

**Outline Sociology 621 Lecture 8. Capitalist Dynamics: a sketch of a Theory of Capitalist Trajectory**  
**October 1, 2003**

**I. The trajectory of crisis and contradictions of capitalist development.**

**1. The historical and intellectual context of my analysis.**

**2. The core argument**

- each stage of capitalist development generates distinctive constraints on continued capital accumulation
- as accumulation continues, those constraints are encountered and they become increasingly pervasive fetters on continued capitalist development
- this generates crises of different intensities and disruption
- the crisis sets in motion a “search” for structural solutions
- since the solutions advantage different groups of capitalists to varying degrees, and affect the economic conditions of the working class in different ways, this search takes the form of struggle combined with trial and error institution building
- when it happens that institutional changes occur which unbottle accumulation, crisis pressures subside and the search/struggle over institutions recedes
- actors then adapt their strategies to the new institutional opportunities
- over time the institutional solutions tend to eventually become less effective because (a) the PF develop, and (b) class actors take advantage of contradictions in these solutions to advance their interests.
- and thus crisis tendencies re-emerge

**II. Arrighi’s trajectory of long-cycles of capitalist expansion**

**1. M-C-M’**

**2. The general argument: two phases of cycles**

- (1) The cycle of material expansion: This is the M-C phase
- (2) a cycle of financial expansion: this is the C-M’ phase of the cycle

Together these define *systemic cycles of accumulation*.

**3. The spatio-temporal character of the argument**

**4. The logic of the cycles**

**4.1. The material expansion phase**

key idea: expanded M-C investments ! intensification of competition

**4.2. the shift to financialization of accumulation**

key idea: C-M’ phase ! possibility of escape from competition

**4.3 Turbulence, dislocation, stable expansion, directionality**

**4.4 The current phase**