
- Resource competition with the Palestinians, at both the working- and middle-class levels.
- Existential insecurity that is common to all Israeli Jews because of the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- Neoliberalism, introduced in 1985, after initially hurting Mizrachim economically, has since the mid-1990s benefited many of them (Dahan 2016).
- Much of this beneficial effect occurred under Netanyahu as Prime Minister.

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## The Speech of Objects: Black Marxism(s) Revisited

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By way of his (re)reading of Marx on the commodity fetish and primitive accumulation, Fred Moten's monograph *In The Break* describes the African slave in the context of American slavery as 'the commodity that speaks back.' For Marx, if commodities could speak, they would articulate their use value but not "belong to us as objects." However, Moten rewrites, this an impossible speech Marx imposes on the commodity by way of not only its use value, but the ontological and historical resistance of the slave.

Moten derives this idea from Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*, as well as Hortense Spillers' field-determining essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." In these texts, the black slave holds the special status of a commodity that coexists with the economy of slavery in the Americas in the time of industrialization. Simultaneously, the slave remained a fungible commodity that was reproducible thereafter to the American law of *partus sequitur ventrem* – in which the child of the slave, including those fathered by the violence of the slave master, always follows the mother in entering the status of slavery. While these slave-commodities remained fungible, they were marked by linguistic, psychological, and physical torture – including the scars of what Spillers has called the "hieroglyphics of the flesh." Thus, the captive body was reduced to a thing – becoming flesh after the fact of body – but this thingliness was marked by the symbolic order in transformation of both body and speech itself. Spillers has called the fungibility between slaves that is nonetheless marked by their sexual reproduction "ungendering."

For Marx, so-called primitive accumulation "plays the same part as the original sin in theology." Here, the primordial enslavement for Marx is linked with the conquest of colonialism. Many scholars, who we can now call black Marxists (Moten included) have added an addendum to this idea in which the economy of slavery in the Americas coexisted alongside industrialization: in fact, especially in Moten's articulation, the thingliness of the slave persists even after emancipation.

In my proposed conference presentation, I will explore how the 'commodity that speaks back' does so in the sense of a fungible object's entering of the symbolic order, while remaining part-and-parcel of economic exchange. Ungendering poses an economic and historical – and not just symbolic – problem. Firstly, this presents an issue in Moten's terms, marking the slave-commodity as both commodity in the realm of exchange, as well as human whose labor power can be sold. Secondly, and historically, primitive accumulation has been treated as a signpost in which we must pass in order to have the period called capitalism. Yet to take Moten quite seriously, this primitive period becomes something we have to keep on encountering. In other words, to deal with America's ongoing racial and economic crises simultaneously is also to arrive



at the fact that primitive accumulation in this context is a crisis that has yet to be solved.

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## **Dehumanization and Techno-Fetishism: A Marxist Critique of Transhumanism**

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In the era of total crisis, transhumanism - an ideology advocating for transcending human limitations through technology - warrants an in-depth Marxist analysis. This dissection reveals thematic parallels between transhumanism's narratives and Marx's critiques of alienation, commodification, and class struggle, indicating deep structural relationships between transhumanism's goals and the socio-economic conditions it emerges from.

Amid pervasive crises, transhumanism suggests a merger of human and technology to transcend natural limits and enhance human potential. The goal here is not merely to attain technological immortality but to empower humans with enhanced autonomy for tackling complex societal challenges. This augmented capability could revolutionize problem-solving approaches. However, this prompts scrutiny of our inherent "species-being" - a Marxian concept reflecting our unique capacity for creative self-actualization, often distorted by capitalist alienation. Transposed onto transhumanism, we risk erasing vital human traits, instigating a novel self-alienation. This human-technology amalgamation could incite a unique dehumanization, potentially magnifying existing crises. Fundamental aspects of our "species-being" such as empathy, aesthetic appreciation, relationship fulfillment, and shared cultural experiences risk profound alteration or even loss in the pursuit of post-humanity. Thus, transhumanism may inadvertently intensify the Marxian critique of capitalist-induced alienation, exacerbating the prevailing crises.

Techno-fetishism, a cornerstone of transhumanist ideology, exemplifies an uncritical adulation of technology. By focusing predominantly on the technological augmentation of human abilities, it often neglects the intricate socio-economic factors and labor dynamics that drive technological progress. This aligns with Marx's critique of commodity fetishism, where the perceived market value of goods obscures the human labor and social relations that underpin their production. Techno-fetishism, in its decontextualization of technology, can distort our understanding, portraying technology as an autonomous entity, disconnected from the human labor and societal infrastructure that

give it life. This perspective risks sidelining the human element in technological advancement, thereby contributing to an unequal distribution of technological benefits and risks. This blinkered view not only threatens to intensify social inequalities but also fails to acknowledge the social responsibility inherent in technological development. In doing so, techno-fetishism could perpetuate and deepen the crises we face, instead of presenting a viable solution.

In response to the total crisis, this study argues for a balanced understanding of transhumanism that takes into account socio-political and economic realities. This approach provides a proactive solution to the crises, engaging critically with the realities of technological progress, and recognizing its potential consequences. Building on these insights, this study advocates a radical reinterpretation of the transhumanist trajectory. It proposes that the historical materialism central to Marxism can offer a powerful counter-argument, conceptualizing alternative paths for technological evolution. These alternatives prioritize human needs and social equity over technology's unchecked expansion, challenging the reductionist, techno-utopian narrative propagated by transhumanism. By reframing our aspirations away from mere technological advancement towards a future centered on humanistic principles and social justice, Marxism could potentially offer a promising solution to the age of total crisis.

Keywords: Transhumanism; Dehumanization; Techno-fetishism; Alienation; Species-being; Commodity Fetishism; Technological Advancement; Historical Materialism; Class Struggle

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## DEGROWTH AND POST-CAPITALISM

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Ecology, productive forces and Marxism are the corners of a long-debated triangle for the crises of our times. In the literature, three perspectives can be named. Firstly, a perspective which claims Marxism is entirely a futile effort regarding ecology since it is Promethean (Giddens, 1981). Secondly, Marxism is useful to a certain level however it is not enough therefore it must be overcome since it is not sufficient to provide us with the tools to build a sustainable post-capitalist future (Eckersley, 1992) and finally the perspective that claims Marxist critique and a vision for a communist society is already in itself an ecologically sustainable vision (Saito, 2023). For the study at hand, Marxism, refers to the historical materialist perspective that is the critique of the capitalist relations of production and forming the practical basis of a communist society. Therefore, the main subject of the study at hand is not inspecting which of these three perspectives carries the 'true' Marx within them but what does Marx's methodology provide us to challenge and overcome the 'total crises' that is set against the human and non-human life in the contemporary context that is caused by capitalism. After all, mankind only sets itself tasks that he can solve (Marx, 1859).

For this reason, this study focuses to the most urgent issue that concerns both ecological sustainability and Marxism, that is being how a sustainable post-capitalist future can be planned and under which principles this planning should be organized. To achieve this, it focuses on to the concept of degrowth and its relations with Marxism. It does not merely ask whether the concept of degrowth for a post-capitalist society is in accordance with Marxism but rather conducts a conceptual research on what can be inferred from the degrowth literature which can be instrumentalized in a possible non-capitalist future which is founded on the Marxist critique of the capitalist mode of production.

Henceforth, it concludes, thanks to a synthesis and a critique of already existing literature, that degrowth principles are necessary for the certain sections of production (industrial economy) yet for some it is not just unnecessary but also undesirable politically (digital economy). It is this research's claim that a post-capitalist Marxist future needs degrowth but not in its totality. It requires degrowth on certain sectors of production due to the emergency of climate change yet in certain sectors, economic growth is still desired. With instrumentalizing the concept of algorithmic governmentality (Rouvroy & Stiegler, 2016) and pharmacology (Stiegler, 2013), it will be shown why developing the productive forces of digital and information economy is a necessity for a Marxist post-capitalist future but why the industrial productive forces definitely need to be gone through a general process of degrowth. In between the concepts of formal and real subsumption of labor under capital

and pharmacology, the future of the “monster at hand” (Latour, 2011) will be discussed for the sake of planning of a post-capitalist sustainable future.

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## (Mis)Reading *Grundrisse*

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In his article, “Economic and Sociological Explanations of Technological Change,” Donald MacKenzie parrots and critiques two misreadings characteristic of Marx’s legacy on theories of technological development. The first is the overidentification of capitalism with machinery or “fixed capital.” In MacKenzie’s reading of this misreading of Marx, technological development under capitalism is always technology created in the image of capitalism. The second is an overidentification of fixed capital and surplus value, such that fixed capital is said to create surplus value and thereby secure and continue technological development.

Now, MacKenzie is rightly critical of the inconsistencies within these two misreadings, but I am interested in something else—namely, what such theories do in and as their failures to theorize technological objects and their historical developments. The temporal circularity of MacKenzie’s two mistaken legacies of technological development posit capitalism itself as a species of automation.

I argue that the notion that capitalism now works by itself occurs in and should in fact be understood through a modality of stagnation, in other words understood as a crisis for capitalism synonymous with its declension.

One of the points here will be to adjudicate just what we mean by crisis. We have reached a crisis after which capitalism’s defining modality is that it fails, economically, by working as it always has—this much has become consensus among contemporary scholars of Marxism such as Gopal Balakrishnan, Robert Brenner, Aaron Benanav, Robert Meister, and others. But capitalism has always had crises. Indeed, in what might be called the Secularist methodology among Marxists trying to explain and periodize the stages of capitalist development after the 1970s is a constant rejection of the periodic crises of capitalism as periodizing crises, ones which would actually define its tendential development.

In this talk, I will propose that contemporary dystopian and evangelist discourses around automation, hyper-productivity, etc., as well as their secularist correctives marshalling methods in economics to demonstrate that capitalism is actually in an acute “period” of stagnation, underemployment, or in a “stationary” state, are essentially saying the same thing: that each discourse indexes, without properly describing, an abyssal modality of capitalism. I argue that, thought this way, we can actually understand the crisis of capitalism today as a tautology: capitalist stagnation today describes a situation in which its causes are its effects and its effects are its causes.

We are indeed within a crisis of capitalism today, but in this piece I seek to demonstrate that, if this is a crisis can actually be used to periodize its development, then we must understand the following: that stagnation describes a modality of time in which the very failures which ought to secure the programmatic destruction of capitalism are in fact the reasons for its persistence. In order to make these points, I proceed through a protocol of reading I have developed in my research on automation, one which I rehearse in miniature above using a text by Donald MacKenzie.

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## **COMPUTATION AND CAPITALISM: HOW CAN WE FIND A LINK BETWEEN TURING MACHINES AND MARXISM?**

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The term algorithmic capitalism has come to be used by some (see, for example, Parisi, 2012) to describe important aspects of the current phase of capitalism. This reflects the major role digital technology has come to play in the workplace and in everyday life and the consequent incursion of concepts from computing into the critical social sciences. In contrast, Matteo Pasquinelli (2013) has commented that “common ground is missing between...Turing machines and Marxism”. By this he meant that there is a lack of a theoretical structure that will link the grounding concepts of computation (a Turing machine being the theoretical concept that that defines all modern computers) with Marxist ideas, particularly in political economy.

This paper will discuss whether and how we might incorporate the basic concepts of computer science into an analysis of digital technology in capitalism. This will consist of three elements: an examination of the early ideas of Alan Turing which form the groundwork for modern computer science; a critique of three theorists who have attempted to link Turing’s concepts directly to Marxism – George Caffentzis (2013), Matteo Pasquinelli (2013, 2022), and Paul Cockshott (2012); and the outlining of a dialectical approach based on moving from Turing’s abstract machine to the concrete application of computers in the labour process, suggesting that this requires several mediating stages, each of which enables choices and redefines constraints and acts as a sublation of previous stages.

I shall first examine aspects of Turing’s ideas on computation including their connection to the labour process of ‘human computers’ and discuss why he did not follow up possible escape routes from the “straitjacket of formal logic” having shown its limits. I shall then discuss how the authors referred to apply Turing’s ideas and why these do not adequately explain the relationship between computation and capitalism. This in turn raises questions such as whether measures of computation and value can be commensurate and thus whether a machine can produce value and also whether the direct application of Turing’s ideas to the capitalist labour process is corrects.

One criticism will be that they neglect important mediations between abstract concepts of computation and the complex reality of their application to the labour process. One suggested route will go from Turing machines to computers as a mediator of human goal-directed activity (human involvement was totally missing from Turing’s 1936 definition of a logical computing machine); then to the processes of design and implementation of an information system; and then its embedding in a particular labour process and more widely in the priorities and dynamics of capitalist economy.



This is not a purely theoretical analysis but has implications for how workers should approach the implantation of computers at work.

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## **Function and Totality: The Methodological Confrontation of Historical Materialism and Holism**

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Aside from popular ideas about holism by many top scientists (often in the direction to Buddhism), we have to ground a system of materialistic holism. But what does that mean? In my contribution I want to tackle that question along the lines of the Marxist concepts of function and totality. Only if we integrate the structural and the developmental view, the question of all realizable relations and their functions for a bigger whole, we can pose the question of the whole or totality in a methodological way.

One major obstacle here is the ingrained belief in formal logic, which intrinsically forbids transcendence. Obviously, simple models serve us well in our development and knowledge production, but the essential aspect of quantity - quality transitions demand further research. The historical materialist notion that the hegemonic culture is a driving force for pure and applied sciences has to be engaged with. It is precisely the fact that humans are not bees, but have phantasies and moral goals. On the other hand, the more we know, the more we know what we don't know. Ignorance even increases.

Scientifically seen, in our present state of the art, our investigations are still descriptions from "the outside". We describe, ever better an object. This has two consequences: a) in the description the object to be described is defined. A related issue is the uncertainty discussion in QM. So what is the object we want to describe? Inducing the debate about structuralism, do we talk about structures or well-defined objects, b) are we able to look inside out? Here we deal with the "immanent" aspects about an 'object' including things like the capitalist mode of production or even the human-self.

## **Reducing uncertainty by Marxists abstractions in a time of total crisis**

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We live in a time of total crisis, to the effect of being unable to represent the crisis in such a manner that provides a firm basis for effective actions of people and their institutions to reach such aims as "to avoid the risk of runaway climate change" (Folke et al., 2021), i.e., to ensure "a safe operating-space for humanity." This contribution critically presents the state-of-the-art science-based conceptualization of the global crisis and suggests an alternative abstraction based on the recent operationalizations of Marx's concepts.

The concept of resilience developed by Holling (1973) and applied by Folke (2006) forms the basis of the analysis of "social-ecological systems" and the conceptualization of the Anthropocene in the white paper of the Nobel Prize Summit (Folke et al., 2021). The sufficiency of this framework can be questioned both on empirical and theoretical grounds. Its recommendations developed for particular cases are often not followed, as exemplified by the Galapagos crisis (Gonzalez et al., 2008). One of the potential theoretical causes of inefficiency is that an essential driver of the system dynamics is missing. While the proponents of this approach overwhelmingly emphasize that "In the Anthropocene biosphere, systems of people and nature are not just linked but intertwined" (Folke et al., 2021), they entirely ignore the self-governed long-term dynamics of the capital itself. The conceptual scheme and modeling approaches should incorporate the dynamics of capital governed by the law of capital accumulation (Chatzarakis et al., 2022) and apply the dialectical method conceived by (Ollman, 2003).

The mainstream bottom-up scientific approach to tackling complex problems is constructing a system of data-driven dynamic models without referring to general laws. Resilience has become a flagship concept of this practice and a paradoxical aim as well: "... the terms operates in the interest of producing a world where any change can be technically managed and assimilated while maintaining the ongoing survival of the system, even at the cost of its particular components, be they individuals, ecosystems, or species." (Halpern, 2017).

The processes on the Earth run in interconnected and hierarchical subsystems with different state variables on various time and spatial scales. Organisms, ecosystems, societies, geo-climatic processes, and the capitalist economy have endogenous but interrelated dynamics affecting the human condition. According to Marx, long-term capital dynamics are decisive in these processes. Recently, in a series of papers, Chatzarakis and his coworkers published macroeconomic models based on Marx's principles of expanded reproduction and showed that changes in the rate of surplus value govern the long-term capital dynamic and induce cycling (Chatzarakis et al., 2022).

What are the rules of constructing an architecture of such models? Ollman (2003), having analyzed the dialectical method of Marx, concluded that there are three features of abstractions that one has to always reflect on: extension, generality, and the vantage point of abstractions. Focusing on these features may help find a useful representation of the total crisis we live in.

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## **Symptoms of Asymptotic Knowledge: An Ecological Leninist Critique of the Mechanistic Worldview**

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Marxists have long noted that capitalist development - the historical realization of capital accumulation, violent domination of labor and life, and the globally ubiquitous plunder of the commons through imperial and colonial conquest - takes place by means of a socio-material transformation of the (re-)production of space and a socio-material transformation of the (re-)production of time. Thus our present world, riven with crises in every sphere of society, is a world created by capital in its own image, a world shaped and reshaped for capital's own accumulative ends, a world in which capital thrives by mortifying life. We will briefly account for these socio-material transformations, predicated on a quantitative reduction, a reification, and contend that this early history highlights an existing reductive and reified tendency both in science and economics, which consecrated itself as the presupposition of social organization. This culminates in an epistemological structure of a capitalist-scientific-mechanistic world-view.

Given the mechanical nature of the logic and processes of capital valorization, the generation of capitalist space and time were interpenetratively developed through the complex formation of a specific form and structure of knowledge, expressed in and through the worldview of capital's representative class. It is our contention that the underlying thematic of this totalizing epistemic structure, which corresponds to capital's own totalizing dominance of sociality, is predicated on thingification: or, the reduction of transformative and interrelated processual phenomena to atomistic, compartmentalized, and static 'things'. Here, we argue that, on the one hand, the epistemological presuppositions and content of capitalist thought, best depicted by the mechanistic worldview in science, have a tendency towards thingification, and on the other, that this tendency is not the result of thought alone, but is determined by specific historical-material conditions. We show that the kind of thinking that reifies, thingifies, the objects of consciousness and consciousness itself is in fact symptomatic of the normatively-laden material conditions of the historically specific form of capitalism out of which such thinking arises and by which such thinking is compelled, which we will demonstrate through a brief analysis of the mechanical world-view as developed by its leading representatives Newton and Kant - what we call asymptotic knowledge.

Without diminishing the importance of class struggle, we attend to this epistemological implication to stress, in the face of this present age of total crisis, the necessity of a coherent and consistent Marxist philosophical position that is at once antithetical and superior to the dominant form of knowledge which uncritically justifies and reproduces the current status quo. For this reason, we turn to the Ecological Leninist perspective, which we have begun to develop elsewhere, as a politico-philosophical perspective, emphasizing the category of metabolism, which enables us, in a systematic form, to identify the relation between the contradictions belonging to nature itself and the contradictions which emerge from a capitalist society, and thus, against the dominant, yet fatalistically static epistemology of the bourgeoisie, the thought of capitalism thinking itself, to assert both the necessity and possibility of social transformation.

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# **Music in Crisis and the Crisis in Ethnomusicology: Towards a Marxist Theoretical Framework for the Holistic Study of Music in the Age of Total Crisis**

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Ethnomusicology has been the only branch of musicology which has a holistic approach for the study of any kind of music in any culture, whereas the other two branches, historical musicology based on history and systematic musicology based on natural sciences mainly study Western art music.

This study is based on the fundamental definition of music in ethnomusicology as proposed by Blacking (2000 [1974]: 10): Music is humanly organised sounds. Although not all societies or communities in the world have a word corresponding to 'music,' they organise sounds in a way that we call it 'music.' Furthermore archeological evidence shows that oldest musical instruments date back to around fifty-thousand years ago which implies that singing is probably much older than we intend to assume. Blacking (2000 [1974]: 4, 9) also argues that division of people as musicians and listeners is the result of class societies and thus 'musical talent'- the eligibility for making music- especially in capitalism that this division has radically deepened, is simply the product of division of labour and is not innate. Therefore, our main theoretical premise is based on conceiving of music making as a necessary part of the definition of being human following Blacking's (2000 [1974]: 34) argument that 'music may be a species-specific trait of man.' We propose that music in crisis is fundamentally the violation of human right for making music most dramatically emerged in capitalism and deepened in the age of total crisis.

It is not an accident that this overtly political argument of Blacking with its actual implications has been neither followed nor embraced within ethnomusicology, explicitly, so far. First, ethnomusicology as an US enterprise was based on historical particularism of cultural anthropology, which was not in favor of 'universalism.' Second, anything reminiscent of Marxism during the Cold War was considered quite dangerous.

Thirdly, ethnomusicology has corresponded to the study of musical cultures in non-western societies and communities, especially the non-modern ones until the 1980s, when ethnomusicologists started to join the Cultural Studies enterprise. While ethnomusicology seemed to focus on the under-

standing of musical cultures in 'remote' human societies and thus stay 'remote' also from actual musical cultures in modern societies until this date, the Cultural Studies had already emerged as a political Marxist project for a socialist Britain in early 1960s.

Thus, the interest of ethnomusicologists in musical cultures of modern capitalist societies where the music is mainly commoditized has been out of scope until the 1980s. Unfortunately, in the 1980s when the ethnomusicologists met with the Cultural Studies, the Cultural Studies had already started to be institutionalized and to diverge from Marxism by converging to poststructuralism and postmodernism.

As a result, neither neo-liberalism of the 1980s and 1990s, nor authoritarian-neoliberalism of 2000s, nor the neo-fascism of the past two decades could hardly find place in ethnomusicological literature. Instead, the literature was dominated by postmodern and globalization theories.

Finally, what makes Blacking one of few exceptions starting from the early 1960s was his Marxism-inspired approach and thus his socialist political view towards connecting his ethnographic work in South Africa with the problems of the modern world, as a political activist British ethnomusicologist (Rogers, 2012).

It is only recently that number of studies focusing on Marxism and music (e.g. Qureshi 2002; Manuel 2019) or musical commodity, music in neoliberalism, and capitalism has emerged (e.g., Leyshon 2014; Taylor 2015; Beaster-Jones 2016; Chapman 2018). However, most of these studies also have a problematic relation with Marxism, by either keeping a critical distance from Marxism or abandoning the labor theory of value or misunderstanding of fundamental Marxist concepts, such as productive labour or decontextualization and selective appropriation of Marxist culture theories which all depoliticize critical sharpness of Marxism (Gedik 2022).

Consequently, we propose that ethnomusicology should be the study of music in crisis for understanding the crisis of humanity. Following Jameson (1996) if Marxism is the study of the inherent and systemic crisis of capitalism, then the study of music in crisis corresponds to Marxist study of music in capitalism. Considering the totality of crises, only ethnomusicology has necessary tools to study music holistically. However, as mentioned above, there is a crisis in ethnomusicology itself, as a knowledge production on music, as well. In this sense, we will try to draw a Marxist theoretical framework for the holistic study of music based on critique of Marxist literature in ethnomusicology, and genuine review of Marxist culture theories of Benjamin, Adorno, Williams, Stuart Hall and Jameson within an Ilyenkovian context for the definition of culture. We also hope to discuss briefly the possible appearances of music in socialist and communist societies where people could freely use their human right for making music.



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## **Machines of Dialectical Vision: Systemic Imagination in John Akomfrah's Multichannel Installations**

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The growing awareness about the progressive intensification of the climate crisis has brought into the spotlight the constitutive co-dependance of human dwelling and the life-systems comprising the physical world. Such an awareness is undermining the longstanding anthropocentric delusion about our technical capacity to master an inert "nature." Global warming requires more than a technical solution: "the 'warming' is such that the old distance between background and foreground has faded away: it is human history that appears cold and natural history that is taking on a frenzied aspect" (Latour 2017, 74). Political action itself is at stake, when human agency is constrained by the impact that the heating aspects of the climate crisis have on our imagination.

According to Bertell Ollman, in order to pursue political change, we need to recognize the future as already inscribed within the present in the form of positive and negative potentialities (Ollman 2003). Yet, due to the unpredictable albeit inevitable consequences of the anthropic impact on the Earth-systems, we risk falling prey to the chatacronistic tendencies that Srinivas Aravamudan denounced as characteristic of our time: "Catachronism – or the inversion of anachronism – characterizes the backlash of the Anthropocene as post-human nomenclature. Similar to anachronism that reimagines the past in terms of the present, catachronism re-characterizes the past and the present in terms of a future proclaimed as determinate but that is of course not yet fully realized" (Aravamudan 2013, 8). Analogous fatalistic conceptions of the New Climatic Regime prevent the recognition of the potentialities, which Ollman invites us to identify within the present, amidst the crisis itself. The main obstacle to such a recognition lies in the paucity of our imaginative resources when it comes to move from the partial perspective of the local to a holistic understanding of dynamic systemic entanglements.

As we are confronted with planetary phenomena whose temporal and spatial scale exceeds the capacity of our sense perception, what we need is to develop novel points of orientation, which require "new imaginaries, new visions of ecological relationality, and a wide-ranging exploration of the codependences of species and Earth systems" (Masco 2018, 72). A new imagination that can sustain a dynamic systemic thinking is therefore the precondition for the overcoming of the current political impasse. As suggested by Jacques Rancière, it is the aesthetic that paves the way to effective political action (Rancière 2015).

Focusing on John Akomfrah's ecocritically informed audiovisual installations from the past decade, in my talk I want to explore the potential of multichannel cinema as a machine of dialectical vision. Not only conventional audi-

ovisual representations of ecological phenomena mostly concentrate on localized aspects – films featuring weather calamities, or documentaries about the degradation of specific physical weather environments – but the very format of the single-channel (single-screen) display constrains the kinetic and semiotic potential of moving images. Akomfrah’s multichannel installations explode the spatio-temporal and conceptual containment of both conventional cinematic representations and exhibition practices. The networked audiovisual architecture of multichannel image-display materializes in a perceptual form the entanglement of heterogeneous spaces and temporalities, while the horizontal montage organized across the screens disrupts the self-contained vertical ordering of audiovisual materials displayed within each single frame. My purpose is to show how Akomfrah’s multichannel installations enact on an audiovisual level a process of abstraction that corresponds to the logic inherent to the three fundamental principles, which Ollman ascribes to the dialectical method: extension, level of generalization, and vantage point (Ollman 2003). In this way, the multichannel display format allows Akomfrah to create a dynamic, networked form of audiovisual experience in response to the challenges of imagining the Anthropocene in its becoming.

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## **On Political Epistemology: Revisiting Fact and Value in Science and Society**

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The ongoing debates about the changing role of science and society have raised pertinent questions about the relation between politics and epistemology. We would like to revisit the demarcation problem of fact and value in the sciences, as a way to understand the current concerns about the place of science activism in the political struggles. Centering these concerns, we introduce our collective work in the making of a curriculum in political epistemology. The curriculum as a pedagogic and political intervention seeks to probe the historical relation between the practices of science, processes of alienation and the possibilities for emancipation. Drawing upon diverse themes in the history and the philosophy of sciences, situated in different historical periods and cultural contexts, the thematic inquiries propose new modes of investigation of the entanglements of science and other forms of knowledge, not only as a problem in the disparate realms of genesis, orientation and validation of doing science, but an integrated inquiry into the social relations of labour and knowledge. Epistemological praxis of Marxism has consistently realized the tension between fact and value, local and the universal, theory and practice, as dialectical. We propose that visualizing these relations is an important political task today, in a context where skepticism and relativism, concerning the sciences often pervade the political engagement with science and knowledge.