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LEARNING THE DIALECTICS OF MARXISM

In »Crisis or Dialectics of Marxism«¹ I have tried to show that Marxist assumptions on dialectics must be applied to Marxism as well. This self-application may even help to clarify our ideas on dialectics. Marxism is in movement. And it is driven by contradictions. Those who claim an ideological Eternity for its truth contribute in so doing to making *passive dialectics* of Marxism all the more fatal. Though this ~~movement within contradictions is unavoidable~~, it can assume very different forms and meanings, following our un/conscious way of tackling it. Dialectics of Marxism: we must learn them in order not to be mastered by their most catastrophic forms. The history of Socialism —, though it *is* still the history of Early Socialism — is now developed enough to provide us with experiences: of failures, of unexpected *turns* in the sense of Lenin's and Brecht's use of the term), of paradoxical unities of struggling opposites, of the nullity of fixed essences, etc. To be sure, we have to emancipate our understanding of dialectics from Hegel. For if there is a *failure* in the history of Marxism-Socialism, it is the failure of the »centered totality«, of the false equation of dialectics with automatic progress, of the — mostly unconscious — organizing pattern of the one subject-substance. It is time to finally say farewell to such visions. The real world is no closed totality, but an open, structured whole, with irreducible differences. There is a multiverse to discover within the universe and vice versa.

Proposed changes of Marxism arouse fears. Don't they transcend the borderlines?

¹ W.F. Haug, »Krise oder Dialektik des Marxismus«, in: *Aktualisierung Marx'*, Argument-Sonderband AS 100, Berlin/W 1983, p. 8-34. Again in: W.F.Haug, *Pluraler Marxismus*, vol. 1, Berlin/W 1985, p. 22-51; french translation in: *Socialism in the World*, Belgrade, VII, No 36, 1983, p.3-25.

What are the criteria for Marxist identity? If we admit that different versions of Marxism have been developed and that Marxism exists in a plural form (Sève) — don't we thereby dissolve its possible identity? For Andras Gedö the answer is clear: »If the *one* Marxism doesn't exist, then *Marxism* doesn't exist.« (1983, 139) His conclusion is as unequivocal as this: Since it cannot be that Marxism doesn't exist, it must exist as the one and closed system, whose inner coherence is granted by *Philosophy*. Only Philosophy can grant a clear cut identity. »For in what should the Marxist characteristics of the 'Marxisms' consist? Where is the criterion that distinguishes them from Non-Marxisms?« (ibid., 138) Before we answer the question, we must question Gedö's question itself. From which point of view does he ask it? His leading interest in defining Marxism is obviously to eliminate Non-Marxism. The inclusion seems to be expected as a result of exclusion. But can this approach to identity lead anywhere except to such wonderful self-evidences, which can be pseudo evidences, such as this: that the outside is not inside, and vice versa. Isn't it only a fake authority of Philosophy which regulates this game of inclusion by exclusion? Isn't the taciturn center of this discourse in reality state power, subduing philosophy to its authority?

The assumption that there is something like a »doxical« (or dogmatical) core of Marxism, delivering criteria for *orthodoxy*, is indeed an effect of inner contradictions and a compromise form. The first orthodoxy was shaped by Kautsky. Lukács articulated his critique of Kautsky within the same kautskyan form, when he discussed the question »What is Orthodox Marxism?«. To be sure, he filled it with quite different contents. He tried to free revolutionary activity from some of the burdens of the evolutionist Marxism of the II International. However he nourished the myth of the »doxical« fundament. A critique of his most influential *History & Class Consciousness* remains therefore until today a prerequisite of tackling the »camera-obscura effects« within Marxism: its ideological inversion. Because this is one of the manifestations of passive dialectics of Marxism: the rearticulation of Marxist

theory by Philosophy of Consciousness. Correspondingly the guaranties for »orthodox« identity are formulated in terms of consciousness: Principles, basic ideas and ideals, represented in philosophical form, have to be confessed in order for one to be a »Marxist«. So the Philosophy of Marxism seems to grant it's Eternity. However, this Eternity proves to be a momentary one. It is denied by the real movement. Every version becomes, what it defined, a diversion.

Which instance shall we then address for the decision? Will we return to Marx? Or will we return from this return, because it tends to deliver Marxism to the hair-splitters, who are »munching the letters« of Marx' writings, as Lukács said, or to the Talmudists, as Stalin used to put it. Will we deliver the question to the hierarchical organisms of politics? But can we deliver to power structures the project of the self-emancipation of the working classes and, via this particular stepping out of subalternity, of a general human emancipation? Wouldn't we have to deal with pragmatism on the one hand, to legitimizing distortions on the other? Shall we therefore wait for the spontaneity of the Masses? Shall we withdraw Marxism from the politics of power and restore it as Critical Consciousness in our minds? Or shall we rely on its positive character as a science and try to submit the political institutions to the execution of scientific Truths? Or would this only introduce the State into the scientific practices and institutions and lead to the Lyssenko syndrome, promoting the representative of the state authority into the *pontifex maximus* position of the highest »scientific« authority?

To be thrown blindly from instance to instance is the experience of passive dialectics. To learn active dialectics instead means to put forward two questions. The first concerns the relations of the different and irreducible instances of Marxism. But how to approach this problem? This leads to the second question: What are actually the constitutive necessities for Marxism? Or what do we need Marxism for?

What is problematic is much less Marx than our reading of Marx. Every generation has created — and has to create its appropriate Marxism, starting from the needs for it. This is one of the reasons why crises are a regular component of the life of Marxism. It has always been short-sighted to mistake the crisis of a historically specific formation of Marxism for the ultimate Crisis of Marxism as such. That is why the rule is: *Marxism is dead — long live Marxism*. The real salient instances are the social struggles and crises from which, in every epoch anew, the necessity of a unifying theory and practice is realized. To be sure, the basic articulation of *problematiques* is never basic in the sense that it is pre-given. It is already the result of theoretical and political practices and struggles. Therefore, the necessity of Marxism is no »Iron Necessity« or »Iron Law«, as it was stamped in the phraseology of the Second International. Phraseologies of this kind are not nothing: They organize a sort of power. They fulfill an ideological function. Or, as Marx put it: »The term *iron* is a signature, by which the orthodox recognize each other... « (see MEW 19, p.25). This kind of orthodoxy (»Rechtgläubigkeit« in the German original of Marx) has always had the effect of a barrier against necessary innovations. To go back in the last instance to the necessity (or focussed necessities) of (and for) Marxism, by no means leads into a metaphysical realm of an eternally given essence. It leads into the basic dimensions of struggles. And it leads into the struggles for a comprehensive project articulating the awareness of different crises and liberation interest's, and the elements of the respective Social Movements, in a strategy of social transformation. The texts of Marx play an enormous role in the foundation of such a project. To go back in the last instance to the real practical necessities helps to prevent these texts from being institutionalized in a para-religious way. One of the inexhaustible modernities of Marx' theory is exactly his primacy of practice as formulated in the »Theses on Feuerbach«. Whilst no metaphysical approach to Marx is compatible with Marx's own thought and practice, the *necessity approach to the question of Marxist identity is in full accordance with it.*

It should go without saying that the social needs for Marxism do not remain unchanged in the changes of society. There are insights into the general class relations and mechanisms of valorization and crisis, also of the abuse of natural conditions and of the one-sided development for the productive forces under the rule of private property, turning them »for the majority« into »destructive forces« (Marx/Engels, *German Ideology*, CW 5, 73), etc. — insights which in a general way have proved their validity. On economic terrain the global failure of Keynesianism has made even former Keynesians aware of the topicality of Marx' *Critique of Political Economy*. On the other hand the profound changes of the human world since Marx must inevitably lead to a permanent rethinking (and further development) of Marx' theories and strategies. Lenin's intervention in Marxism was of this sort. The interventions linked to names like Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Mariátegui, Gramsci, Cabral, and many others, respond to the same necessity of specific elaborations of Marxism following the historical conditions of every region and also of every epoch. Among the inescapable specificities (of the German-European Marx as well as of all his successors), the configurations of »Civil Society«², with its cultural inheritances and its ideological powers and traditions, play an important and »relatively autonomous« role. Patterns of articulation are preshaped here. One has only to consider the problems of translation of Marx' *Capital* in the various languages to get an idea of the articulative decisiveness of cultural traditions. It is however vital to fight against the easy national myths of pre-given civilizational essences, residing in a mysterious transcendental space beyond the concrete social (including the economic) relations (a re-edition of Herder's romantic idea of the *Volksgeist*). Specificities of a civilizational kind are therefore misused if they are made to be barriers to universality.

We have to admit, however, that »regionality« is not only a problem of Marx's

² Even if it is a bourgeois civil society, it may not be identified with bourgeois society as such; see Rehmann, Jan, »'Abolition' of Civil Society?« Remarks on a Widespread Misunderstanding in the Interpretation of 'Civil Society'«, in: *Socialism and Democracy*, New York, no. 1/2000, 1-18.

successors, but of Marx himself. His patterns of articulation are largely European and, what is more, German. Particularly the German dialectical idealism of Hegel has deeply marked the material grammar of Marx' thought, in spite of his rupture with Hegel. To say it more precisely, there is a life-long struggle in Marx himself between quite different patterns of articulation. In »Crisis or Dialectics« I follow such struggles with particular attention to the struggle between a Hegelian speculative logic stemming from the Philosophy of History and a Historical Materialistic line. This inner struggle gives a certain textual ambiguity even to Marx' most rigorous work, to *Capital*. Hence the inevitability of interpretation. What is at stake in these ambiguities and inner struggles is nothing less than our strategic problem which is implied in the necessity of learning the dialectics of Marxism: How to articulate the different necessities, movements, instances, etc.

Althusser's critique of the ideological pattern of the *expressive totality* has its persistent right. Interpretative patterns of this kind, linked to subject-object-thinking and the dualist structure of consciousness-philosophy, belong to the most deeply rooted ideologems.³ They are central switchings in the ideological grammar. Through them a binary order unfolds itself. The meaning of the epistemological revolution, articulated in the »Theses on Feuerbach«, is just the breaking up of this ideo-logic. The turning towards the »ensemble of societal relations« opens a continent of differential articulations, a multiversal reality of the universe. Thus the founding document of what in thesis 10 is called »the new materialism« proclaims the primacy of practice as well as the rupture with reductionist conceptions. The different patterns of interpretation have proved their power in the readings of *Capital* they produced. On the one hand we had the interpretations of »Capital-Logic« with its derivation debate (*Ableitungsdebatte*). In Marx' theoretical exposition they see one »logical development«, as the work of

³ See my UNU-research report *The Camera Obscura of Consciousness. A Critique of the Subject/Object-Articulation in Marxism*, Tokyo 1984.

concept-begetting concepts, and in reality the breeding of one essence. Mats Dahlkvist, the author of a commentary to *Capital*,⁴ has called this the »World-Egg-Thinking«. Like a fertilized egg one substance-subject is thought to develop itself. Human individuals and their activities are thought of as personifications of economic categories. Such interpretations can point to a certain number of formulations in Marx which seem to justify them. In so doing they have to ignore the organizing conceptions of Marx' theory and practice. Realities are not only thought of as »parts« of totality; and the »absolute domination of totality over its parts, as proclaimed by Lukács (1919/1923), is not imposed in Marx' analyses. His analyses of domination do not resolve the dominated in the dominating. — In the very center of Marx' conception — linked to the critical analysis of class structures and to the elaboration of a strategy of class struggles aiming at the abolition of classes — we find the concept of *Vergesellschaftung*, which sometimes is translated as »societalization«, sometimes as »socialization«. The making of their social relations by the associated workers determines Marx' perspective. The structures and institutions of this association were conceived of by Marx as social self-management, not, however, in categories of the State. Therefore the interest in the articulation of different forces, practices, regions, etc. is basic.

Those who follow similar lines of a non-reductionist Marxism today very often believe that they have to get rid of the concept *Scientific Socialism*. The way in which it has been practiced by socialist State power, seems to have more or less the following meaning: There is a system of truths, established and applied by competent authorities in the name of the working class and of Marx. In this model there seems to be always one truth, pre-established, unmoveable, thus pre-deciding along the one correct »line«. The rest is deviation. With this we are quite obviously in the realm of ideological myths. This myth envelopes a hard »administrationist« practice: the elimination of contradiction. If this is scientificity, it is self-evident that

⁴ Dahlkvist, Mats, *Att studera Kapitalet. Kommentar och studiehandledning*, Bo Cavefors Bokförlag 1978.

it must be criticized with the perspective of its abolition. It is, however, a misrepresentation of scientific procedures. The one pre-given Truth has nothing whatsoever to do with scientific criteria. »Sciences« exist in the form of processes, which are composed of a multiplicity of differing lines. Contradiction and public discussion are no disturbances to Truth, but forms of determining truths. Therefore the position of scientific instances, practices and criteria is not in opposition to democracy. Though these are situated on quite another »level« of social life, there is a homology between science(s) and democracy. What we have to get rid of, is the superstition of science, a pre- or even anti-scientific conception of science, which is in effect a conception of science as an ideological power.

But wasn't Marx himself caught in a conception of »Science«, which is typical for the 19th Century and is deeply ideological in this sense? It is deterministic, even naturalistic; in its very center there is the concept of Law, its revelation being Truth. Much effort — and also much anti-marxist propaganda — has been (and is being) dedicated to this message. To be sure, there are some kernels of truth in it. But on the whole it is nevertheless a misrepresentation if not falsification. First of all it has to be taken into account that the above mentioned concept of truth would be called »metaphysical« by Marx. Truth cannot be established except in practice (see 2nd Thesis on Feuerbach). On the other hand, the scientific quest for truth must free itself from external intervention, and Marx calls »mean« and »shabby« those researchers who subdue their thought to powers (see for instance; MEW 26.2, 110-13).

Scientific Socialism — and this, not Marxism, was the concept adopted by Marx himself — has to be re-thought. It has to be emancipated from an unscientific conception of science. What is more: It has to be understood not as the formula of a given essence, but as a necessary competence; it aims at the self-socialization of different social forces. Scientific Socialism as conceived of by Marx brings together the workers' movement and science(s) in the perspective of a classless and self-

managing society. For the purpose of this text I can leave aside the many problems which are linked to this project and which Marx did not yet see. I also leave aside the question if he was not too naive in respect to the *problematiques* to which under the conditions of class society the State gives an answer. These and other important questions are going to be discussed elsewhere. Here I want to insist on the importance of a non-reductionist conception of Scientific Socialism already present in the work of Marx. Equally absurd for him would have been the ideas of either subduing scientific practices to the »dictatorship of the proletariat«, or, on the other hand, to subdue the associated workers to a rule in the name of »Science«. Though Scientific Socialism can only be constructed on the class basis of the workers, it cannot be reduced to this basis. It always remains a »differential articulation« (Laclau). Socialization (the German *Vergesellschaftung*) has to be freed from connotations which depict it from above and as the competence of one center realizing one truth. The alternative to a »centered« and hierarchical vision is not an »anarchistic« one. Different levels with their specific logics have to be respected and allowed to find their balance. If the political instances represent politically dominating »lines«, their domination of scientific processes would ruin science and reproduce the Lyssenko-syndrome. The same — *mutatis mutandis* — is valid for different cultural practices. Learning the balance of these unending contradictions is a basic element of learning the dialectics of Marxism. At the same time these dialectics are indispensable for a new type of *structural hegemony*.⁵

⁵ See W.F.Haug, *Pluraler Marxismus*, vol. I, Berlin/W 1985, p. 158-184.