

## Dialectics1

Arabic: *djadal*. -- French: *dialectique*. -- German: *Dialektik*. -- Russian: *dialektika*. -- Spanish: *dialéctica*. -- Chinese: *bianzheng fa*

The “Algebra of Revolution” was the name given to the Hegelian dialectic by Alexander Herzen, and the materialist dialectic is often called, particularly following Lenin, the “living soul” of Marxism. Dialectics is a key to the philosophic thought and the linguistic-aesthetic production of Brecht, who named it *the Great Method*. What dialectics means is contested, and the dispute concerning dialectics has always been at the same time a struggle over the correct way.

“In its mystified form” - that is, the Hegelian - “dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and to glorify the existing state of things”. In the form which Marx gave it and which he named in the *Afterword* to the second edition of *Capital* (1873), “its rational form”, “it is a scandal and an abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors”. It is “a scandal and an abomination”, because it is *subversive*, because it brings movement *into* the dominating order *as* the order of domination, “because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every form in the flux of movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary” (*MECW* 35, 20; trans. modified). - Dialectics practiced in this sense also became a “scandal and an abomination” to the ruling order of state socialism.

It appears almost impossible to speak *about* dialectics without speaking *un-dialectically*, and thus, as the dialectician **Brecht** warned, to transform “the flux of the things itself into a static thing” (*Journals* 6.1.48; trans. modified). On the other hand, if dialectics is meaningful, it is quite impossible to speak correctly about the things themselves without speaking about them dialectically, and thus to bring the fixed things back into flux. The possible meaning of dialectics must therefore be demonstrated by what all of the articles of a Marxist dictionary can contribute to dialectics in practice, how, that is to say, dialectics appears in the presentation of *autà tà prágmata*, “the things themselves”.

---

1 From: *Historisch-kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus*, vol. 2, Hamburg: Argument 1995 (2nd ed. 1999), pp. 657-693. The English version appeared first in *Historical Materialism. Research in critical marxist theory*, vol. 13, n. 1, Leiden: Brill, 2005, pp. 241-265.

**Marx** practiced dialectics at first *negatively* against metaphysical thinking, by which he understood a static mode of thought which assumes fixed divisions, which is dualistic, and which attributes to things a fixed being, instead of comprehending them in movement and transition, in conflict and interaction. His version of dialectics opposed any form of thought which, particularly when it turned its attention to human things, did not direct its attention to their becoming and passing away, conflicts and contradictions, relations of domination and their subversion. Three aspects in particular are to be considered:

1. In terms of the *history of philosophy*, it is necessary to think the breaks and continuities in relation to the previous traditions of dialectical thought.
2. In terms of *epistemology*, it is necessary to examine what dialectics concretely achieves for the theoretician and scientist Marx.
3. In terms of the *history of its effects*, it is necessary to think the almost universal reversal, the lack of dialectics, which, taking up above all Marx's talk of "laws" of dialectics, occurred in the official main currents of Marxism, and to contrast it with examples of liberating productivity.

Overall, we are concerned to present the dialectic of the versions of dialectics in the history of Marxism.

1. **Marx** took up dialectics from Hegel, but also directly from ancient philosophy, which was the subject of his dissertation.

1.1 **Heraclitus**, who declared the uncreatedness of the world, universal becoming and passing away and the unity of opposites, is commonly regarded as one of the pre-Socratic dialecticians. This would not have seemed to be the case to the ancients, however. The aphorisms of Heraclitus appear like dark puzzles in direct opposition to common sense, closed off from any discussion or dialogue (*durchsprechen*, "talking sth. through"), while this was exactly what the word "dialectics" meant: the word "dialectics" is derived from the Greek verb *légō* (to talk) and the preposition *diá* (through); the middle form *dialégesthai* means just as much as to discuss or

dialogue, the mutual discussion of something, “often used in conversation, thus practising dialectics, by Socrates and his students” (**Benseler**); from this is derived the adjective *dialektikós*, (“to dispute, pertaining to dialectics, proficiency or skill in dialectics”, (ibid.)).

1.2 **Socrates**, or rather, **Plato** in the form of the Socrates of his dialogues, practiced *dialektikê téchnê* (*Phaidros*, 276e) as a competence in conversation, conducted in the form of a question and answer game aimed at consensus (*homologeîn*) regarding *truth*. This version of dialectics was directed against *rhetorikê téchnê* as a form of public speaking. *Rhetorikê téchnê* was concerned immediately with the means of speech, in order to win votes from the assembled masses in the institutions of the attic democracy. Rhetoric aimed at *obtaining power by means of persuasion of the masses: peíthein tà plêthê* (*Gorgias*, 452e). Practiced professionally and taught (for money), rhetoric was literally a demagogic argumentative technique i.e. public speaking which strives after leadership of the people (the *demos*), otherwise named eristic (*téchnê eristikôn*). Its mission was the correct organisation of the polis.

**Plato** spoke out against this argumentative technique with the claim to overcome, by means of dialectics, political conflict and thus also eristic itself. He named this project Philosophy. One can, therefore, speak exactly of a birth of philosophy from the spirit (*Geist*) of dialectics. - Of course, it is assumed, that dialogue (*talking-through*) must not fail to be appropriate to the matter under investigation. **Nietzsche** named that the “optimism of dialectics” (*KS A 7*, 134). The “discoverability” assumed here implies a coherent composition of ‘things’ and of the relation of thought to them: “Hence the metaphysics of logic: identity of thought and being” (ibid.). - It is to be observed, however, how this doubled coherence (without the detour via labour and socially transformative praxis) could be claimed by Plato only by force. The ‘technical’ dialectic fell prey to a dialectic of technique and was transformed into its opposite. Certainly, Plato sought to realise a reorganisation of thought with the help of the “what is” question, which was supposed to lead to a non-contradictory sphere of ideas. But thus arose out of dialogue oriented towards consensus a view which, appealing to authority, was “un-dialectical” or even inexpressible. What should have ended the argument once and for all was transformed into an institution of the war of position. **Nietzsche** characterised in this way the fourth (and last) period in the genealogy of Greek philosophy: “Dialectics as the great security. Without knowledge, no competence. Philosophy becomes reformatory and imperative and aggressive” (*KS A 7*, 388).

1.3 In the first book of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle credited Plato, in opposition to the Pythagoreans, with the “introduction of the Forms ... due to his inquiries in the region of definitions”: *hê tôn eidôn eisagogê dià tèn en toîs lógois egéneto sképsin* (*Met* I.6, 987b 31 et sq.). He added: “the earlier thinkers had no tincture of dialectic”: *hoi gàr próteroi dialektikês ou meteîchon* (ibid.). But in the fourth book he threw the Sophists and Dialecticians together in the camp opposed to Philosophy: *dialégontai dè perì hapántôn*, “They talk about everything”, “sophistic and dialectic turn on the same class of things (*perì mèn gàr tò autò génos*) as philosophy, but this differs from dialectic in the nature of the faculty (*tô trópô tês dunámeôs*) required and from sophistic in respect of the purpose of the philosophic life” (*tês dè toû bíou tē proairesei*) (*Met* IV.2 1004 b 17). Dialectics, which was supposed to remove ambiguity, now symbolised ambiguity itself. The opposition to rhetoric was undone. - During the Hellenistic period dialectics was ranked among the seven liberal arts. In the early middle ages the formula *grammatica + rhetorica + dialectica = logica* had currency (*HWP* 2, 166).

1.4 The birth of modern experiment-based science and its philosophy in the post-medieval world had to destroy this articulation. For, Francis **Bacon** claimed, the demonstrations “we have in logic (*in dialecticis*) do little else than make the world the bond-slave of human thought, and human thought the bond-slave of words” (*The New Organon* I, Aph. 69, 66). “On the basis of the consideration that logic is supposed to operate essentially formally and not materially, and should deduce definite and not merely probably correct conclusions, the designation of logic as dialectics has been given up since the seventeenth century” (W. **Risse** in *HWP* 2, 167).

1.5 Nevertheless, even **Kant** still encountered dialectics in the sense of a “general logic” which was misused falsely as an instrument to produce objective claims and which thus became a deception (*CPR*, B 85). The Socratic differentiation between dialectics and rhetoric was not honoured by Kant. Rather, he explained ancient Greek dialectics without further ado as a “*logic of illusion*”, “a sophistical art of giving to ignorance, and indeed to intentional sophistries, the appearance of truth” (B 86). In opposition to this, Kant’s critique had as its object “the safe – keeping of the pure understanding” or the “critique of this dialectical illusion”, which was

produced by the border-crossing or “unrestrained use” of the understanding (B 88). For him it was the (unhistorically represented) “ideas of pure reason, which become dialectical only through heedlessness and misapprehension” (B 708). For example, “unity of nature” is a “regulative principle” of reason; “to take it as being a constitutive principle ... is simply to confound reason” (B 721). However, Kant now transformed the expression ‘dialectics’ from a name of an illusory logic to that of a theory of illusion, in so far as, because of the nature of our capacity for knowledge, this is natural and inevitable (B354) (and in as much as it is so, it is transcendental), and has to be brought under control. Kant distinguished the transcendental illusion from empirical illusion (for example, the optical A295) and from logical illusion, which consisted in the “mere imitation of the form of reason”, and was thus “the illusion of fallacies” which disappeared as soon as one came upon it (B353). Not so the transcendental illusion, which was based on the “delusion” that subjective necessities are objective (ibid.). Kant named this element of his theory of knowledge the “transcendental dialectic”.

1.6 **Hegel** sublated formal logic once more into a material logic, demolished the Kantian divisions and transformed dialectics into the “moving soul” of thought. He articulated dialectics doubly, at the same time subjectively and objectively, in terms of the experience of consciousness and the development of the thing itself (which were, for **Hegel**, in the last analysis, one and the same thing). In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* consciousness develops through experiencing itself in the thing: actively extending, it fails in its particular intention and through this experience it is forced to undergo a ‘sea change’. “Dialectics” signifies here no mere method in the possession of an unchangeable subject. Rather, it indicates the progression through contradictory stages of experience, in which the subject “forms” itself. What is valid for thought is also valid for the object which it investigates: the claim of dialectics consists in developing the “Idea”, that is, “the rational factor in any object of study”, “out of the concept, or, what is the same thing, to look on at the proper immanent development of the thing itself” (PR, N2, 14). “The dialectical constitutes therefore the moving soul of scientific continuation and is the principle as a result of which alone *immanent connection and necessity* come into the content of science” (Enz, Ñ81).

What needs to be examined is what that concretely means “in practice”, if it is supposed to be more than the “metaphysics of logic” which **Nietzsche** detected in **Plato**: on the one hand, **Hegel** was concerned with “those common dialectics of life, coming into being, growth, passing

away und re-emergence from Death”, as happens “in almost all realms of natural and intellectual life” (his examples are drawn from life cycle of plants: bud, bloom, seed etc., and also seasons as symbols of stages of life – *Ästh* [Bassenge 1955], 352 et sq.). The graphic nature of the content predestined this natural cycle paradigm for a *popular* reception. On the other hand were the schemas which seemed to be perfectly suited for the (superficial) *intellectual* reception: the game of thesis, negating antithesis and the negation of this negation, the opposite of the sublating synthesis.

Beyond organic images and triadic formulae, however, **Hegel** was also concerned with the shadow which thought itself throws on the object, because, fixated with the mobility of the things and in its isolation, it fails to recognize their connections. Hegel can therefore say: “But it is far harder to bring fixed thoughts into a fluid state than to do so with sensuous existence” (*PS*, *Preface*, 20). (This is the keyword for **Marx**’s definition of dialectics as comprehending “every form in the flux of movement” (*MECW* 35, 20)). While **Hegel** defined the *Science of Logic* in the *Preface* to the first edition (1812) as “metaphysics proper or purely speculative philosophy” (*SL* 27), and in the *Introduction* as “the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind (*Geist*)” (50), as “the realm of shadows, the world of simple essentialities freed from all sensuous concreteness” (58), the *Preface* to the second edition (1831) hints at a paradigm change in the late **Hegel** (which, however, was not further developed in terms of content): as *thought forms* are the material of logic, *language* now becomes the matter of discussion. Spontaneously a “natural logic” prevailed whose “use of categories ... is unconscious” (35). On this terrain, Spirit, in the instinctive efficacy of thought, is “enmeshed in the bonds of its categories and is broken up in to an infinitely varied material” (37). **Hegel** now articulates the programme of the 1831 *Logic* in this way: “to clarify these categories” (which “as impulses” “are only instinctively active” and initially “enter consciousness separately and so are variable and mutually confusing”), and through these categories “to raise mind (*Geist*) to freedom and truth” (37).

Dialectics would now be, therefore, according to this immanently transforming view of the late **Hegel**, the liberation of thought out of the immobility of its supposition of an essence and out of its unconscious inhibition in the categorical net of language, thus becoming an adequate mental agility.

1.7 Against **Hegel's** dialectic of Absolute Knowledge, **Feuerbach** claimed to reintroduce dialectics back into the dialogical situation (*ins Dialogische des Durch-Sprechens*): “The *true dialectic* is *no monologue of the solitary thinker with herself*, it is *a dialogue between me and you*” (*Grundsätze einer Philosophie der Zukunft*, Ñ62). **Plekhanov** responded to this rather unconvincingly that, firstly, dialectics in **Hegel** didn't “have the meaning of a monologue of the single thinker with herself”, and secondly, that **Feuerbach** had correctly determined the *exit point of philosophy* with his anthropological materialism, but not its method, an omission which, according to **Plekhanov**, was supposed to have been filled by **Marx** and **Engels** (26). However, both the keywords words *materialism* and *method* are not to be encountered in **Marx's** change of terrain as it is expressed in the *Theses on Feuerbach*.

2. **Marx** inherited the Hegelian legacy on the condition of a radical critique and rearticulation. In opposition to all speculative dialectics he was concerned with “scientific dialectics” (1865, *MECW* 20, 29). **Proudhon's** attempt “to present the *system* of economic categories dialectically” was criticised by **Marx** because of its speculative philosophical foundations. “In place of *Kant's* insoluble “*antinomies*”, the Hegelian “*contradiction*” was to be introduced as the means of development”. The categories for **Proudhon** had been transformed into Ideas, instead of comprehending them as “theoretical expressions of historical relations of production” (*ibid.*). **Marx** translated dialectics into history, whereby all preconceived notions were abandoned. This categorical claim of a rational secularisation of dialectics makes **Marx's** relation to **Hegel**, his stimulator, problematic.

2.1 At the time of his dissertation **Marx** was still under the spell of **Hegel**. “Death and love are the myth of negative dialectic, for dialectic is the inner, simple light, the piercing eye of love, the inner soul which is not crushed by the body of material division” (*MECW* 1, 498). - The *break* with Hegel was, therefore, experienced as a liberation, after which the situation appeared, at least negatively, clear: “Who annihilated the dialectics of concepts, the war of the gods that was known to the philosophers alone? *Feuerbach*” (*MECW* 4, 92). - But what replaces “the dialectics of concepts”? **Marx** spoke mostly about a “dialectical method of development” (*MECW* 42, 390), or simply of a “method of development”, concepts which he sometimes used synonymously with “dialectics” (*ibid.*, 544). But wherein lies the difference to **Hegel**?

2.2 **Marx** announced that he wanted to present the difference of his version of dialectics from **Hegel's** in his own words. While he was working on the *Grundrisse* (1858), he wrote to **Engels** that “What was of great use to me as regards *method* of treatment was Hegel’s *Logic*” which he had “flicked through again” by mere accident: “If ever the time comes when such work is again possible, I should very much like to write 2 or 3 sheets making accessible to the common reader the *rational* aspect of the method which Hegel not only discovered but also mystified” (*MECW* 40, 249; trans. modified). Ten years later (9.5.68) he wrote to **Dietzgen**: “When I have cast off the burden of political economy, I shall write a ‘Dialectic’. The true laws of dialectics are already contained in Hegel, though in a mystified form” (*MECW* 43, 31). In what, then, does this non-mystical form of dialectics consist?

Even though there are a number of texts criticising **Hegel**, especially in the early works of **Marx**, much remains implicit, and the explicit formulations consist of metaphors (inversion, placing on feet, freeing the rational kern from its mystifying shell etc.) which are ambiguous and misleading, and whose inappropriateness has been criticised by, for instance, **Korsch** (174) and **Althusser** (*FM*, 93 et sq.). Thus, for example, **Marx** declared **Hegel's** dialectic to be “the basic form of all dialectic, but only after being stripped of its mystical form” (*MECW* 42, 544); its difference from the “rational form” (*MECW* 35, 19), which **Marx** claimed to have given dialectics, was explained by him in that he was a “materialist, and Hegel an idealist” (*MECW* 42, 544).

On the occasion of a praising reference by **Lange** (*Über die Arbeiterfrage* ..., Winterthur 1870), **Marx** wrote to **Kugelmann** that **Lange**, under the influence of Darwinism, “subsumes all history under the phrase ‘struggle for life’”, understood nothing about **Hegel's** method “and, therefore, second, still less about my critical manner of applying it” (*MECW* 43, 528). **Lange** praised **Marx** for the fact that he moved in the empirical matter with a rare freedom, without suspecting, as **Marx** noted, “that this ‘free movement in matter’ is nothing but a paraphrase for the *method* of dealing with matter – that is, the *dialectical method*” (*ibid.*). Thus, in the face of the emerging social Darwinism, the difference from **Hegel** was reduced to the critical application of his method = dialectics.

When one investigates the writings, or rather the passages dedicated to the critique of **Hegel**, above all in the *1844 Manuscripts* (*MECW* 3, 326 et sq.), *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Introduction (*MECW* 3, 3-129), or less directly, in the Introduction of 1859 (*Gr*



100 et sq.), taking into account also the *Theses on Feuerbach* and *The German Ideology*, one discovers that **Marx** carried out, in a series of phases, a complete change of terrain, an epistemological revolution, in which nothing of the old remains or rather, ought to remain. **Marx** even says exactly this in the *Afterword* to the second edition of *Capital*, where he claims that his version of dialectics is “not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite” (*MECW* 35, 19). In this context, however, he appears to say that this “direct opposite” consists in the fact that, against **Hegel**’s transformation of the thought process “under the name of “the Idea” ... into an independent subject”, **Marx** opposes a materialistic gnoseology, for which “on the contrary, the ideal is [supposed to be] nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought” (*ibid.*). This introduces more confusion than it removes, because everything which goes beyond mind as the decisive instance of practical realisation – labour, activity, praxis – that is to say, exactly that which since the *Theses on Feuerbach* had been for **Marx**’s thought the specific terrain of praxis in the ensemble of social relations, remains excluded. Strictly taken, this formulation cannot be differentiated either from the sensualism of **Feuerbach** or from the mechanical materialism of a **Hobbes**, or even from the criticism of a **Kant**. Because **Hegel** turns thought into the “demiurgos of the real world” which “is only the external, phenomenal form of ‘the Idea’”, the dialectic “with him ... is standing on its head”, **Marx** continues, clothing his critical appropriation in the seemingly transparent metaphor of “inversion” (*ibid.*).

Alongside this are further unclear formulations. The Russian reviewer **Kaufman** remarked that, “At first sight, if the judgement is based on the external form of the presentation of the subject, Marx is the most ideal of idealist philosophers” (qtd in *MECW* 35, 17, trans. modified). **Marx** responded by claiming that it was necessary to differentiate between research and presentation, while admitting that the later could give the impression that one was dealing with an a priori construction (*ibid.*, 19). But it is neither explained why the presentation is allowed to be like an a priori construction, nor whether dialectics is merely a question of presentation or if it also plays a part in research. On the basis of such unclear formulations, the question of **Marx**’s relation to **Hegel**, which is so important for an understanding of **Marx**’s version of dialectics, has lead to the formation of controversial and opposed interpretative traditions. Against the popular interpretation of explicit formulations, it has continually been attempted to make explicit the *operative dialectics* which are contained, above all, in **Marx**’s scientific master piece, *Capital*.

3. In order to treat **Marx's** version of dialectics, one must examine:

1. for what it is necessary;
2. what it concretely achieves;
3. what its forms of articulation are;
4. where its boundaries are and what, consequently, its epistemological status is.

3.1 If **Marx** described the achievement of his version of dialectics in passing as the interpretation of “every form in the flux of movement”, then corresponding to that is the problematic to which it is supposed to answer: the question concerning *the connection of that which at first appears to be without connection, the connection at the point of origin of the phenomena which appear as disparate in the result.* The most general problem of the critique of political economy: the dissolution of the “mutual independence and ossification of the various social elements of wealth” (*MECW* 37, 817). As a goal of knowledge, this is not, at any rate, specific to the critique of political economy. Rather, classical political economy also sought “to reduce the various fixed and mutually alien forms of wealth to their inner unity by means of analysis and to strip away the form in which they exist independently alongside one another”. Classical political economy also wanted “to grasp the inner connection in contrast to the multiplicity of the forms of appearance” (Marx 1972, 501 et sq.; trans. modified). The difference lies in the mode of comprehending and resolving the question of connection. Classical bourgeois economy resolved it in the form of the analytic reduction of “all independent forms and titles under cover of which the non-workers participate in the value of the commodity, to the one form of profit”, which in its turn was reduced to surplus-value (*ibid.*). **Marx** observed that classical political economy occasionally contradicted itself in this attempt: “It often attempts directly, leaving out the intermediate links, to carry through the reduction [...] It is not interested in elaborating the different forms genetically”, because it “conceives [...] production designed to appropriate other people’s labour not as a *historical form* but as a *natural form* of social production” (*ibid.*). In this formulation the specificity of the Marxist critique of political economy is indicated: genetic reconstruction instead of analytic reduction, historicisation of forms, instead of leaving them unanalysed in their natural apparent immediacy. The primary question of knowledge is that of the “genetic presentation, of grasping the real, formative process in its different phases” (*ibid.*).

3.2 Many passages support the view that when **Marx** called dialectics a “method of development”, he used the term “development” in the sense of a *presentation of the results of research*. Research attempts by means of critique “to take a science to the point at which it admits of a dialectical presentation”. Excluded, on the other hand, is the application of “an abstract, ready-made system of logic to vague presentiments of just such a system” (*MECW* 40, 261). Dialectics finds expression, then, in the *construction* of the presentation, in the *sequence* of the treated categories and in the *transitions* from one to the other. - A by-product of his “dialectical method of development”, Marx noted, was that “it is constantly *setting traps* [for its bourgeois critics], which will provoke them into an untimely display of their idiocy” (*MECW* 42, 390).

3.3 That commodity production forms an *inner unity* which is torn apart and therefore moves and reproduces itself in “external antithesis” (*MECW* 35, 123), that such *contradictions* are comprehended as the driving force of development, for example, by making themselves a “form of movement” (cf. *MECW* 35, 113), are forms of articulation of dialectics often used by **Marx**. Especially important is the figure of “transformation” (*das Umschlagen*). In these terms **Marx** analysed, for example, how “the laws of appropriation ... become by their own inner and inexorable dialectic transformed into their very opposite” through the repetition of the valorisation process and in the transformation into capital of at least a part of the surplus value, in which “each single transaction invariably conforms to the laws of the exchange of commodities” (*MECW* 35, 582, trans. modified): under capitalist conditions, appropriation by virtue of one’s own labour becomes appropriation of the “unpaid labour of others” (*ibid.*, 583). - Rosa **Luxemburg** praised this analysis as “a masterpiece of historical dialectics” (*GW* 5, 222), which required “the powerful dialectic of a scientific analysis” (*ibid.*, 397). - In a letter to **Engels**, **Marx** pointed out that in the third chapter of *Capital Volume I*, in the transition from craftsman to capitalist, he cited “Hegel’s discovery of the *law of the transformation of a merely quantitative change into a qualitative one* as being attested by history and natural science alike” (*MECW* 42, 383). In the 32nd chapter of *Capital Volume I* **Marx** used **Hegel**’s formulation of the *negation of the negation* for the supersession of the capitalist mode of production as the expropriation of the expropriator (*MECW* 35, 751).

3.4 In the *Introduction* of 1857 **Marx** noted warningly that he was dealing with dialectics “whose boundaries are to be determined, and which does not suspend the real difference” (*Gr* 109).

Viewed from the position of Hegel, that is tantamount to a step backwards in the direction of Kant, for whom the ‘real distinction’ - particularly of ‘the thing for us’ and ‘the thing in itself’ – cannot be abolished and is epistemologically fundamental (cf. **Colletti**). Historical materialist dialectics are thus supposed to guard against falling back into the speculation of a philosophy of identity.

The question of the function and status of dialectics for **Marx** became an issue of controversy for the first time through the attacks of **Dühring**, who reproached **Marx** with having fabricated the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation, “in default of anything better and clearer”, with “Hegelian verbal jugglery” like the negation of the negation (qtd in *MECW* 25, 120). In *Anti-Dühring*, **Engels** declared that “Herr Dühring’s total lack of understanding of the nature of dialectics is shown by the very fact that he regards it as a mere proof-producing instrument” (*MECW* 25, 125). “Only after [Marx] has proved from history that in fact the process has partially already occurred, and partially must occur in the future, he in addition characterises it as a process which develops in accordance with a definite dialectical law” (ibid., 124). - **Engels** here appears to restrict the status of dialectics to a *retrospective interpretation of scientific knowledge*.

Nevertheless, he adds: “Even formal logic is primarily a method of arriving at new results, of advancing from the known to the unknown – and dialectics is the same, only much more eminently so; moreover, since it forces its way beyond the narrow horizon of formal logic, it contains the germ of a more comprehensive view of the world” (ibid., 125). - For the **Engels** of *Anti-Dühring*, dialectics provides, therefore:

1. retrospective interpretation of scientific results;
2. the function of a heuristic guide, comparable to “*Findekunst*”, the form in which **Aristotle** had comprehended **Plato**’s dialectics;
3. the initiation of a *Weltanschauung*.

**Engels** did not make the relationship of the three functions explicit.

The scientifically most important function appears to be the heuristic, which equips the researcher with determinate investigatory questions and expectations, which of course are to be worked out according to all the rules of historical experiment-based science. Nevertheless, **Engels** himself exceeded these limits of dialectics and thus inadvertently ushered in the process of the de-dialecticisation of the Marxist version of dialectics.

4. The formulation of the “application” of dialectics, also used by **Marx**, was extended by **Engels** to the systematisation of that which, from the 1880s, was called “Marxism”. “The materialist conception of history and its specific application to the modern class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie was only possible by means of dialectics” (*MECW* 24, 459), he explained in 1882 in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. In his *Outline of the General Plan of Dialectics of Nature* he had affirmed dialectics already in 1878 “as the science of universal inter-connection” and had codified three “Main laws: transformation of quantity and quality – mutual penetration of polar opposites and transformation into each other when carried to extremes – development through contradiction or negation of the negation – spiral form of development” (*MECW* 25, 313).

4.1 Instead of leaving things “in their isolation” (*MECW* 24, 299), dialectics showed them in the context of their coming into being and efficacy. Thus far **Engels** respected the limits of dialectics which had been indicated by **Marx**, but only immediately to exceed them: “Nature is the proof of dialectics” (*ibid.*, 301). After the death of **Marx**, **Engels** explained in 1885 that he had taken advantage of his retirement to study mathematics and the natural sciences in order to “convince myself also in detail – of what in general I was not in doubt – that in nature, amid the welter of innumerable changes, the same dialectical laws of motion force their way through as those which in history govern the apparent fortuitousness of events; the same laws which similarly form the thread running through the history of the development of human thought” (*MECW* 25, 11). Dialectics was turned into a universal law of being. Nothing was changed by the fact that **Engels** affirmed, after just as before, that for him “there could be no question of building the laws of dialectics into nature, but of discovering them in it and evolving them from it (*ibid.*, 13). In his studies of dialectics in nature, only long after his death fabricated as a “Work”, **Engels** specified the criterion to the point that “an external side by side arrangement is as inadequate as Hegel’s

artificially constructed dialectical transitions. The transitions must make themselves, they must be natural. Just as one form of motion develops out of another, so their reflections, the various sciences, must arise necessarily out of one another” (ibid., 529). With that, dialectics was closed up into a universal cosmology.

4.2 Dialectics was regarded by **Engels** henceforth as the science of the “two sets of laws which are identical in substance, but differ in their expression in so far as the human mind can apply them consciously, while in nature and also up to now for the most part in human history, these laws assert themselves unconsciously, in the form of external necessity, in the midst of an endless series of apparent accidents. Thereby the dialectic of concepts itself became merely the conscious reflection of the dialectical motion of the real world” (*Ludwig Feuerbach, MECW* 26, 383).

4.3 A consequence in terms of the theory of knowledge of the thesis of the “two sets of laws”, of which the second was the reflex of the first, was the appearance of the *Abbildtheorie* (theory of the image). Moreover, dialectics had thus become an *evolutionary Weltanschauung*, involving universal development and relativity, and departing from the “great basic thought that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made *things*, but as a complex of *processes*, in which the apparently stable things, no less than their mental images in our heads, the concepts, go through uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away, in which, for all apparent accidentality and despite all temporary retrogression, a progressive development asserts itself in the end” (*MECW* 26, 384). **Engels** adds that these ideas have, since **Hegel**, “so thoroughly permeated ordinary consciousness that in this generality they are now scarcely ever contradicted” (ibid.; trans. modified).

5. Among the Marxists of the first generation after **Marx**, the positions of **Kautsky**, **Bernstein**, **Plekhanov** and **Labriola** are the most important.

5.1 Georg **Lukács** accused Karl **Kautsky** of “the deformation of revolutionary dialectics into a peaceful evolutionism” (*Werke* 2, 591). If **Steinberg** could say that **Katusky** had “consequently banished the ‘Hegelianism’” from his presentation of the “economic doctrines” of **Marx**, he

could do so because by Hegelianism he understood the “dialectical structure of Marx’s argumentation” (XVII in **Kautsky**). **Kautsky**’s “non-dialectical mode of presentation” (ibid.) constituted, according to **Steinberg**, the secret of the wide international reception of his book. **Lukács** struck upon the matter more accurately: **Kautsky** had declined into a vulgar Hegelian evolutionism.

‘Undialectical’ evolutionism was manifested already in **Kautsky**’s *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*: exemplary, for instance, is the transition from money to capital. For **Marx**, an abyss of discontinuities must be leaped, since this transition is the “the product of many economic revolutions, of the extinction of a whole series of older forms of social production” (*MECW* 35, 179) in which alone the condition for the possibility of the appearance of the free wage labourer “comprises a world’s history” (ibid., 180). **Kautsky**, on the other hand, simply claimed: “It develops with time” etc. (52). The analysis of the form(s) of value, and the genetic reconstruction of its sequence, a classic example of dialectical presentation in *Capital Volume I*, escaped **Kautsky**.

5.2 **Bernstein** explicitly pronounced that which **Kautsky** only did: “Hegelian dialectic” was regarded by him as “the treacherous element in Marxist doctrine, the pitfall that lies in the way of any logical consideration of things” (36). Against the late **Engels**, he problematised the metaphor of “placing the dialectic upon its feet” with the not to be simply dismissed argument that, if one followed “the laws of dialectic, as laid down by **Hegel**”, one ended up “once again enmeshed in ‘the self-development of the concept’” (ibid.). He was aiming to criticise **Marx**, but managed only a caricature of his version of dialectics (cf. 35).

5.3 The Italian philosopher Antonio **Labriola**, who became important for **Gramsci**, saw the key to understanding **Marx**’s break with **Hegel** in a change of terrain to a “philosophy of *praxis*”, which he comprehended as the “central point of the historical materialism” of **Marx**. The way of **Marx**’s philosophy of praxis, which leads “from labour, which is knowledge through action, to knowledge as abstract theory” contains “the secret of a formulation of **Marx** on which so many a head has broken themselves, namely, that he *inverted* the Hegelian dialectic” (318). - In other places, however, **Labriola** described the theory of historical materialism as the “dialectical view or the evolutionary or genetic *Anschauung*, or however one wants to describe it” (348), and in

*Capital* he praised “the particular agility and *souplesse* of spirit, namely the aesthetic of dialectics” (337). Apparently he saw no further need for clarification regarding the combination of these diverse approaches. Nevertheless, with the determining status of praxis, in the sense outlined in **Marx’s** *Theses on Feuerbach*, the course had been set for a reception of dialectics that was as much non-metaphysical as it was anti-naturalistic.

5.4 In Russia, Georg W. **Plekhanov**, who exercised a decisive influence upon **Lenin’s** philosophical formation, resumed **Engels’s** arguments in the sense of a philosophy of dialectical materialism. He saw the essential difference of dialectics from the vulgar theory of evolution in **Hegel’s** thesis of sudden transformations in development (28). In *Mutationstheorie* (**De Vries**, 2 Vols, Leipzig 1901-1903), **Plekhanov** saw the “dialectical leap” now also recognised by Biology, though misunderstood in a teleological sense, and celebrated as dialectical the Neo-Lamarckian doctrine of the “Sensibility of Matter”, because it represented, “properly understood, only a translation into modern biological language of **Feuerbach’s** materialist doctrine concerning the unity of being and thought, of object and subject” (29). “In Hegel’s system”, **Plekhanov** explained, “dialectic coincides with metaphysics. For us, dialectic is buttressed upon the doctrine of nature. In Hegel’s system, the demiurge of reality [...] is the absolute idea. For us, [...] only an abstraction from the motion by which all the combinations and all the states of matter are produced” (118). **Plekhanov** still saw, at least, that movement (“fundamental fact of being” (113)) is a contradiction only as a concept in the context of a system of coordinates (112), and thus that one of the fundamental problems for the necessity of dialectics must be sought exactly in the *non-identity* of thought and “being”.

6. For the second generation of Marxists, who emerged around the turn of the 20th century (**Luxemburg**, **Pannekoek**, **Lenin**, among others) and for those of the third generation, who were drawn to Marxism through the experience of the October Revolution (**Gramsci**, **Mariátegui**, **Lukács**, **Korsch**, **Bloch** etc.), until the generation of **Brecht** and **Benjamin**, the reception of dialectics carried a left wing, revolutionary sense. For **Adorno**, confronted by the totalitarian horrors of the century and the increasingly apparent failure of the revolutions which followed in the wake of 1917, dialectics withdrew into a negative Hegelianism of ‘inner



resistance', while at the same time, in the lands of command administration socialism, a version of dialectics converted back into metaphysics was enforced by the official ideology.

6.1 Rosa **Luxemburg** condemned harshly “applications of historical materialism which did not use Marx’s dialectics”, without however defining what was meant by “dialectics” more exactly. It was precisely in economic history that she saw those who regard themselves as being outside of ideology, producing “that raw derivation of the most abstract ideological forms directly out of the soup-tureen” (*GW* 1/2, 470). In **Sismondi** she praised “the broad horizon of the dialectical approach”, because he historicised the capitalist mode of production, comparing wage labour with other forms of unfree labour and declaring that it was possible that an age would arrive which would be just as barbaric as this one (*Accumulation*, 183). Dialectics for **Luxemburg** were not something which can be formulaically applied, but rather, the sense for – that is, the heuristic orientation towards – contradictoriness. Thus she opposed the romanticisation of the village community: “The Russian peasant beaten by his own neighbours in the service of Tsarist absolutism with birch-rods – that is the cruellest historical critique of the narrow restraints of ur-communism and the most obvious expression of the fact that also this social formation is subject to the dialectical rule: reason becomes irrational, favour – misery” (*GW* 5, 687). Against **Tugan-Baranowski** who, among others, declared **Marx**’s analysis of accumulation to be contradictory, Luxemburg responded: “One only needs, however, to translate into historical dialectics the apparently rigid contradiction, as it corresponds to the spirit of all Marx’s theory and way of thinking, and thus the contradiction of the Marxist schema becomes the living mirror of the global career of capital, its fortune and end” (*GW* 5, 518). It is a matter here of the “dialectical contradiction, that capitalism needs non-capitalist social organisations as the setting for its development, that it proceeds by assimilating the very conditions which alone can ensure its own existence” (*Accumulation*, 346). Against the critics of **Marx**’s accumulation schema who argued that the calculation could not rise, she proposed the crisis-theory insight that this “is, precisely in its insolubility, the exactly posed prognosis of the economically inevitable downfall of capitalism as a result of the imperialist process of expansion” which, though, as she immediately added, thus avoiding an economistic theory of collapse, “is a theoretical fiction, particularly because the accumulation of capital is not a merely economic, but rather, political process” (*GW* 5, 519).

Nevertheless, **Luxemburg** demonstrated herself to be an important dialectician more in her practical theory than in her theoretical praxis: for example, in her mediation or doubled supersession of Revolutionism and Realpolitik in the concept of *Revolutionary Realpolitik*, or of necessary centrism and its anarchistic rejection in the orientation to the “*self-centralism*” of the masses. (cf. *GW* 1/2, 429).

6.2 Anton **Pannekoek** also reclaimed dialectics for the revolutionary left in 1909. His discourse, though, did not actually order the positions dialectically, but rather, as a dichotomy: “*The proletarian point of view is materialist, the bourgeois, ideological. But dialectical and materialist belong just as much together as ideological and undialectical.*” For the proletariat, material powers which lie outside the domain of any individual dominate development; for the bourgeoisie, the creative power of the human spirit. Material reality is dialectical because it can only be grasped fully as a unity of opposed concepts” (60). – **Lenin** opposed **Pannekoek** and at the same time joined him in such dichotomous thought paradigms.

6.3 For the young **Lenin**, the “dialectical method” of **Marx** and **Engels** was “nothing else that the scientific method in sociology, which consists in regarding society as a living organism in a state of constant development” instead of “as something mechanically concatenated” (*LCW* 1, 165). When he later invoked “the materialist dialectic, the doctrine of development”, which, he claimed, had been used by Marx (cf. *SR*, *LCW* 25, ??), it was not differentiated in the slightest from the conventional rhetoric of the Second International, from Karl **Kautsky** to Otto **Bauer**.

Following Engels’s notion of “two sets of laws”, **Lenin** interpreted its reflex category causally: “dialectics of things produces dialectics of ideas” (*PN*, *LCW* 38, 196). Dialectical thought comes at best onto the traces of the connection of movement and efficacy of things, but the nature of this connection doesn’t make it easy. The mistake lies not in the answer, but rather, in the question: in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, **Marx**, from the standpoint of praxis, had blown open the philosophical grammar of the “two sets of laws” and of that which **Descartes** called *commercium mentis et corporis*. **Labriola** was correct: whoever misunderstands this demolition, also misunderstands **Marx**’s version of dialectics.

**Lenin** summarised *practical* dialectics in four laws:

1. Comprehensiveness (almost Kantian in the sense of a regulative idea: “That is something we cannot ever hope to achieve completely, but the rule of comprehensiveness is a safeguard against mistakes and rigidity”);
2. Examination of the object “in its development, in its ‘self movement’ (as Hegel sometimes said), in its transformation” (noticing that this rule could not be applied meaningfully to an isolated object, Lenin replaced it with the thought that the object could change “its connection with its environment”).
3. “a full ‘definition’ of an object must include the whole of human experience, both as a criterion of truth and a practical indicator of its connection with human wants”;
4. Never to forget, “that ‘truth is always concrete, never abstract’, as the late **Plakhanov** liked to say after **Hegel**” (*LCW* 32, 94). – These rules obviously do not amount to concrete methodological steps, more a general framework of orientation, almost a disposition.

The theoretician **Lenin**, who, as such, remained the student of **Plekhanov**, fostered the re-Hegelianisation of Marxist dialectics. Not so much through his insistence on organising “the systematic study of Hegel’s dialectic from a materialist standpoint” (*LCW* 33, 234), but rather, through remarks formed through taking up formulations from **Marx** such as the following: “Marx *applied* Hegel’s dialectics in its rational form to political economy” (*PN*, *LCW* 38, 178). Or even through his explanation in the fragment *On the Question of Dialectics*: “Dialectics is the theory of knowledge of (Hegel and) Marxism” (*ibid.*, 362).

An evolutionary paradigm can be observed when **Lenin** comes to speak of **Marx**’s *Capital*: in his analysis of commodity exchange as the cell of bourgeois society, **Marx** showed, precisely, “the germs of *all* the contradictions” and, further, “the development (both growth and movement) of these contradictions and of this society ... from its beginning to its end” (*ibid.*, 361). Dialectics has here lost all reference to the unexpected or the discontinuous, and denotes exactly a type of knowledge, derived from the ‘philosophy of history’, regarding the predetermination of the future. Reading **Hegel**’s *Logic*, **Lenin** coined the concept “the *logic* of capital”, which was later to form the foundational category of a tradition of interpretation of *Capital*. “In *Capital*, Marx applied to a single science logic, dialectics and theory of knowledge of materialism [three words are not needed: it is one and the same thing] which has taken everything valuable in Hegel and

developed it further” (ibid., 319). Especially rich in its effects was the following notice:

“Aphorism: It is impossible completely to understand Marx’s *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the *whole* of Hegel’s *Logic*.

Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!” (ibid., 180). Here is one who, in the exuberance of a reading of **Hegel**, has the feeling to be the first (or rather, the second, after **Marx**) to catch a glimpse of a new world.

The explicitly “philosophising” **Lenin**, however - similar to **Luxemburg** - is to be differentiated from the historically powerful politician. His discussion of dialectics (“dialectical logic unconditionally demands ... teaches ... requires” (*LCW* 32, 94) is more conventional than his action. In political-tactical, as in communicative praxis, he was able to demonstrate another uncommonly agile side, directed to the concrete. Here is a masterly dialectician in the perception of the game of many-sidedness, of contradictions, of interdependency and latent potentials, of relationships of power and timely moments for intervention. The perception of unexpected applications is, though, the other side of a voluntaristic, seemingly zigzag, method in politics. After **Lenin**’s political Art came **Stalin**’s politics of violence.

6.4 Under **Stalin** dialectics were codified into 4 “essential features” or “guiding principles”:

1. Unity of nature;
2. Universal movement in the sense of becoming and passing away;
3. “An onward and upward movement [...] as a development from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher”, which, “rapidly and abruptly” but not “accidently”, rather “as the natural result of an accumulation of imperceptible and gradual quantitative changes”, led to “qualitative changes”;
4. Internal contradictions of natural things and the struggle of opposites as the driving force of this higher development. (*Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, 838 et sqq).

6.5 **Mao**’s writings on dialectics represent a special case. In his catechistic writing *On Contradiction* of 1937, he took up **Lenin** (though filtered through **Stalin**), translating him into easy to

remember formulae, in which he combined “Marxist terminology always more strongly with the content of traditional Chinese ‘native dialectics’” (Klimaszewsky/Thomas 1972, 1213). This was possibly the element which encouraged **Brecht** to greet emphatically the publication of this text in German in 1954 and to use it for his own purposes (cf. Schickel 1968, 150 et sqq.).

Contradiction was treated by **Mao** as a universal law of being, in which he differentiated the “Principal contradiction and the principal aspect of a contradiction” (*On Contradiction*, **Mao** 1953, 34): they determined all “secondary contradictions”, and “the aspects of each contradiction develop unevenly” (ibid., 36). **Mao** named above all the virulent contradiction between the old and the new, which ended with the supersession of each (a “universal, forever inviolable law of the world” (ibid., 37)). The practical meaning of this was **Mao**’s teaching of the omnipresence of conflict between the old and the new, in which victory was supposed to be guaranteed to the later. He illustrated the “law of identity and struggle of opposed aspects of a contradiction” with the following example: “to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat or the people’s dictatorship is precisely to prepare the conditions for liquidating such a dictatorship and advancing to the higher stage of abolishing all state systems” (ibid., 45). The dialectic thus functioned as a form of rhetoric affecting the masses, legitimating contradictions between ends and means, theory and praxis.

If, however, contradictions were omnipresent, then at least contradiction in socialism became discussable. **Mao** did precisely this in his 1957 Text, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* (**Mao** 1977, 384-421). Differently to earlier, he now discovered that “the contradictions ... between the exploited and the exploiting classes have a non-antagonistic as well as an antagonistic aspect” (385). The contradictions between the People and Enemies of the People were construed as antagonistic. But People just as Enemy and, certainly, contradictions regularly change their meaning, and **Mao** went through the changes since the 1920s. Concepts do not signify essential differences, rather they derive strategic differentiations and oppositions out of the concrete situation. Contradictions also exist in socialist societies, contradictions which in and for themselves are not antagonistic (that is to say, they are resolvable within the system), but can become antagonistic through false treatment (cf. 391). Schematically, **Mao** claimed that within capitalism, on the other hand, the antagonistic contradictions are irresolvable within the system (388). - In 1964, in *Conversation about the Questions of Philosophy* (**Mao** 1974), **Mao** undertook a revision of **Engels**’s doctrine of the three laws of dialectics. Immediately at the beginning the foundational theme was announced (in terms of its influence on **Althusserianism**, see **Balibar**

1977): “Only when there is class struggle is there philosophy. It is a waste of time to discuss epistemology separately from praxis” (212). “The juxtaposition, on the same level, of the transformation of quality and quantity into one another, the negation of the negation, and the law of the unity of opposites is ‘triplicism’, not monism. The most basic thing is the unity of opposites, the transformation of quality and quantity into one another is the unity of the opposites quality and quantity. There is no such thing as the negation of the negation. [...] in the development of things, every link in the chain of events is both affirmation and negation”. For example, slave society negated pre-class society, but was an affirmation in relation to feudalism (226). Dialectics is “the continual movement towards opposites.” One must therefore accept death in life and death and passing away as moments of life.

6.6 After the 20th party conference of the CPSU there was a discussion of contradiction in areas under Soviet influence which began from the recognition of the existence of contradictions in socialism and affirmed that they were the driving force of socialism. The law of the negation of the negation, which had been abolished under Stalin, was also reintroduced in the wake of de-Stalinisation (cf. **Stiehler** 1960, 3). Nevertheless, this discussion remained relatively without consequence as it was not accompanied by any politics of contradiction. The political leadership regularly supported research into dialectics which, however, was severed from reality. The triumphal tone still dominated the official ideology: “Materialist dialectics prove irrefutably”, declared the chief ideologue, extending one of **Lenin’s** phrases to the point of caricature (cf. LW 22, 108\*), “that the antiquated ... capitalist society bears a passing character, that its dissolution by a new, more perfect social order is mature” (**Suslow** 1974, 48).

Official Marxism-Leninism stagnated in the shadow of such a regression of dialectics back into vulgar metaphysics. Robert **Havemann** found himself in 1964 “surrounded by fossils which have absolutely no real content anymore” (168). “The gentlemen who taught dialectical materialism from the professorial chairs of the Soviet Union have gone back to the positions of vulgar materialism and of mechanical materialism. All dialectics in their words is only to be regarded as a coy alibi before the classics” (ibid., 12). – Vaclav **Havel** explained in 1966 that the cause for such a regression of dialectics into an “a priori and fundamentally abstract dialectical schema” (174) – that is to say, into a new metaphysics – was the “precedence given to the theoretical principle over concrete praxis” (176). Against the triumphal manner of speaking

(“sovereign domination and application of dialectics” (cf. **Stiehler** 1960, 5)) and irreplevisable claims (“the principle of the comprehensiveness of analysis” (cf. **Wallner** 1981, 636)), he spoke out ambitiously in favour of a “new, higher dialectic”, a “dialectical dialectic” (175), the sober, liberating truth: “a comprehensive *Anschauung* is nonsense” (179).

While the “passive dialectic” (**Haug** 1985) over took the communist project, there arose on its margins and in its gaps pluralistic dialectical thought, beginning afresh. Repressed in theory and political praxis, dialectics returned above all in literature and art.

6.7 Despite all the institutional hindrances, a series of discussions of dialectics (discussions of logic, of praxis, and of dialectic as method cf. the overview in **Bogomolow** 1974.) took place throughout the history of the GDR. The final results of these debates, however, were a great disillusionment. – Initially, dialectics were defined “with Lenin, briefly, as ‘the doctrine of development’”, whose meaning, however, was “constant progress, the unsuspended development of productive powers” etc. (**Redlow** et al. 1971, 182). Correspondingly, materialist dialectics was taken for a method which was “incessantly perfecting itself ..., a weapon which becomes ever more powerful with each of its deployments” (**Rosental** 1974, 6). But did this development therefore recognize no decline, defeat, regression, no destruction? Is not dialectics for the classics of Marxism related to the thought that nothing lasts for ever, that everything also passes away? Doesn’t there exist, therefore, a contradiction between such optimism of progress and dialectics? - For Hermann **Ley**, dialectics functioned as a successor to theodicy when he said that “the dialectical standpoint justifies coming into being and passing away as moments of continual becoming”, and when he thought to see “realised dialectics”, with **Engels**, “in the transitory character of the solar system, the earth and humans” (1977, 765). As if he wanted to confirm **Nietzsche’s** judgement of the optimism of the dialectic, he declared that the specific achievement of dialectics was “that no pessimistic conclusions are presented by the knowledge of nature” (766) etc. Wolfgang **Eichhorn** (I) interpreted **Lenin’s** paraphrase of **Engels** – “dialectics of things produces dialectics of ideas” – in the sense of an ontology of diverse spheres: dialectical laws are the most universal, under which fall the dialectics of both spheres with a parallelism of interpellation and pre-stabilised correspondence, with the slight reservation: that they “must agree on the whole” (1973, 13). For **Kosing** and others, this means “that dialectics in general exists in two fundamental forms: as *objective dialectics* which are immanent in nature and society, and as

*subjective dialectics* which reflect objective dialectics in the theory of dialectics and the dialectical method which is derived from it" (1981, 32). Here the whole was closed up into a "system", in the sense "that the whole forms an independent phenomenon which imbues all parts and confronts them as their determining moment" (**Redlow** et al. 1971, 185). - In its late phase, the leading themes of such a theory of dialectics, both scientific and in terms of the history of philosophy, went through a terrain-shift to, on the one hand, a *system* of thought (cf. **Warnke** et al. 1977 a & b), and, on the other, a theory of *development* (cf. **Redlow/Stiehler** 1977).

M. **Wallner** sensed the elimination of the necessary effort from such a philosophy of identity. In 1981 he went over to a long-disputed fundamental position of the "analytical theory" which was predominant in the West: one must distinguish between (prescriptive) method and theory, otherwise there results "the construction of 'ideal centaurs' which are at the same time knowledge and instructions for action" and which imply an abstract subject "whose action is exclusively determined by knowledge of objectivity and which thus comports itself in reality without interest" (633). The assumption of direct reflection was also now charged with being mechanistic because it eliminated interests, and thus the relation of the subject to the object (635 et sqq.). Methodology was ultimately seen in relation to the subject as "the ideal concept of activity" (637 et sq.).

The operative sense of 'dialectical method' was treated in investigations of the "ascent from the abstract to the concrete" (cf. **Iljenkow** 1969), of the relationship of the logical and the historical (cf. **Gropp** 1970, **Iljenkow** 1974), or in **Narski's** study of **Marx's** treatment of aporiai etc. (cf. **Bogomolow** 1972). Nevertheless, no real clarity reigned. According to E. **Thomas** the function of "the foundational laws of dialectics" consisted in the fact that through them "the investigation ... is fixed theoretically in a general form" (1976, 161). It would perhaps be helpful to add: in a provisional theoretical framework with heuristic function. G. **Pawelzig** ascribed to the "law of the negation of the negation in **Engels's** presentation of historical processes" the functional status of taking up "the leading, guiding form of presentation in the structure of method when it is a matter of imparting historical understanding and thus allowing activity oriented to the future" (1981, 135). That appears, rather, to be a didactic-propagandist ("ideological") function. When Götz **Redlow** declared that "the dialectical method is a universal method which in the first instance, in principle, is applicable to any and everything ... but not in the sense of a master key..., since the objective universality of dialectics exists only in its concrete individuality" (1979, 10), **Wallner** countered with the question: "How does a universally applicable method function,



if not as a universal skeleton key?” (1981, 638). That condemns all attempts “to represent the dialectical-materialist method as an instrument which solves concrete research tasks alongside specialised methods” (639). Herbert **Hörz** was correct when he wrote that dialectics “isn’t a method ranged alongside others, but is, rather, suitable for the comprehension of the co-action of these methods” (1976, 344). Thus the conscious application of dialectics was finally restricted to directing “the selection and the combination of more specialised methods, so that as a result a methodology is established which is able to reveal the objective dialectics of the relevant field of investigation”. **Wallner** named this the “subordination” of specialised methodologies, while conceding, however, that this is also possible “without the scientific application” of the dialectical method, in as much as the single scientist correctly combines the more specialised methods correctly” (ibid.). If it had become apparent that dialectics was “no ‘paralogical wonder-weapon’” (ibid., 640), this amounted to a revaluation of the *spontaneous dialectics* of (competent) scientists, which is otherwise named “instinct” or “intuition”.

7. *Western Marxism*. - In the emphatic moment of 1917 young intellectuals all over the world moved towards revolutionary Marxism under the aegis of dialectics. The Bolshevisation of the international communist movement presented them all, sooner or later, with alternatives: either to pay lip service to the rising orthodoxy, to fall into silence, or to develop their projects outside of the countries of state socialism and the parties connected with them. For the pluralistic theoretical culture which developed outside of Stalinism the (misleading) name “Western Marxism” has gained currency. **Lukács**, **Korsch** und **Gramsci** are regarded as its “real originators” (**Anderson** 1976, 29; cf. **Haug** 1985, 234-59).

7.1 In 1919 **Lukács** directed his critique (which later, due to *History and Class Consciousness*, exercised a many-sided subterranean influence) as far back as **Engels**, who he accused of having “extended the [dialectical] method to apply also to nature... following **Hegel**’s mistaken lead”. **Lukács** declared himself to be firmly for dialectics limitation “to the realms of history and society” (*He&CC*, 24). - **Sartre**, in the Introduction to his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, developed the tendency of this argument regarding the effects of the regressive dialectics of **Engels**’s position (cf. 15 et sqq, 27 et sqq, 33 et sqq). - **Lukács**’s second fundamental critique was aimed against **Engels**’s objectivism. The October Revolution had allowed the Proletariat to appear to

Marxist theory as “both subject and object of knowledge” and allowed “theory in this way to intervene immediately and adequately in the revolutionary process of society”. In as much, therefore, as the unity of theory and praxis was made possible for the first time, the way to theory’s knowledge of “its theoretical being – the dialectical method” - was open for the first time. (*H&CC* 3; trans. modified). This idea is lacking in **Engels**, according to **Lukács**: “He does not even mention the most vital interaction, namely the *dialectical relation between subject and object in the historical process*” (ibid.). “The difference from ‘metaphysics’ is then no longer sought in the necessity for any ‘metaphysical’ treatment to leave the object unchanged, while for the dialectical method the central problem is the *transformation of reality*” (ibid. trans. modified). Otherwise “the virtues of forming ‘fluid’ concepts [would] become altogether problematic” (ibid.), and dialectics would appear as “a superfluous additive, a mere ornament of Marxist ‘sociology’ or ‘economics’ [...], as an empty construct in whose name Marxism does violence to the facts” (*H&CC* 4). - Similarly, Ernst **Bloch** turned against the type of “dialectics which have all too often become pure decoration or even a schema” (*GA* 11, 393). - Dialectics became for **Lukács** when he was separated from praxis a form of totality thinking, which **Althusser** later challenged in his critique of the *expressivist totality*.

7.2 Against the thesis, defended by Franz **Mehring** and others, which claimed that method could not be separated from analysis of the matter, August **Thalheimer** explained in 1923 that “the development of a version of dialectics is ‘a pressing need’, among other reasons because ‘the need for the creation of a comprehensive and strictly ordered world view has presented itself to the most advanced sections of the world proletariat’”. Karl **Korsch**, who cited these words, accused **Thalheimer** of positivism-idealism in 1924 and reaffirmed “the total error of the idea of the possibility of an independent ‘system’ of materialist dialectics. Only an idealist dialectician can attempt to consider the totality of thought-forms (determinations of thought, categories) ... as a particular subject matter for itself” (176). In 1930 **Korsch** extended his critique to **Lenin**, in whom **Korsch** found dialectics to be one-sidedly placed in the object and the dialectic of theory and praxis destroyed, due to the *Abbildtheorie* (62). According to **Korsch**, **Lenin** saw his chief task not in dialectics but in the “defence of the *materialist position*, which has not really been seriously attacked by anyone” (65).

“The dialectical method used by Marx in *Capital*” points, according to **Korsch**, to “the inner restlessness in all that which exists” (1932, 177). Nevertheless, he insisted increasingly upon a clarification of the terminology of dialectics. In particular, contradiction “exists not as such, but rather, only through a simulated, symbolically abbreviated or unclear (due to other reasons) manner of expression” (ibid., 197). Already himself now under the influence of logical empiricism, **Korsch** declared in 1932: “The logically and empirically flawless clarification of all these concepts which are still used unthinkingly today, and a good number of further ones, is one of the most important tasks for the future of the socialist-proletarian science which appeals to the authority of Marx” (ibid.). - His later intellectual development saw him break with Marxism; but for his “student” Bertolt **Brecht**, both the sense for dialectics and the sense for its non-speculative deployment remained living forces.

7.3 *Brecht* - Like **Korsch** and other Marxist intellectuals from 1917, **Brecht** was a Leninist. It was precisely for this reason that he understood what sort of a degeneration the “Leninism” institutionalised by **Stalin** represented. In 1926/27 Brecht noted “an enormously characteristic episode: When Lenin had died, someone tried to gather together his immortal sayings and phrases. But there weren’t any. All that was found were slips of paper with practical instructions scribbled on them”; consequently, the slips of paper were to be examined, to see if “changes of world-historical significance” could be made of them (*GA* 21, 179). In a letter to **Korsch** from 1934 (**Brecht** 1983, 185 et sqq.) **Brecht** announced that the “good old dialectic” was “not yet so vanquished and antiquated” and attributed its “deterioration” to the weakness of the workers’ movement. In a similar fashion, he later gave priority of place in his critique of Stalinism to the “withering away of the dialectic” (*GA* 23, 417).

7.31 Around the same time as **Korsch** turned away from dialectics, **Brecht** sketched his programme for a “dialectical drama” (*GA* 21, 431 et sqq.). It is *a philosophy of praxis under antagonistic conditions*, related to that of **Gramsci**, which emerges and is dialectical in as much as it avoids dissolution, uniformity and over-generality and not only claims agility, but makes it the very criterion of its expression. The capacity to describe something is founded upon the capacity to transform it. The idea of historical “necessity” is criticised in that it conceals “contradictory tendencies which have been decided upon pugnaciously” (*GA* 21, 523). Dialectics is necessary

because of the unbridgeable difference between thought and reality, and because of the necessity of finding an orientation for action according to this condition. “In general, processes don’t come to an end in reality. It is observation which requires and establishes conclusions” (ibid., 523). **Brecht** elaborated a reversed uncertainty principle: it is not intervention which makes an image unclear, but rather, the lack of possibility to intervene: “Situations and things which can not be transformed by thought (which are not dependent upon us) cannot be thought” (ibid., 521). - In a letter to Erich **Engel** in 1949 **Brecht** proposed “to study” the materialist-dialectical “way of thinking as a way of life”, with the consequence “that dialectics must not be derived or refuted from the pervious way of thinking alone, just as the new way of thinking, in any case, can not be derived” from previous thought forms: “a leap is necessary, or (possibly more auspiciously) a fall is due (*“ein Fall ist fällig”*)” It is “wiser to comprehend dialectics from its political applicability, that is, to derive the new concepts (*die neuen Begriffe*) from attempts to intervene (*aus den Griffen*)” (**Brecht** 1983 [619], 591).

“Dialectical criticism” for **Brecht** consisted in bringing points of view “into crisis” “by means of their results” (*GA* 21, 520; *GW* 20, 153). In this sense he showed the crisis of the Soviet censorship regime, by confronting it with its results: “The state damages literature which is in favour of the state when it oppresses literature which is opposed to the state, it incapacitates Literature’s voice, it pulls its teeth and de-realises it” (*GA* 22.1, 132).

7.32 Norman **Levine**’s claim that dialectics for **Marx** were “the unifying concept, the central vision” (1) is equally the case for **Brecht**. He adopted the expression “turning point” (*Wendung*), used by **Lenin** in the context of self-criticism and reorientation, in the subtitle of his *Me-ti. Buch der Wendungen*. In this “small handbook” of dialectical morals, or rather, dialectical manners, dialectics are named “the great method”. Dialectics are concerned “to recognise processes in things and to use them. It teaches the art of asking questions which make action possible” (*GW* 12, 475). **Hegel**’s dictum that identity is the identity of identity and non-identity is negated, transferred into the pressure of the things “under thought” (ibid., 493) and the dictum of difference: things don’t remain true to themselves, concepts don’t remain with the things (ibid., 548). “Things are happenings. States of affairs are processes. Events are transitions” (ibid., 517). **Brecht** comprehended dialectics anti-ideologically: subversive, against every and any ideological

eternity of an established order. “Deployment of dialectics for the destruction of ideologies” (*GW* 20, 157).

**Brecht** felt a paradox in the liberation of the Germans from National Socialism by a defeat: “Once again this nation is swindling its way to a revolution by assimilation” (*Journals* 6.1.48). Without materialist dialectics the situation in Germany could not be comprehended: “for its unity can only be achieved through continued rending asunder, it will have freedom dictated to it etc etc ...” (*ibid.*). - He noted the danger that with the swindling of the revolution emerged a perverted dialectics, transformed back into metaphysics: this pseudo-dialectic, “which stirs everything up in order to calm it down, which transforms the things in flux into something fixed, ‘elevates’ matter into an idea, is just the bag of magic tricks for such shit-awful times” (*ibid.*)

7.33 The theatre which **Brecht** directed in the GDR was strongly oriented to dialectics.

“Everything connected to conflict, clash, and struggle cannot be treated at all without materialist dialectics” (*GA* 23, 376). The theatre “is able to make dialectics a pleasure. The surprises of the logically progressive or leaping development, the instability of all states of affairs, the wit of contradictoriness and so forth, they are delights in the liveliness of humans, things and processes, and they raise the art of living well just as much as the joyfulness of life. All arts contribute to the greatest of all arts, the art of living well” (*GW* 16, 702). The reception of dialectics in the theatre was not only beneficial. Cautiously formulated: “the entry of dialectics into the theatre triggered a perceptible shock among those who accepted dialectics in other areas” (*Journals* 25.12.52).

7.4 In the *Prison Notebooks* **Gramsci** developed his version of dialectics above all in his critique of **Bukharin**’s “objectivist disfigurement of Marx’s theory of history” (**Schmied-Kowarzik** 1981, 116) and in his confrontation with the idealist dialectics of Benedetto **Croce**.

7.41 **Gramsci** attacked **Bukharin** precisely in that place where he presented the theoretical structure which had been developed by **Engels**, **Plekhanov** and **Lenin**, and which was later canonised by **Stalin**. In as much, this critique can be understood as a critique *avant la lettre* of Stalinist *Dialectical Materialism*. **Gramsci** saw the foundational problem in the assumption that

“the philosophy of praxis has always been split into two: a doctrine of history and politics, and a philosophy, which Bukharin says is dialectical materialism and no longer the old philosophical materialism” (Q11, 22; SPN 434; trans. modified). “But if the question is framed in this way, one can no longer understand the importance and significance of the dialectic” (ibid.). Expressed in positive terms: “The true fundamental function and significance of the dialectic can only be grasped if the philosophy of praxis is conceived as an integral and original philosophy which opens up a new phase of history and a new phase in the development in world thought. It does this to the extent that it goes beyond both traditional idealism and traditional materialism, philosophies which are expressions of past societies, while retaining their vital elements. If the philosophy of praxis is not considered except in subordination to another philosophy, then it is not possible to grasp the new dialectic, through which the transcending of old philosophies is effected and expressed” (ibid., 435). **Gramsci** saw in the pre-Stalinist ‘theoretical grammar’ of **Bukharin**, which posited and gave precedence to a foundational materialist philosophy which determined historical materialism, also a capitulation before common sense (*senso comune*): “It is felt that the dialectic is something arduous and difficult, in so far as thinking dialectically goes against vulgar common sense, which is dogmatic and eager for peremptory certainties and has as its expression formal logic” (ibid.). Referring to the third of the *Theses on Feuerbach* (MECW 5, 3), he continued: “The uneducated and crude environment has dominated the educator and vulgar common sense has imposed itself on science rather than the other way round. If the environment is the educator, it too must in turn be educated, but the *Manual* does not understand this revolutionary dialectic” (Q11, 22; SPN 435).

The reclamation of dialectics, according to **Gramsci**, consisted in the critique of evolutionism and all views which supposed an unbroken, goal directed, predictable development, and which were not able to recognise “the dialectical principle with its passage from quantity to quality”, a passage which “disturbs any form of evolution and any law of uniformity understood in a vulgar evolutionist sense” (Q11, 26; ibid., 426). Against the objection that if this was the case, dialectics could not even be conceived, **Gramsci** answered: “But a theory of history and politics can be made, for even if the facts are always unique and changeable in the flux of movement of history, the concepts can be theorised. Otherwise one would not even be able to tell what movement is, or the dialectic, and one would fall back into a new form of nominalism” (ibid., 427).

7.42 **Croce** was accused by **Gramsci**:

1. of having regressed from **Marx**'s *real dialectics* to *ideal dialectics* ("in becoming does he see becoming itself or the 'concept' of becoming?" (Q10.II, 1); and
2. of having gone to great pains "to reduce the antithesis and to split it up in a long sequence of moments, that is, to reduce the dialectic to a process of reformist evolution of "revolution-restoration", in which henceforth only the second term is valid, because it is concerned to repair continually (from the outside) an organism which does not have its own sources of recuperation within itself" (Q10.II, 41.XVI).

**Gramsci** saw this liberal-conservative domestication of Hegel's dialectics in the sense of a reformist "passive revolution" (cf. *ibid.*) above all in the "dialectic of distincts", which Croce "introduced in addition to a dialectic of opposites" (Q10.II, 1). "The philosophical error (of practical origin!) of such a conception consists in the mechanical assumption that in the dialectical process the thesis must be 'conserved' by the antithesis, in order not to destroy the process itself. The dialectical process is therefore 'foreseen' as a mechanical, arbitrarily, pre-arranged repetition into the infinite. [...] In real history the antithesis tends to destroy the thesis, the synthesis is a sublation (*Aufhebung*). However, this does not mean that it can be established a priori which elements of the thesis will be 'conserved' in the synthesis, nor that the blows could be 'measured' a priori, as in a conventionally organised 'boxing ring'. That this in the end actually occurs is a question of immediate 'politics', because the dialectical process in real history breaks down into countless partial moments" (Q10.I, 6). **Gramsci** allowed that **Croce**'s "dialectic of distincts" was a "purely verbal solution of a real methodological requirement which is to be criticised" (Q10.II, 41.X): "There is a real requirement in the differentiation of oppositions from distinctions, but there is also a contradiction in terms, because there is a dialectics only of oppositions" (*ibid.*). Here is disputed, above all, the Marxist differentiation between structure and superstructures. Croce thought the relationship *speculatively*, while Gramsci comprehended it in *realistic* terms with the concept of an "historical block" (cf. *ibid.*).

7.43 **Gramsci** reconstructed dialectics from active behaviour in nature and thus avoided reducing dialectics to subject-object dialectics. He sought a path between objectivism and subjectivism. He noted an indirect critique of the objectivist **Plekhanov** when he was making

excerpts from a neo-Thomist text in which dialectics were comprehended as a part of formal logic and rhetoric: **Plekhanov**, in *The Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, defined dialectics, departing from a classification of objectivity and disregarding the primacy of praxis, “as a part of formal logic, as the logic of movement in distinction to the logic of stasis” (Q11, 41; cf. **Bogomolow** 1974, 236).

Regarding **Lukács’s** view “that one can speak of the dialectic only for the history of men and not for nature” (Q11, 34; *SPN* 448; cf. *He&CC* 24) **Gramsci** argued that “If his assertion presupposes a dualism between nature and man he is wrong because he is falling into a conception of nature proper to religion and to Graeco-Christian philosophy and also to idealism which does not in reality succeed in unifying and relating man and nature to each other except verbally. But if human history should be conceived also as the history of nature (also by means of the history of science) how can the dialectic be separated from nature? Perhaps Lukács, in reaction to the baroque theories of the *Popular Manual*, has fallen into the opposite error, into a form of idealism. Certainly, there are many notes in Engels (*Anti-Dühring*) which can lead to the deviations of the *Popular Manual*. It is forgotten that Engels, even though he worked on it for a long time, only left behind sparse materials for the promised work, which is supposed to prove that dialectics is a cosmic law. Furthermore, it is exaggerating to claim the identity of thought of the two founders of the philosophy of praxis” (ibid.).

7.5 Étienne **Balibar** opened the dialectics conference in the research institute of the French Communist Party in 1975 with the notion, following **Mao**, of a double relation of dialectics to the class struggle: “At the same time, dialectics has the class struggle as its primary (if not its only) *object* [...]; and, on the other hand, dialectics is itself a product, or better, a particular *form* of class struggle”, namely, a revolutionary form of class struggle (1977, 21). **Balibar** detected two opposed “deviations”, whose interplay of permanent “transitions” and “corrections” was, however, essential for the process of Marxism:

1. *Objectivism* (in the chief form of a dialectics of nature and of evolution and of a universal ontology; and the secondary variant of positivism, of formalism of a theory of knowledge or of a dialectical methodology); and



2. (not symmetrically opposed) constitution of a *philosophy of praxis* or a materialist *historicism* (with the weaker variant forms of subjectivism, a philosophy of freedom and of the subject, a theoretical humanism etc.) (25).

The most important form of the philosophy of praxis is “not that which thinks praxis as the praxis of a *subject* [...] but rather, that which thinks *praxis itself as anonymous internally split ‘subject’ of the historical process*” (by means of categories like: relations of power, forms of organisation, the ruling ideology and the opposed proletarian ideology) (35). The opposition of objectivism and historicism embodied in **Engels** and **Gramsci** is “*immanent* to materialist dialectics” (40). This opposition will therefore not disappear. Its maintenance is the very life of materialist dialectics itself: no fixed definition can be given of it, however, inside materialist dialectics, there is a complex theoretical struggle *for* the same (41). **Balibar** intervened in the struggle of these opposites with two complementary corrections: “There is only *objective* dialectics, dialectics is the contradictory movements of *the things themselves* and not the things ‘as they are reflected in consciousness’, *let alone* a mere movement of thought. 2. There is only dialectics from the standpoint of praxis or rather, from a *practical standpoint*, a standpoint which subordinates theory to practical determinations” (38).

**Balibar** regarded as foundational for materialist dialectics “the thesis of the ‘unity of opposites’ (*unité des contraires*), the thesis of the universality of contradiction (*contradiction*) and of the specificity (*spécificité*) of contradictions” (60). If one grasped dialectics, on the other hand, as the doctrine of movement etc., it remained within the criticised metaphysics and ontology. Dialectics is the theory of the emergence, development and resolution (not reconciliation) of contradictions: “for *no* contradiction is ever ‘stable’, ‘eternal’, even though *the* contradiction, the contradictory character of the ‘essence of things’ is, as such, eternal or rather *absolute*” (ibid.). - “Specificity” had already been demanded by **Brecht**: “For example, the dictum of ‘transformation’ is simply castrated, if one quality is simply transformed into another. The dictum then becomes a mere platitude, that is, a trivial, ineffective truth. What is possibly needed is a conceivable, expectable incident, in which a new quality, of a quite specific type, emerges due to changes in a certain concentration; while that out of which the new quality has emerged was not able to be treated in this specific respect, that is, it was better to not name it as a quality at all” (Letter to Erich **Engel** 1949 in **Brecht** 1983 [619], 591). To make the things under consideration “treatable” in a practical-transformative sense is the meaning of **Brecht**’s postulate “to derive the new concepts (*die neuen Begriffe*) from attempts to intervene (*aus den Griffen*)” (ibid.\*). - **Balibar** developed his

version of the specificity of *contraires* as an interpretation of **Engels's** 'reflex thesis' (the thesis that subjective dialectics are a 'reflex' of objective dialectics): that does not mean that there are two dialectics, whose relationship would have to be studied, but rather "that there is *one*, single, *objective dialectic* whose development of thought, of knowledge, is likewise a specific *aspect* and consequently a determinate *effect*". Reflex signifies "that knowledge develops as itself an objective process" (29). Thus **Balibar** could stand by the thesis of the universality of *the* contradiction, even though there are only ever specific oppositions or contradictions which appear only for and in praxis.

Obviously influenced by **Lenin's** way of thinking, **Balibar** ended with the dictum: "Dialectics is for the theory of the proletariat that which the party is for the praxis of the proletariat, its *organisation* or its 'concentrated form'" (63). The sentence became an historical signature: four years later, the practical-theoretical political culture in France in which alone such a claim could be made collapsed.

7.6 Wolfdietrich **Schmied-Kowarzik** comprehended the "self-justification of materialist dialectics" (1981, 210) as a philosophy of praxis, which he reconstructed from **Marx's** critical sublation (*Aufhebung*) of **Hegel's** philosophy. His attention was directed to the practical-materialist "predominance" (*das Übergreifende*) which he saw in *production*, understood in the broadest sense. He developed the concept of "predominance" from the *Introduction* of 1857, in which **Marx** wrote "The conclusion we reach is not that [... the determining moments] are identical, but that they all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity. Production predominates not only over itself, in the antithetical definition of production, but over the other moments as well [distribution, consumption]. The process always returns to production to begin anew [...]. A definite production thus determines [...] *definite relations between these different moments*. Admittedly, however, *in its one-sided form* [as a moment alongside the others], production is itself determined by the other moments" (*Grundrisse* 99). **Schmied-Kowarzik** saw here the "central idea of Marx's materialist dialectics" (1981, 97). Production is for him human self-production, at the same time production of human alienation (*Entfremdung*) and production of the tendency, to be realised practically, of the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of this alienation (cf. *ibid.*, 116). With Ernst **Bloch** he comprehended the idea of dialectics of nature in a new way, under the condition that "nature is posited not only as an object of social production" (206). He concluded "that the

dialectical predominance of social production, which represents always and necessarily the starting point of dialectical materialism, is itself dialectically included in the predominant dialectics of nature. The dialectics of nature, however, for its part, can only be fulfilled and defined by social praxis, that is, by a moment over which it has predominated” (210).

8. The post-communist situation is characterised by blind dialectics, which are hardly thought theoretically. Dialectics as a foundational concept of Marxism-Leninism appears to be discredited. In the ruins of the Soviet Union all that which was once thought remains indifferently buried, and the traditions of Western Marxism are threatened by abandonment.

8.1 Analytical Marxists such as Erik Olin **Wright**, among others (1992, 6), claim, in a fashion similar to that of Karl Popper’s intended liquidation of dialectics in 1940 (cf. **Habermas’s** *Nachtrag zur Kontroverse zwischen Popper und Adorno* of 1963 (*The Analytical Theory of Science and Dialectics*, **Habermas** 1976), to have found much “obscuritanism” in the discourses which claim a methodological “distinctiveness” for Marxism, above all in the “notoriously unclear” and “widely repeated” claim that it is dialectical. “It does seem that the skilful use of dialectical metaphors can serve worthwhile heuristic purposes” (6). Nevertheless, the mastery of a “suggestive idiom” is something other than the deployment of a distinctive methodology, particularly since “dialectical accounts either restate what could perfectly well be expressed in less esoteric ways, or else they are unintelligible” (ibid.). That there still isn’t a concrete, exemplary analysis of operative dialectics is taken by them as a “reason for holding that there is no dialectical method at all” (ibid.). What they at best concede is “a way of organizing and directing thinking at a pre-theoretical level, which, in some cases, facilitates the discovery of insights that can be well expressed in terms consonant with the norms of scientific culture” (ibid.).

That this judgement corresponds not *only* to a scientific or positivistic narrow concept of method is indicated by the fact that the historian Edward P. **Thompson** similarly judged the thesis that for **Marx** dialectics was a method and “that this method lies somewhere in the field of dialectical reason” and “constitutes the *essence* of Marxism”. If **Marx** had found this “clue to the universe”, he would have written it down on paper. “We may conclude from this that it was not written because *it could not be written*”. **Thompson** comprehended Marx’s dialectics, in contrast, as

“a practice learned through practising. So that, in this sense, dialectics can never be set down, nor learned by rote” (306). - Richard **Gunn** called for the recognition in principal of a “basic distinction between concept and object, between interpreting and changing the world [...]; between, in short, the teleological or purposive and the causal”, and wanted to admit, at most, the conceptual as the primary field of application of dialectics, which he found, at any rate, to be “animistic and anthropomorphic”. Thus historical or social dialectics at the best can be understood “in relation to the (true or false) awareness of the concerned actors (1977, 48 et sq.). “A *dialectical materialist* monism is a contradiction in itself” (49).

As a counter manoeuvre, dialectics are sublated as soon as they are represented (for example, by Hans-Heinz **Holz** (1986, 11)) as a “system of statements about the structure of the world” and reinforced as an “ontological theory”, which functions *secondarily* as a “meta-theory of thought” (cf. **Narski** 1973, 83). In 1990 **Holz** projected “the development of an ontological foundational model of principles, categories and guiding principles of theoretical construction” (562). Following **Stalin**’s conception of the equivalence of both orders – the logical and its “ontological correlate” (563) – he could say that “the theory of reflection (*die Widerspiegelungstheorie*) [...] represents the foundation of dialectics out of itself” (564). - An exceeding of the boundaries of dialectics of a different nature can be observed in the work of Peter **Ruben**, when, taking up the concept derived from the philosophy of nature of *natura naturans*, he proposed “to think nature in its totality as *its own site of production*” and argued that “It is precisely that which constitutes dialectics” (1978, 70). Since the “*self-movement of the whole*” thus appeared as the theoretical problem of dialectics, **Ruben** regarded the concept of “interaction” as unsuitable (ibid., 82).

8.2 “Warning: not to be misused” -- Thus Theodor W. **Adorno** entitled his reflections on dialectics in *Minima moralia* (Nr. 152): “A mode of discussion stemming from the Sophists”, “whereby dogmatic assertions were shaken”, dialectics “subsequently developed, as against *philosophia perennis*, into a perennial method of criticism, a refuge for all the thoughts of the oppressed, even those unthought by them. But as a means of proving oneself right it was also from the first an instrument of domination, a formal technique of apologetics ... Its truth or untruth, therefore, is not inherent in the method itself, but in its intention in the historical process” (244). Unexpectedly for **Adorno**, that lays the accent upon orientation and commitment. Years later, in 1966 in *Negative Dialectics*, the accent had slipped. Dialectics were now

regarded as “the self-consciousness of the objective context of delusion; it does not mean to have escaped from that context. Its objective goal is to break out of the context from within. The strength required from the break grows in dialectics from the context of immanence; what would apply to it once more is Hegel’s dictum that in dialectics an opponent’s strength is absorbed and turned against him, not just in the dialectical particular, but eventually in the whole” (406).

In the same year (1966) at the Prague Hegel conference, Herbert **Marcuse** presented the thesis opposed to **Althusser**’s, that “materialist dialectics is also still under the spell of idealist reason, remains in positivity, so long as it doesn’t deconstruct the conception of progress according to which the future is always already rooted inside the present, so long as Marxist dialectics doesn’t radicalise the concept of transition to a new social stage, that is, so long as it doesn’t build into its theory reversal, the break with the past and the existing state of affairs, the qualitative difference in the direction of progress” (1969, 186). **Marcuse** registered a structural transformation of social dialectics: “To the extent that the antagonistic society closes itself up into an immense, repressive totality, the social location of negation ‘misplaces itself’, so to speak. The power of negation grows outside of” and “is today concentrated in no class” (190). Determinate negation is therefore for **Marcuse** historically overtaken (cf. 1954, 370 et sq.).

8.3 Dialectics would therefore be relevant for an orientation which combines agility and wisdom; although it does not give up its secrets in a methodological formulation, it would nevertheless be relevant as method in an elementary sense, understood as heuristics (*Findekunst*). Both functions are connected to a conception of the world which allows a contradictory, moving context to be thought. – “Perhaps it is not too bold, in a Brechtian sense, to define the Sage as the quintessential location in which such dialectics may be observed” (**Benjamin**, qtd in Ruoff 1976, 39). The ability to practice dialectics is, finally, an Art. “Being a dialectician means having the wind of history in one’s sails. The sails are the concepts. It is not enough, however, to have sails at one’s disposal. What is decisive is knowing the art of setting them” (**Benjamin**, 473).

## Bibliography

Adorno, T 1974 [1951], *Minima Moralia, Reflections from Damaged Life*, tr. E.F.N. Jephcott, London.

Adorno, T 1973 [1966], *Negative Dialectics*, tr. E.B. Ashton, London.

Althusser, L 1977, *For Marx*, tr. Ben Brewster, London.

Anderson, P 1976, *Consideration on Western Marxism*, London.

Bacon, F 1960, *The New Organon and Related Writings*, ed. F. H. Anderson, New York.

Bhaskar, R 1983, *Dialectic, Materialism and Human Emancipation*, London.

Benjamin, W 1999, *The Arcades Project*, tr. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge (Mass.).

Bernstein, E 1993 [1899], *The Preconditions of Socialism*, tr. and ed. Henry Tudor, Cambridge.

Balibar, É 1977, “A nouveau sur la contradiction. Dialectique des luttes de classes et lutte de classes dans la dialectique”, in Centre d'Etudes et de recherches marxistes [CERM], *Sur la dialectique*, 17-63, Paris.

Bogomolow, A.S. 1974, “Probleme der materialistischen Dialektik in der Philosophie der DDR”, in *Marxistisch-leninistische Philosophie in der DDR*, 229-52, ed. M.Klein et al., Berlin (GDR).

Bloch, E 1959-1978, *Gesamtausgabe (GA)*, Frankfurt/M.

Brecht, B 1967, *Gesammelte Werke (GW)*, Frankfurt/M.

Brecht, B 1983, *Briefe*, Berlin (GDR) und Weimar.

Brecht, B 1988-2003, *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe (GA)*, Berlin-Weimar-Frankfurt/M.

Brecht, B 1993, *Journals 1934 – 1955*, tr. H. Rorrison, ed. J. Willet, London.

Bunge, M 1975, “A Critical Examination of Dialectics”, in, *Dialectics/Dialectique*. 63-77, ed. C.Perelman, Den Haag.

Colletti, L 1979 [1974], *Marxism and Hegel*, Berlin (W).

Eichhorn, W. (I) 1973, “Zur Bestimmung des Gegenstands der Philosophie”, in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 5-19, 21. Jg., H. 1.

Eisler, H 1970, *Fragen Sie mehr über Brecht: Gespräche mit Hans Bunge*, Munich.

Feuerbach, L 1975 [1843], *Grundsätze einer Philosophie der Zukunft*, in *Werke* 3, Frankfurt/M.

Gethmann, C.F. 1984, "Formale Logik und Dialektik. Die Logik-Diskussion in der DDR 1951 bis 1958", in *Ein kurzer Frühling der Philosophie. DDR-Philosophie in der "Aufbauphase"*, 75-155, ed. C.Burrichter, Paderborn.

Gramsci, A 1971, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks (SPN)*, trs. and eds. Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith, London.

Gramsci, A 1975, *Quaderni del carcere*, Turin

Gropp, R.O. 1970, *Grundlagen des dialektischen Materialismus*, Berlin (GDR).

Gunn, R. 1977, "Is Nature Dialectical?", in *Marxism Today*, Feb. 1977, 45-52.

Habermas, J 1976 [1963], "The Analytical Theory of Science and Dialectics" in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, 131-162, ed. T. Adorno et al., trs. G. Adey and D. Frisby, London.

Haug, W.F. 1985, *Pluraler Marxismus*, Bd. 1, Berlin (W).

Havel, V. 1989 [1966], "Über dialektische Metaphysik", in V. Havel, *Das Gartenfest/Die Benachrichtigungen*, Reinbek.

Havemann, R. 1964, *Dialektik ohne Dogma*, Reinbek.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1952, *Philosophy of Right (PR)*, tr. T.M. Knox, Oxford.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1955, *Ästhetik*, ed. F. Bassenge, Berlin.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1969, *Science of Logic*, tr. A.V. Miller, London.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1969, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, Frankfurt/M.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1977, *Phenomenology of Spirit (PS)*, tr. A.V. Miller, Oxford.

Holz, H.H. 1986, "Hinleitung zu den Problemen", in *Dialektik als offenes System*, 11-28, ed. Bartels et al., Köln.

Holz, H.H. 1990, "Dialektik", in EE.

Hörz, H. 1976, *Marxistische Philosophie und Naturwissenschaften*, Berlin (GDR).

Iljenkow, E.W. 1960, "Die Dialektik des Abstrakten und Konkreten im 'Kapital' von Marx" [Moscow, 1960], in *Beiträge zur marxistischen Erkenntnistheorie*, 87-127, ed. A.Schmidt, Frankfurt/M 1969.

Iljenkow, E.W. 1974 [1971], "Logisches und Historisches", in *Geschichte der marxistischen Dialektik. Von der Entstehung des Marxismus bis zur Leninschen Etappe*, ed. Rosental et al., Berlin (GDR).

Israel, J. 1979, *Der Begriff der Dialektik -- Erkenntnistheorie, Sprache und dialektische Gesellschaftswissenschaft*, Reinbek.

Kant, I. 1929, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. N. K. Smith, London.

Kautsky, K. 1980 [1886], *Karl Marx' ökonomische Lehren*, ed. H. J.Steinberg, Berlin (W) and Bonn.

Klimaszewsky, G. and E.Thomas 1972, "Marxistisch-leninistische Dialektik oder maoistische Pseudodialektik?", in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*. 20. Jg., H. 10, 1208-26.

Klimaszewsky, G. ed. 1976, *Weltanschauliche und methodologische Probleme der materialistischen Dialektik*, Berlin (GDR).

Kofler, L. 1973, *Geschichte und Dialektik. Zur Methodenlehre der marxistischen Dialektik*, Darmstadt and Neuwied.

Korsch, K. 1971 [1932], "Die dialektische Methode im »Kapital«", in K. Korsch, *Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung*, ed. E. Gerlach, Frankfurt/M.

Kosing, A., E. Hahn, M. Hagen, H. Schliwa and I. Schulze 1984 [1981], *Dialektik des Sozialismus*, Berlin (GDR).

Labriola, A. 1972, *Über den historischen Materialismus*, eds. A. Ascheri-Osterlow and C. Pozzoli, Frankfurt/M.

Lenin 1972, *Collected Works (LCW)*, Moscow.

Levine, N. 1984, *Dialogue Within the Dialectic*, London.



Lukács, G. 1968, “Der Triumph Bernsteins”, in *Werke*, Bd. 2. Neuwied/Berlin.

Lukács, G. 1971, *History and Class Consciousness*, tr. R. Livingstone, London.

Luxemburg, R. 1970-5, *Gesammelte Werke (GW)* Berlin.

Luxemburg, R. 2003, *The Accumulation of Capital*, tr. A. Schwarzschild, London.

Mao Tse-Tung 1953, *On Contradiction*, New York.

Mao Tse-Tung 1974, *Mao Tse-Tung Unrehearsed. Talks and Letters 1956-71*, ed. Stuart Schram, London.

Mao Tse-Tung 1977, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Peking.

Marcuse, H. 1969, “Zum Begriff der Negation in der Dialektik”, in H. Marcuse, *Ideen zu einer kritischen Theorie der Gesellschaft*, 185-90, Frankfurt/M.

Marx, K. and F. Engels 1975, *Collected Works (MECW)*, London.

Mark, K. 1972, *Theories of Surplus Value VIII*, London.

Marx, K 1973, *Grundrisse*, tr. Martin Nicolaus, Harmondsworth.

Mepham J. and D. H. Ruben eds 1979, *Dialectics and Method* (= V. 1 of *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, 3 Vols), Brighton.

Merleau-Ponty, M 1968 [1955], *Die Abenteuer der Dialektik*, Frankfurt/M.

Morf, O. 1970, *Geschichte und Dialektik in der Politischen Ökonomie*, Frankfurt/M.

Narski, I. S. 1973 [1969], *Dialektischer Widerspruch und Erkenntnislogik*, Berlin (GDR).

Pannekoek, A. 1909, *Die Klassen der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft und ihre Funktion im Klassenkampf*, Hamburg.

Pawelzig, G. 1981, “Das Gesetz der Negation der Negation in Engels' Darstellung historischer Prozesse”, in *Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung*, 134-38, H. 9, 1981, Berlin (GDR).

Plekhanov, G. 1937, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, tr. Eden and Cedar Paul, ed. D. Ryazanov, London.

Popper K. 1966 [1940], “Was ist Dialektik?”, in ed. E.Topitsch, *Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*, 262-90, Köln-Berlin (W), [“What is dialectic?”, in *Mind*, 1940].

Redlow, G., H. Frommknecht, M. Klein et al. 1971, *Einführung in den dialektischen und historischen Materialismus*, Berlin (GDR) and Frankfurt/M.

Redlow, G. 1979, “Zu einigen aktuellen theoretischen Fragen der materialistischen Dialektik”, in *deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 1/1979.

Redlow, G. and G. Stiehler eds 1977, *Philosophische Probleme der Entwicklung*, Berlin (GDR).

Ritter, J. et al. 1971-, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie (HWPh)*, Darmstadt.

Rosental, M.M. 1969 [1955], *Die dialektische Methode der Politischen Ökonomie bei Karl Marx*, Berlin (GDR).

Rosental, M.M. et al. 1974 [1971], *Geschichte der marxistischen Dialektik. Von der Entstehung des Marxismus bis zur Leninschen Etappe*, Berlin (GDR).

Ruben, P. 1978, *Dialektik und Arbeit der Philosophie*, Köln.

Ruoff, K. 1976, “Tui oder Weiser? Zur Gestalt des Philosophen bei Brecht”, in *Brechts Tui-Kritik*, AS 11, 17-52, Berlin (W).

Sartre, J-P. 1967 [1960], *Kritik der dialektischen Vernunft*, Reinbek.

Schickel, J. 1968, “Me-ti, Bertolt Brecht und die Große Methode”, in J. Schickel, *Große Mauer, Große Methode*, Stuttgart.

Schmied-Kowarzik, W. 1981, *Die Dialektik der gesellschaftlichen Praxis. Zur Genesis und Kernstruktur der Marxschen Theorie*, Freiburg-München.

Segeth, W. 1977, *Materialistische Dialektik als Methode*, Berlin (GDR) and Frankfurt/M.

Sève, L. 1976, *Über die materialistische Dialektik*, Frankfurt/M.

Stalin, J. 1976, "Dialectical and Historical Materialism", in *Problems of Leninism*, Peking.

Steinberg, H-J. 1980, *Einleitung* [Introduction] in K. Kautsky 1980 [1886], *Karl Marx' ökonomische Lehren*, Berlin(W) and Bonn.

Stiehler, G. 1960, *Hegel und der Marxismus über den Widerspruch. Zur Frage der kritischen Überwindung der idealistischen Dialektik durch die wissenschaftliche materialistische Dialektik*, Berlin (GDR).

Stiehler, G. 1967, *Der dialektische Widerspruch*, Berlin (GDR).

Stiehler, G. 1968, *Dialektik und Praxis. Untersuchungen zur >tätigen Seite< in der vormarxistischen und marxistischen Philosophie*, Berlin (GDR).

Stiehler, G. 1971, *System und Widerspruch. Zur Dialektik in der sozialistischen Gesellschaft*, Berlin (GDR).

Suslow, M. A. 1974, *Der Marxismus-Leninismus-- die internationale Lehre der Arbeiterklasse*, Berlin (GDR).

Thalheimer, A. 1927, *Einführung in den Dialektischen Materialismus*, ed. Gruppe Arbeiterpolitik, Bremen o. J. [Reprint].

Thomas, E. 1976, "Die Einheit der Grundgesetze der Dialektik in der ökonomischen Lehre von Karl Marx", in G. Klimaszewsky ed., *Weltanschauliche und methodologische Probleme der materialistischen Dialektik*, Berlin (GDR).

Thompson, E. P. 1978, *The Poverty of Theory*, London.

Wallner, M. 1981, "Fragen der materialistischen Dialektik als Methode", in *deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 6/1981, 629-40.

Warnke, C., H. Bergmann, U. Hedtke and P. Ruben 1977(a), *Dialektik und Systemdenken. Historische Aspekte*, Berlin (GDR).

Warnke, C., B. Heidtmann, G. Richter and G. Schnauss 1977 (b), *Marxistische Gesellschaftsdialektik oder >Systemtheorie der Gesellschaft<?*, Berlin (GDR).

Wright, E. O., A. Levine and E. Sober 1992, *Reconstructing Marxism. Essays on Explanation and the Theory of History*, London and New York.

**Wolfgang Fritz Haug**

**(Translation: Peter Thomas)**

->abstract/concrete, Althusser-School, Analysis/Synthesis, analytical Marxism, antagonism, anti-ideology, anti-philosophy, application, beginning, Camera obscura, Capital-logic, class-struggles, composition plans, concept, consciousness, contradiction, crisis, Critical Theory, critique, Debate on Positivism, Della-Volpe-School, development, dialectical image, Dialectical Materialism, dialectical theatre, dialectics of nature, doubling, empiricism/theory, ensemble of social relations, genesis, guiding thread, Hegel-critique, Hegelianism, historical-logical, image, interaction, intervening thought, language, limits of dialectics, logical-historical, Marxism, mediation, metaphysics, method, movement, negation of negation, ontology, philosophy, Positivism, research/presentation, revolutionary Realpolitik, stupidity, sublation, system, theory/praxis, thought-form, Umschlag, Western Marxism, Weltanschauung

->Abbild, abstrakt/konkret, Althusser-Schule, Analyse/Synthese, analytischer Marxismus, Anfang, Antagonismus, Antiideologie, Antiphilosophie, Anwendung, Aufbaupläne, Aufhebung, Begriff, Bewegung, Bewusstsein, Camera obscura, Darstellung/Forschung, Della-Volpe-Schule, Denkform, Dialektischer Materialismus, dialektisches Bild, Dialektisches Theater, Dummheit, eingreifendes Denken, Empirie/Theorie, Ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse, Entwicklung, Forschung/Darstellung, Genese, Grenzen der Dialektik, Hauptwiderspruch, Hegelianismus, Hegelkritik, Kapitallogik, Klassenkämpfe, Krise, Kritik, Kritische Theorie, Leitfaden, Logisch-historisch, Marxismus, Metaphysik, Methode, Naturdialektik, Negation der Negation, Ontologie, Philosophie, Positivismus, Positivismus-Streit, revolutionäre Realpolitik, Sprache, System, Theorie/Praxis, Umschlag, Verdoppelung, Vermittlung, Wechselwirkung, Weltanschauung, westlicher Marxismus, Widerspruch