Recent Trends in Dialectical Materialism: Ecological, Post-Digital, and Decolonial Horizons in Contemporary Western Philosophy

Hoa Thi Kim Do

DOI: 10.18355/XL.2025.18.03.09

Abstract
Over the last decade, Western philosophy has witnessed a quiet—but decisive—renaissance of dialectical materialism. This article reconstructs that revival across four interlocking fronts. First, eco-dialectical naturalists have re-centered Marx's metabolic-rift problematic, exemplified by John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark's recent work on Richard Levins's "human-nature metabolism". Second, theorists of digital capitalism such as Søren Mau diagnose the "mute compulsion" of algorithmic markets, extending dialectical categories to intangible labor and data abstraction. Third, feminist and decolonial scholars are re-tooling contradiction analysis to track gendered and colonial formations, advancing a self-described "feminist dialectical materialism" that bridges Marxist and intersectional methods. Fourth, philosophers of science have reopened the question of a dialectics of nature. We follow here Carlos Garrido's ontological defense of motion and the ensuing synthesis of historical and biological evolution. Our paper attempts to combine these into a synthesis. We propose a "Dialectical Materialism 2.0" that retains the materialist core while incorporating several key elements, namely complexity theory, posthumanist insights, and contemporary AI-ethics concerns. To achieve this, we combine genealogical reconstruction with conceptual mapping. Our goal is to show how the unity-and-struggle-of-opposites now plays out in climate systems, platform economies, and liberation movements. Also, our aim is to reflect on this Western development through the lens of South-East Asian (Vietnamese) philosophical perspective, which we will do at the end of our study. The conclusion points out some obvious research gaps the resolution of which could inform both critical theory and applied scientific practice.
Key words: Dialectical Materialism, Metabolic Rift, Digital Capital, Social Reproduction, Dialectics of Nature, Eco-Marxism, Feminist Dialectics

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed a resurgence of interest in dialectical materialism across Western Marxist and adjacent scholarship, spurred by crises of ecology, digital capitalism, and social reproduction. Contemporary theorists integrate Marx's classic method with new domains: eco-Marxism examines the nature–society metabolism and climate crisis through dialectics; digital-capital critique applies Marxian analysis to informatics, platform labor, and abstraction; feminist/decolonial dialectics extend dialectical critique to gender, race, and coloniality; and philosophy-of-science debates revisit dialectics of nature and the ontology of change. This paper surveys major (2015–2025) contributions in these four currents, putting together a critical overview of key sources, a concept map of dialectical retooling that can be used in our current assessment, a timeline of books and events, a cross-currents "contradiction matrix," a concise debate digest of open questions, and finally a concise summary of identified research gaps. We have used a qualitative literary research method along with philosophical heuristics to examine, compare and synthesize relevant literature.

Current I: Eco-Marxism and the Nature–Society Dialectic

Eco-Marxists have reworked the metabolism of nature and society as a central dialectical contradiction. They draw on Marx's notion of the "metabolic rift" between labor, capital, and the earth (Tasdemir, 2017), and on Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* (Kangal, 2020). Modern works emphasize that society and nature form a single flux: "all nature is in a perpetual state of flux…bound up with everything else". Key themes in this category include:

a) **Metabolic rift and climate crisis:** Capitalism's endless growth disrupts biogeochemical cycles, a dialectical "Anthropocene rift" (Moore, 2016). Ecological Marxists like Foster and Clark call for reconciling humanity with nature via socialist metabolism. Debates turn on how to apply dialectics to environmental science. (E.g. Foster's (2024) *Dialectics of Ecology* provides a Marxist ecology; Kai Heron (2021) critiques both Foster and critics for insufficient "materialism".)

b) **Totality and flux:** Eco-Marxists stress that the dialectical whole combines social and natural processes. Following Marx and Engels, environmental crises reflect contradictory unity: "humanity is both 'a part of nature' and itself 'a force of nature'"(Marx, K. and Engels, F., 2002: 655). Works in this current (e.g. Foster & Clark, 2023; Hasan, 2019; Huan, Chen, & Huan, 2022) affirm that dialectical materialism remains the method for analyzing planetary change.

c) **Critiques of Western Marxism:** Many note that post-1930s Western Marxists rejected Engels's dialectics of nature, weakening ecological critique. Huan, Chen, & Huan (2022) summarize this "decisive double rejection" of Engels, arguing for a revived *dialectics of ecology* to meet the Anthropocene (Foster, 2017; Spash, 2024).

d) **Metabolic alternatives:** Sources explore socialist or indigenous alternatives to capitalist metabolism. For example, Yurchenko (2021) argues that metabolic rifts occur in any society with broken human–nature relations, not just capitalism. Her critical decolonial reading draws on Soviet ecology (Vernadsky) to propose dialectical "biospheric analytics" beyond purely capitalist analysis (Yanshin, 1988; Oldfield & Shaw, 2006).

e) **Ontological motion:** Eco-Marxism emphasizes nature's dynamism: Engels noted in his "Introduction" to *Dialectics of Nature* (1883) that "the whole of nature shown as moving in eternal flux and cyclical course" (Marx, K. and Engels, F., 2002: 471). Engels thus framed nature's flux as a manifestation of dialectical contradictions. More precisely, motion requires an object to be "both in one place and not in it" simultaneously (Theckedath, 2020: https://cpim.org/wp-content/uploads/old/marxist/202003-4-marxist-engels-theckedath.pdf). Dialectical ontologies here treat natural history as process, rejecting static being. In sum, this current retools the dialectic by foregrounding ecological contradictions and an ontology of change within *nature–society* totalities.

Current II: Digital-Capital Critique

Marxist scholars have extended dialectics to the digital economy, analyzing how information technology transforms capital. This current spotlights how abstract digital processes enact contradictions:

a) **Abstraction and labor:** Digital capitalism intensifies alienation by making labor and value more abstract. Critical theorists argue that tech firms exploit our digital labour (user data, content creation). Platforms automate and codify work (e.g. Amazon's warehouses, Foxconn's factories) while displacing workers. Digital Marxists view platforms as new mode of production, requiring updated

dialectical categories (e.g. "digital primitive accumulation" or "immaterial labor" critiques) (Brown, 2013).

b) **Crisis and persistence:** Authors like Søren Mau (2021) theorize a *"mute compulsion"* at the core of capitalism: an impersonal, abstract power that compels individuals to reproduce capital even outside workplaces. Mau argues capital tightens its stranglehold on the life of society by constantly remolding the material conditions of social reproduction (Mau, 2021: 2). In other words, digitalization is an expression of capital's abstract logic, perpetuating crisis in new forms.

c) **Digital public sphere:** Digital capitalism creates contradictory media ecologies. Algorithms produce post-truth politics and surveillance (Fuchs, 2021; 2022; 2025). Critical media scholars stress dialectics between liberation and commodification: the Internet as both potential commons and capital accumulation (for instance, Mastodon vs. Twitter).

d) **Social reproduction:** The digital economy reconfigures reproduction. Many care and social services are platformized or precarious (e.g. gig-economy childcare, teleworking). Feminist-informed critics note how unpaid digital work (maintaining profiles, free content creation) reproduces capital's consumer base (Frederici, 2018; Gimenez, 2018; Gimenez & Marx, 2019).

e) **Ontology of information:** Theorists in this current often treat the digital as a new realm of flux—data flows, algorithmic feedback loops—requiring a dialectics of information. They argue that reality itself is increasingly mediated, so dialectical materialism must account for immaterial, algorithmic processes. For example, tripleC editors call for "critical theories and the philosophy of praxis" of digital capitalism (Allmer, Arslan & Fuchs, 2024: 140)

So, when we look at it comprehensively and think about what it means we see that the *digital-capital* stream retools dialectics around abstraction: the contradiction between concrete needs and abstract computation, the flow of data and commodification, and the digital extension of capitalist exploitation.

Current III: Feminist and Decolonial Dialectics

Feminist and decolonial scholars have reinvigorated dialectical materialism by embedding gendered and racialized power relations within it. This current emphasizes:

a) **Social reproduction and patriarchy:** Feminist Marxists stress that production and reproduction are dialectically entwined. The traditional Marxist focus on production alone omits women's reproductive labor. Contemporary works (e.g. the *Social Reproduction Theory* cohort) use dialectics to analyze how capitalism relies on, and distorts, household and care work. Although not all sources are fully cited here, many note that modern feminist thought (e.g. Federici 2018; Fraser, 2020) sees Marx's method as essential to understanding patriarchy and capital.

b) **Intersectionality and coloniality:** Decolonial theorists argue that race and empire are internal contradictions of capitalism. For example, Yurchenko (2021) invokes a decolonized dialectics to show that both "ecocidal and conservationist" outcomes occur across all social formations (colonial, slave-based, socialist, etc.), not just under capital. Dialectical feminism/anti-racism thus demands integrating class, race, and gender into one analysis (Majewska & Rahimi, 2025). Vogel (2013) outlines a *"unitary"* Marxian approach to gender and capital that subsumes inequalities within capitalist accumulation.

c) **Critique of universalism:** Feminist/decolonial dialecticians often criticize "abstract" universality. They incorporate concrete differences: instrumentalisations of 'naturalness' of indigenous groups is decried as colonial distortion of dialectics. The dialectic is used to expose how supposed natural laws of capitalist development have been applied to erase colonial histories.

d) **Dialectic of body and nature:** This stream highlights the embodied dialectic. Questions of reproductive rights, ecology, and colonial resource extraction are treated as a unified contradiction ("colonial-capital's assault on nature and on women's bodies"). Silvia Federici's recent work (*Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*, 2018) exemplifies re-reading Marx dialectically to recover women and commons in history.

e) **Ontological renewal:** Several feminist thinkers (e.g. Ruddick, 2018; Harding, 2013; Wynter, 2018) call for transforming dialectical ontology. Instead of static Being, they emphasize "becoming" in nature/society, and the agency of subaltern actors. The Marxist dialectic is re-imagined as an open-ended process, no longer Eurocentric.

Thus, feminist/decolonial currents retool the dialectic by situating it in power relations: reconceiving contradictions of capitalism as inherently gendered, racialized, and colonial. Social reproduction becomes a focal contradiction, and dialectical materialism is broadened into a *hegemonic worldview* that must overcome patriarchal and racialized ossifications.

Current IV: Philosophy of Science and Dialectics of Nature

Scholars in the philosophy of science have engaged the dialectical tradition in the context of science and nature theory:

1) **Dialectics of nature:** Some call for a *revival of Engels*. Works by Lefebvre (2017; Merriefield, 2013), Holz (1992), and others (including the Midwestern Marx series – Action & Masterson, [n.d.]: https://www.midwesternmarx.com/youth-league/archives/08-2021) argue that natural laws themselves are dialectical and form the ontological grounding for social dialectics. They stress that movement is itself a contradiction and that nothing is eternal but eternally changing. This suggests a dialectical ontology of *becoming*, where scientific laws (thermodynamics, evolution) embody universal dialectical "laws of motion."

2) **Unity of science and society:** Continuing Engels's spirit, this current argues science must be integrated with social praxis. Marxist philosophers like Sheehan (2022) chart how historical and dialectical methods apply to scientific change. Historical Materialism's Sheehan notes that Marx viewed science as "historically specific" (e.g. determined by modes of production). The resurgence includes debates over Marx's relation to Hegelian dialectics of science.

3) **Critique of positivism:** A core tenet is that positivist science misses contradictions. Yurchenko (2021) critiques positivist ecology for obscuring dialectical interconnections, advocating a non-positivist dialectical *"biospheric analytics"*. Theorists invoke Ilyenkov (2012) and others to show how a dialectical philosophy of science would examine nature-society as a co-evolving totality.

4) **Laws of history and nature:** This current foregrounds metaphilosophical questions: Are there universal "laws" (Hegelian categories) of development? Garrido (2022) and others (e.g. Lefebvre, 2017) have emphasized that Marx/Engels treated Hegel's dialectical categories as objective features of nature and history. Critics respond, warning against "vulgar" schematism.

5) **Science and contradiction:** Another theme is how specific sciences (biology, ecology, technology studies) have rediscovered Marxist dialectics. Levins & Lewontin's earlier *The Dialectical Biologist* (1985) is often cited as progenitor. Recent accounts (e.g. Huan, Chen, & Huan, 2022) draw on ecology and earth systems to show dialectics in practice.

This stream effectively *generalizes* dialectical materialism as a meta-scientific worldview: an ontology of change and interdependence. It challenges analytic philosophy's anti-dialectical stance and argues for a "dialectical naturalism" where science and socialism are unified.

Thematic Concept Map

The thematic concept mapping below offers a preliminary mapping of how the reworking of the dialectic is happening in the above mentioned new approaches/emphases. Over the past decade, dialectical materialism has quietly stretched its muscles in four very different arenas, yet the same six keywords, namely (1) Metabolic Rift and (2) Digital Abstraction; (3) Social Reproduction and (4) Intersectional Contradictions; (5) Dialectics of Nature and (6) Ontological Flux, knit the conversation together.

Metabolic Rift anchors the eco-Marxist revival. Scholars such as John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark (2023) recast Marx's original warning—capital's "alien metabolism" with the earth—as today's defining contradiction. In their hands, climate breakdown becomes the lived proof that society and nature form one total system, spiraling in Ontological Flux rather than sitting as fixed "things." The dialectic here is kinetic: carbon cycles, soil nutrients, and supply chains churn together, exposing the class stakes of planetary crisis. Shift to Silicon Valley and Digital Abstraction surfaces. Søren Mau (2021), Christian Fuchs (2021; 2022; 2025) and company dissect how algorithms turn labor, desire, and even attention into code. Where classical Marxism tracked surplus *value in the factory,* digital-capital theorists map it in data lakes and AI pipelines. The dialectic is no longer just *labor versus capital*—it is concrete human need versus the ghostly power of abstraction, automated and scaled globally.

Feminist and decolonial writers press the conversation further through Social Reproduction and Intersectional Contradictions. Social-reproduction theorists (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Fraser, 2020) insist that the daily work of cooking, caring, and educating is not an epilogue to production but its hidden engine. When that work is racialized, feminized, or platform-mediated, the dialectic knot tightens: class struggle bleeds into gender, race, and coloniality. Intersectionality here is not additive—"class + gender + race"—but dialectical, a moving relation where each axis reshapes the others. But by far the most abstract debates occur in philosophy of science under the banner of Dialectics of Nature. New readings of Engels, Levins, and Lewontin (1985) contend that contradiction is not just a social law; it is baked into evolution, thermodynamics, and complexity science. Critics of positivism argue that without a dialectical lens, climate models or genomic data risk reductionism, missing the emergent properties born of motion and tension—again, Ontological Flux.

Below is a summary of the above depiction of the thematic concept map divided into four main categories/currents:

- **Eco-Marxism:** retool dialectic for the **metabolism** of *nature and society*.
    - Treats ecosystems and capitalism as a single contradictory system.
    - Emphasizes **totality and flux**: society ↔ nature mutual dependence.
    - Conceptualizes crises (climate change) as class contradictions.
    - Ontology: world as dynamic, cyclical, interconnected (flux over fixity).

- **Digital-Capital Critique:** retools dialectic for **information and abstraction**.
    - Focuses on the contradiction of *concrete lives vs abstract code*.
    - Highlights how data/algorithms mediate labor-value.
    - Examines tech's continuity of capital's motion (e.g. automation, surveillance).
    - Ontology: reality increasingly networked and coded; motion in digital flows.
- **Feminist/Decolonial Dialectics:** retools dialectic for **identity and reproduction**.
    - Centers **social reproduction** (care, gender) as a domain of capitalist contradiction.
    - Integrates intersections (gender, race, coloniality) into class analysis.
    - Opposes abstract universality; emphasizes concrete differences and collective praxis.
    - Ontology: relational, embodied, anti-colonial interconnection.
- **Philosophy of Science:** retools dialectic for **science and nature**.
    - Frames **dialectics of nature** as scientific method (Engels revived).
    - Argues against positivism: science must grasp contradictions (e.g. in ecology).
    - Explores laws of motion (unity/opposites, qualitative change) as ontological categories.
    - Ontology: emphasis on becoming and contradiction as fundamental to reality.

Each current thus modifies the dialectic by specifying new contents (ecology, data, gender, science) and stressing particular dialectical moves (e.g. reproduction, abstraction, ontology of flux). Across these currents, the six keywords behave like tuning forks. Metabolic Rift and Digital Abstraction expose capitalism's newest fault lines; Social Reproduction and Intersectional Contradictions insist those lines cut through bodies and households; Dialectics of Nature and Ontological Flux remind us that every contradiction rests inside wider processes of becoming. Together they show a method in renewal, not a doctrine in decline—a dialectical materialism 2.0 built for climate crisis, platform power, feminist struggle, decolonial repair, and a science that speaks the language of change.

Table 1: Chronological Timeline (2015–2025) of Selected Works

Year	Key Works/Events (West/Anglophone Marxism)
2015	Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital* (Monograph on fossil-fuel capitalism) – sets stage for dialectical ecology debate.
2016	Jason Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?* (Essay, *Ephemera*) – world-ecology critique allied to metabolic rift.
2016	Joshua Farley et al., "Capitalism and the steady state: uneasy bedfellows" (A Future Growth, 2016).
2018	Federici, *Re-Enchanting the World* (Feminist ecology; book; *PM Press*) – revives Marx for gender and commons.
2018	Martha Gimenez, *Marx, Women, and Capitalist Social Reproduction* (Brill) –

Year	Key Works/Events (West/Anglophone Marxism)
	Marxist-feminist theory of gendered economy.
2021	Yuliya Yurchenko, "Humans, Nature and Dialectical Materialism" (*Capital & Class*) – critiques Foster/Moore, invokes decolonial ecology.
2021	Kai Heron, "Dialectical Materialisms, Metabolic Rifts and the Climate Crisis" (*Science & Society*) – Hegelian/Lacanian critique of Foster/Malm.
2021	Søren Mau, *Mute Compulsion* (Monograph, Verso) – new Marxist theory of abstract capital power.
2022	Nafis Hasan (2019). Marxism and the Crisis in Modern Biology. Organisms. Journal of Biological Sciences, 3(2), 40-53. – Marxist philosophy of science.
2022	Carlos Garrido (2022). *The Dialectical Materialist Worldview and Its Indispensability for Revolutionary Politics*. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.
2022	Helena Sheehan (2022). Marxism, science and science studies: from Marx and Engels to Covid19 and COP26. *Monthly Review*, *74*(1), 35-48. – survey of Marxist dialectics in science.
2023	John Bellamy Foster & Brett Clark, "The Dialectical Ecologist" (Book; Monthly Review Press) – revives Levins' perspective on human–nature metabolism.
2021 2025	Christian Fuchs (2021), *Digital capitalism: Media, communication and society volume three*. Routledge; and also by the same author: Digital Labor and Digital Capitalism: A Critical Political Economy Perspective. *The Handbook of Digital Labor*, (2025) 349-371.
2025	Qingzhi Huan, Yiwen Chen, and Xincong Huan. (2022). A frugal eco-innovation policy? Ecological poverty alleviation in contemporary China from a perspective of eco-civilization progress. *Sustainability*, *14*(8), 4570. – Chinese Marxist ecology and critique of Western Marxism's neglect of nature.

Table 2: Contradiction Matrix: How each current treats four contradictions

Current ↔ Theme	(a) Nature–Society Metabolism	(b) Digital Abstraction	(c) Social Reproduction	(d) Ontology of Motion
Eco-Marxism	Central: focus on metabolic rift, the Anthropocene, and labor–nature metabolism. Nature-society dialectic is key.	Secondary: examines digital tech's ecological footprints (e-waste, energy), but digital is less central.	Related: looks at how capitalist ecology disrupts social reproduction (food systems, indigenous livelihoods).	Emphasizes constant flux in nature. Rejects static "things": "flux" and "contradiction" drive ecological change.

Current ↔ Theme	(a) Nature–Society Metabolism	(b) Digital Abstraction	(c) Social Reproduction	(d) Ontology of Motion
Digital-Capital Critique	Tertiary: discusses how digitization affects material metabolism (smart grids, surveillance of nature).	Central: analyzes abstraction of labor/data (social media, platforms). Algorithms vs human labor contradictions.	Considers new forms of reproduction (digital carework, gig labor) and automation's threat to livelihoods.	Treats reality as networks of processes (data flows). Views digital society as dynamic, in perpetual innovation cycles.
Feminist/Decolonial Dialectics	Highlights intersection: colonial/ patriarchal exploitation of land and people. Ecology–reproduction links (e.g. eco-feminism).	Critiques digital divide and techno-colonialism. Highlights gendered digital labor (often unpaid).	Central: gendered and racial reproduction (care, domestic labor). Gender/race integrated into class contradictions.	Emphasizes relational ontology: social identities and nature co-shape each other. Privileges "becoming" (e.g. life cycles, heritage) over fixed structures.
Philosophy-of-Science	Investigates dialectical epistemology: unity of natural and social history (Marx's doctrine).	Often abstracted: may discuss computation as model for dialectics (cybernetics debates) but not a primary focus.	May analogize reproduction with scientific practice (e.g. "reproduction of knowledge"); not an explicit theme.	Core: affirms dialectical ontology (becoming, contradiction) as basis of all reality. Considers laws of motion (unity of opposites etc.) as "general laws."

Debate Digest (Unresolved Questions and Cutting-Edge Arguments)

Dialectical revivalists both converge and clash. A key dispute is Engels's legacy: some (e.g. Lefebvre, 2017; Garrido, 2022) insist Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* was crucial and should be redeemed, while others see it as naive. Perry Anderson (2016) notes Western Marxism largely *rejected* Engels's "later texts" as metaphysical, leaving a gap that debates now reopen. Another locus of debate is the Foster–Moore dialogue: Foster (2024) emphasizes metabolic rift as capitalism's "fundamental contradiction," whereas Moore's (2016) world-ecology argues for a broader view of capitalism's origins. We can now look at the case of Yurchenko (2021). This author

appears to be significant with his critiques of both of the previous views. He argues that environmental destruction happens under various regimes, so radical politics must target *malfunctioning human–nature relations* at large, not only capitalism. Yurchenko thus adopts a more holistic approach. His analysis asks several significant questions. In any case, whether the "metabolic rift" is specific to capitalism or to any anthropogenic system is contested and cannot be so easily solved.

Digital theory poses another biting questions for us. Namely, it prompts us to consider how to adapt Marx's labor-value categories to AI and platforms. Mau (2021) offers his innovative approach to this question by introducing *"mute compulsion."*

Why is this significant? This approach sheds new light because it is able to describe capital's abstract dominance over everyday life. Such perspective was largely missing from the philosophical map lately. Mau's sharp formalism (as opposed to the more typical tendency to valorization) has provoked discussion on whether new laws (like Mau's concept that we have just described) are needed. But there are other novelties. Good examples surface especially when we enter the realm of immaterial economy. This is where digital critics debate dialectics of "social reproduction." Again, we are looking at social reproduction within a specific space, namely the immaterial economy, and ask the following question: how do unpaid social network creation, influencer culture, or platform care-work enter the reproduction of capitalism? These are emergent fields, so far fragmented, and we have no ready-made answers. There are some pioneer scholars in this field, like Fuchs (2021; 2022; 2025). Fuchs and his team of scholars have begun to document digital exploitation (tech layoffs, algorithmic sorting) to explore their social implications. Fortunately, their work goes beyond documentation of what (some would say) is obvious. Instead, they champion alternatives, such as digital commons. However, integrating this into a systematic dialectics remains work-in-progress, and will likely take much more time.

Feminist/decolonial debates turn on incorporation of identity into dialectic: Is intersectionality compatible with class ontology? Some Marxist feminists (e.g. Vogel 2013, Social Reproduction Theory) propose a unitary critique where gender and race emerge within capitalist reproduction, whereas intersectionalists argue multiple irreducible systems. The synergy (or tension) between these approaches is live. Decolonial voices challenge Western dialectics' universality – e.g., Ahmed (2022) or Zambrana (2017) critique "Eurocentric" readings that ignore the dialectic in non-Western societies. On the other hand, writers like Ariel Salleh (2018) (eco-feminist) assert a materialist ecofeminism as synthesis. These positions remain contested: how to incorporate subaltern knowledges without diluting materialism, how to reconcile global class analysis with local oppression.

In philosophy-of-science, debates revive classic questions under new terms. The status of the *Hegelian "laws"* of dialectics is questioned: commentators (including Garrido, 2022) stress that Marx saw them in nature and society, yet critics (e.g. Arthur, 1996) warn against treating them as rigid templates. The unresolved issue is whether dialectical ontology can avoid mechanistic "formalism." The interplay between analytic philosophy and Marxist dialectics is another hot topic. Finally, what constitutes science under socialism remains debated: Must dialectical materialism endorse specific scientific theories (e.g. Darwinism), or simply a method of critique? These philosophy-of-science questions are far from settled.

Despite wide overlap, these currents sometimes dispute each other's emphases. Eco-Marxists warn that some digital Marxists are too "technological" and ignore natural limits. Feminists critique both for downplaying gendered reproduction, and philosophy-of-science thinkers for abstracting away lived struggles. Such cross-currents frictions reveal how neo-dialectics is an active terrain. For example, while some call to revive Marxist dialectics against neoliberal greenwashing, others worry

this rhetoric can slip into orthodoxy. Recent arguments also question whether "dialectics" is the right term at all for ecological transformations or if new frameworks (e.g. the so-called Actor–Network Theory) offer better syntheses – a debate unresolved.

Importantly, all sides acknowledge methodological limits. Critics note the risk of reductionism: treating complex ecosystems or societies as simple pairwise contradictions. Authors caution against deterministic readings of dialectics (discussed by Garrido, 2022). Many contemporary works emphasize praxis: dialectics is seen not as fixed doctrine but as a toolkit, to be continually "brought up to date" by concrete analysis. This inclusive, critical stance is itself part of the ongoing debate: to what extent is "dialectical materialism" a living method versus a historical creed?

A Vietnamese Dialectical Lens on Western "Dialectical Materialism 2.0"

What follows is a brief reflection on the value of the analyzed Western trends in dialectical materialism from a perspective of a non-western philosopher, namely a Vietnamese Marxist. I would like to point out that, in the midst of today's Western reboot, it helps to remember that one of the 20th-century's most agile dialecticians lived far from London, Berlin, or New York. Ho Chi Minh's Marxism was famously porous, pragmatic, and plural, and his reflections offer a timely "Southern" counter-point to the four Western currents that we have reflected on in this paper. In Ho Chi Minh's thought, we see namely a counter balance to abstract intellectualism, which plagued the typical Western forms of Marxism.

a) Marxism as a Living, Historical Process

Ho Chi Minh rejected any frozen canon. "*It is impossible to prohibit the addition of the 'historical basis' for Marxism by adding to it materials that Marx could not have at his time*" (Ho, 2011a, pp. 509-510). We can see how this line of thinking pre-echoes today's call to re-tune dialectics for climate science, data capitalism, and intersectional struggle. Likewise, his warning against "mechanical application" (Ho, 2011d, pp. 97-98) resonates with eco-Marxists who refuse to graft Engels onto Earth-systems models without context.

b) The Four Pillars—Connection, Motion, Quantity/Quality, Contradiction

In a 1950 cadre lecture, Ho Chi Minh boiled dialectical materialism down to four everyday "rules"—universal connection, ceaseless motion, shifts of quantity into quality, and inner contradiction—then added: *"Those four things are very related to practice."* He dramatized the point in strategy debates: *"At a time when it is necessary for the whole people to unite, the policy of class struggle is a stupid thing. Everything must be in accordance with the location, conditions and time to be successful"* (Ho, 2011c, p. 528).

The sentence could double as a critique of Western Marxists who universalize tactics developed in vastly different conditions. Instead, I argue that tactics should be context dependent, attuned to the local conditions and sensitive to the local populace's needs.

c) "Firm Objectives—Flexible Tactics"

Ho Chi Minh proposed the following motto—*"Firm in objectives, flexible in strategies and tactics"* (Ho, 2011a, p. xxi); in other words, keep your big goal steady, but be ready to change your game plan whenever reality shifts. This approach embodies Ontological Flux (i.e. the notion that the world is always in motion) before the phrase ever existed in later Western dialectical materialism. Long before philosophers wrote about flux, Ho Chi Minh was already living it in strategy. The objective (national liberation, socialism) is the "constant"; tactics mutate with the contradiction. Expect change, flow with it, and use it to reach the steady goal. We can

observe that the same move underlies today's digital-capital debates, where labor activists juggle fixed emancipatory goals with fast-shifting platform architectures.

d) Revolution on Dialectical Time

His most celebrated dialectical gambit was the August 1945 uprising. Gravely ill in a mountain shack, Ho Chi Minh told Võ Nguyên Giáp: *"A favourable time has come… no matter how much we sacrifice, […] we must resolutely win independence"* (HCM Academy, 2004: 225). Later, when the Hiroshima bomb and news of Japan's surrender resonated in Vietnam, he urged, *"We need to take advantage of every second, every minute; the situation will change quickly. We can't miss the opportunity"* (HCM Academy, 2004: 230). Few passages illustrate quantity-to-quality leaps so vividly: decades of incremental organizing flipped, almost overnight, into revolutionary seizure. Change happened more vigorously than before due to the courage to direct energy to praxis.

Furthermore, drafting Vietnam's *Declaration of Independence*, Ho Chi Minh wove together the U.S. and French declarations to universalize his anti-colonial claim (Ho, 2011b: 1). We can imagine Ho Chi Minh in 1945, sitting in a cramped attic at 48 Hàng Ngang Street in Hanoi, drafting a declaration that had to speak to Vietnamese peasants, French colonialists, American diplomats, and a watching world. He reached for two of the West's most iconic freedom texts. By quoting them almost verbatim at the very start of Vietnam's own Declaration (Ho, 2011b: 1), Ho Chi Minh pulled off three moves at once:

Table 3: Ho Chi Minh's Strategy ("Three Providential Moves")

Move	What Ho Chi Minh Achieved	Why It Mattered
Universalizing the claim	He framed Vietnam's struggle as part of a global, timeless right to self-determination, not a parochial feud with France.	This placed anti-colonialism on the moral high ground already sanctified by Western revolutions.
Turning the colonizer's words back on them	France and the U.S. prided themselves on those very principles; Ho asked: *If equality and liberty are universal, how can you deny them to us?*	The rhetorical boomerang exposed colonial hypocrisy and pressured potential allies (especially the U.S.) to rethink support for French re-occupation.
Building a bridge for international recognition	Using familiar Enlightenment language made the text instantly legible to diplomats, journalists, and ordinary readers in the West.	It invited the world to see Vietnam not as a radical outlier, but as the next logical chapter in the shared story of human emancipation.

When we put it in dialectical terms, Ho Chi Minh synthesized two bourgeois-revolutionary documents, which were products of Europe's own capitalist awakening, into an *anti-capitalist, anti-colonial* manifesto. By doing so, he inverted their original function, which was to justify the reality of a "Western empire." Now, ideas once used to justify the colonial empire now justified breaking free from it. It was a major political but also philosophical achievement. So, Ho Chi Minh wasn't just borrowing

lofty phrases for style points. He was determined and practical; and he cared about his people. He was staging a sophisticated political argument: *The principles you celebrate oblige you to stand with us.* That fusion of local revolution with universal ideals turned Vietnam's bid for independence into a cause the broader world could—and eventually did—recognize. But it took decades of bloody wars and countless victims for this to transpire, unfortunately.

In any case, Ho Chi Minh's providential approach models intersectional contradictions, again, long before they became "a thing" in Western intellectual salons: colonial Vietnam leverages bourgeois-revolutionary texts to indict their authors' descendants.

e) Theory–Practice Reciprocity

Finally, Ho Chi Minh hammered the unity of theory and praxis: *"The actual operation of the Revolutionary Party must be based on the law of social development, not on empty ideals… Theory and practice must be unanimous"* (Ho, 2011c: 530). He even warned against both dogmatism and revisionism (Ho, 2011c: 531). Interestingly, these two poles are still haunting Western eco-socialist strategy. Võ Nguyên Giáp later further developed the method: *"The absorption, application and development of Marxism-Leninism by Ho Chi Minh is a whole process associated with practical activities"* (Võ, 2000, p. 60). Where Western scholars debate Engels's status, Ho Chi Minh's legacy reminds us that dialectics lives or dies by what it does, not what it cites. Ideas survive by being embodied in human social and political experience and internalized in our capacity to imagine and desire.

Ho Chi Minh once imagined a friendly round-table with Confucius, Jesus, Marx, and Sun Yat-sen, because each sought "*happiness for mankind*" (Võ, 2000: 51). The line of thought expands our Dialectics of Nature and Culture. What do we mean by that? Above all, that materialist method can converse (dialectically) with religious and national traditions rather than bulldoze them. This idea deserves more careful treatment.

When we say this move "expands our Dialectics of Nature and Culture," we mean that dialectical materialism need not march into a society like a wrecking ball, flattening every pre-Marxian idea in its path. Instead, it can enter a genuine dialogue between the material conditions it analyzes and the cultural or spiritual vocabularies already alive in a community, in a given context. Ho Chi Minh's willingness to quote Confucius, Jesus, Marx, and Sun Yat-sen in the same breath (Võ 2000: 51) models this approach, and we are invited to learn and be inspired by it. Both poles of thinking are useful, necessary. The materialist method identifies the concrete contradictions driving history, yet it also listens for resonant moral languages in its environment. These can be drawn from sacred texts (i.e. scriptures, religious texts), classical philosophy, or local folklore, all of which can mobilize people around those contradictions. In practice, then, a dialectic of nature and culture does two things at once, both of which need to be taken at their face value. First, it acknowledges that human beings are natural creatures whose social life is constrained by ecological and economic realities (the "nature" pole). Second, it recognizes that people interpret and act on those realities through stories, rituals, and identities (the "culture" pole). Thus, what we need is truly living materialism. We need materialism that engages both poles, teasing out how ethical teachings, national myths, or religious symbols can sharpen, rather than obscure, the struggle for emancipation and overcoming of exploitations and alienation. Put differently, the method does not "bulldoze" (i.e. blindly destroys) tradition; it "excavates" (so to speak) the liberatory elements already present, even if in a hidden way, within tradition and sets them in motion alongside class analysis. This double movement produces a richer, more persuasive politics.

So what lessons can we learn from Ho Chi Minh for a more comprehensive and sustainable "Dialectical Marxism 2.0"? I propose the following five points:

1. **Contextual Pragmatism** – Ho Chi Minh's insistence on local conditions echoes feminist/decolonial warnings against abstract universals.
2. **Temporal Sensitivity** – His careful, sensitive reading of historical openings (historical opportunities as 'cairos moments') prefigures crisis-theorists tracking tipping-points in climate systems or financial networks.
3. **Theory–Practice Loop** – Challenges in land reform or economic planning (Ho, 2011d) show why digital-capital critics must pair analysis with iterative experimentation.
4. **Pluralist Dialectics** – The round-table parable legitimizes dialogue with non-Marxist epistemologies; this can be especially useful for eco-Marxists engaging Indigenous cosmologies or data activists consulting hacker ethics.
5. **Self-Critique** – Genaral Vo Nguyen Giap's confession of past dogmatism (Võ, 2000: 45) mirrors today's call to avoid "vulgar" Engels or techno-solutionism.

Our call for our Western counterparts could (or should?) be to consider Ho Chi Minh's praxis-saturated dialectics as an invaluable impulse for further developing the new trends in dialectical materialism. It is our philosophical conviction that Ho Chi Minh's praxis-saturated and context-sensitive dialectics can potentially enrich the Western-centered map. We'd like to suggest three ways, in which this can happen: First, it proves that Metabolic Rift, Digital Abstraction, and Social Reproduction debates are not Euro-North-Atlantic monopolies; Vietnam's anti-colonial struggle pivoted on all three, though the terminology was lacking. Second, it underlines that Ontological Flux is not merely a philosophical slogan but a strategic compass that guides real-time revolutions. Here we can proudly point out that these real-time revolutions have been politically, socially, and economically successful in Vietnam. Third, it cautions us that any "Dialectical Materialism 2.0" worth the name must stay firm in objectives but at the same time flexible in tactics. Otherwise it risks the fate of doctrines that mistake the map for the moving terrain.[1]

Conclusion

The Western neo-dialectical revival is lively and very diverse, as we have seen. Key fault lines remain around naturalism vs social reductionism, universals vs concrete difference, and theory vs praxis. What unites most is the drive to address new contradictions – ecological collapse, digital domination, gender–race injustice – with a Marxian method that treats everything as process and interconnection. This can be considered an advantage, a new vantage point for further deliberation. In any case, whether this resurgence of these novel, fresh, neo-Marxist currents will cohere into a unified "neo-dialectical paradigm" in Western philosophy or continue as a field of contestation is an open question. It is far beyond the scope of this paper to answer this question responsibly and with any pretense of academic authority.

What is within the scope of our study, however, is to point out some of the novel research gaps that our research helped uncover and, at least partially, identify and formulate. The first one concerns the **Digitization of Nature–Society Metabolism.** There has not been enough work done on aspiring to synthesize eco-Marxist and digital-capitalist approaches. For example, how do platform technologies affect

[1] All quotations and factual claims are drawn from Ho Chi Minh's collected works (Ho 2011a-d), the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics chronicle (2004), and Võ Nguyên Giáp's commentary (2000).

ecological rifts? Studies focused on this problem could develop a *dialectical biopolitics of AI*, examining carbon footprints of data centers and algorithmic resource management within capital's metabolism. The next gap revolves around the **Dialectics of Social Reproduction in the Algorithmic Age.** There is scant theory on how care work and social reproduction are transformed by automation and surveillance. Yet, this is increasingly becoming a real social and psychological issue. Future research focused on this topic could combine dialectical materialism with feminist social-reproduction theory to analyze, say, AI in healthcare or automation in the home, bridging feminist and digital currents. The third gap that we have identified pertains to the **Decolonial Critique of Western Dialectics.** The revival described and summarized in our paper has been largely Anglo/Euro-centric, at least up to this point in time. Further research could investigate indigenous or Global South thinkers who use dialectical concepts (e.g. Bonilla-Silva (2021) on race, Guattari's (2015) social ecology) to propose a genuinely pluriversal dialectics. This would fill a gap between Western theory and non-Western praxis and bring new impulses that go beyond abstract philosophical ideas. The last gap concerns the **Empirical History of Dialectics Revival.** Despite the scholarly resurgence, we lack a systematic intellectual history of this revival itself. Our work is attempting to shed some light, naturally, but it is merely an introductory voice pointing out the obvious need to pay attention to these new trends. A comprehensive research work of future scholars could trace how Marxist academic and activist networks in the West re-adopted dialectical language (e.g. via Marx conferences, university syllabi, socialist journals). Moreover, archival research and interviews with theorists (like Foster, Mau, Yurchenko) could chart the social conditions of this philosophical turn. We are aware that each gap addresses an underdeveloped angle at the intersection of the currents above, and all of these are complex and difficult issues to deal with. Each one of them would require a substantial research article or monograph, following a rigorous work of dedicated scholars.

Declaration on AI Use

AI-assisted tools were used during manuscript preparation for initial brainstorming, annotated outline suggestions, language editing and refinement. The author takes full responsibility for the content, interpretation, and integrity of the research.

Bibliographic references

Action, D. I., & Masterson, J. (n.d.). Midwestern Marx Youth League [online]. https://www.midwesternmarx.com/youth-league/archives/08-2021

Ahmed, S. (2022). The Marginalized and Critical Theory: Dialectics of Universalism. International Critical Thought, 12(2), 305-326.

Allmer, T., Arslan, S. C., & Fuchs, C. (2024). Critical Perspectives on Digital Capitalism: Theories and Praxis, edited by Thomas Allmer, Sevda Can Arslan and Christian Fuchs (FULL ISSUE FOR DOWNLOAD). tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society, 22(1), 140-433.

Amaruddin, H. ., Dardiri, A., Efianingrum, A., & Sutiyono, S. (2024). Popular Culture in Social Media & Online Games: Between Morality, Fear, and Expectations from Families and Schools. Journal of Education Culture and Society, 15(2), 617-632. https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs2024.2.617.632

Anderson, P. (2016). Considerations on western Marxism. Verso Books.

Arthur, C. J. (1996). Engels as interpreter of Marx's economics. In Engels Today: A Centenary Appreciation (pp. 173-209). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2003). Consumer–company identification: A framework for understanding consumers' relationships with companies. Journal of marketing, 67(2), 76-88.
Bonilla-Silva, E. (2021). Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
Brown, B. A. (2013). Primitive digital accumulation: Privacy, social networks, and biopolitical exploitation. Rethinking Marxism, 25(3), 385-403.
Dubniak, Z. . (2021). Versions of Pragmatic Liberalism: from Rorty back to Dewey. Journal of Education Culture and Society, 12(2), 15-30. https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs2021.2.15.30
Federici, S. (2018). Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons. pm Press.
Foster, J. B. (2017). Marx's ecology in historical perspective. In B. Ollman (ed.). Karl Marx (1st ed.). (pp. 609-621). London: Routledge.
Foster, J. B. (2024). The Dialectics of Ecology: Socialism and Nature. NYU Press.
Foster, J. B., & Clark, B. (2023). The Dialectical Ecologist: Richard Levins and the Science and Praxis of the Human-Nature Metabolism. Socialism and Democracy, 37(1-2), 14-34.
Fraser, N. (2020). From redistribution to recognition?: Dilemmas of justice in a'postsocialist'age. In Steven Seidman, Jeffrey C. Alexander (eds.), The new social theory reader (pp. 188-196). London: Routledge.
Fuchs, C. (2021). Digital capitalism: Media, communication and society volume three. Routledge.
Fuchs, C. (2022). Digital democracy and the digital public sphere: Media, communication and society volume six. Routledge.
Fuchs, C. (2025). Digital Labor and Digital Capitalism: A Critical Political Economy Perspective. The Handbook of Digital Labor, 349-371.
Garrido, C. L. (2022). The Dialectical Materialist Worldview and Its Indispensability for Revolutionary Politics. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.
Gimenez, M. E. (2018). Marx, women, and capitalist social reproduction: Marxist-feminist essays (Vol. 169). Brill.
Gimenez, M. E., & Marx, W. (2019). Capitalist social reproduction. In The Oxford Handbook of Karl Marx. Oxford University Press.
Guattari, F. (2015). Lines of flight: For another world of possibilities. Bloomsbury Publishing.
Harding, S. (2013). Feminism, science, and the anti-enlightenment critiques. In Linda Nicholson (ed.), Feminism/postmodernism (pp. 83-106). New York: Routledge.
Hasan, N. (2019). Marxism and the Crisis in Modern Biology. Organisms. Journal of Biological Sciences, 3(2), 40-53.
Heron, K. (2021). Dialectical materialisms, metabolic rifts and the climate crisis: a Lacanian/Hegelian perspective. Science & Society, 85(4), 501-526.
Ho, C.M. (2011a). Complete Works, 3rd edition, vol. 1 (1912-1924). Hanoi: National Political - Truth Publishing House.
Ho, C.M. (2011b). Complete Works, 3rd edition, vol. 4 (1945-1946). Hanoi: National Political - Truth Publishing House.
Ho, C.M. (2011c). Complete Works, 3rd edition, vol. 6 (1949-1950).(Hanoi: National Political - Truth Publishing House.
Ho, C.M. (2011d). Complete Works, 3rd edition, vol. 11 (1957-1958). Hanoi: National Political -Truth Publishing House.
Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics. (2004). Ho Chi Minh Chronicle, vol. 2 (1930-1945), 3rd edition (with corrections and supplements). Hanoi: National Political -Truth Publishing House.

Holz, H. H. (1992). Nature, society, and thought: a journal of dialectical and historical materialism, Volume 05, Number 3 (July 1992, Special issue). Minneapolis: Marxist Educational Press.
Huan, Q., Chen, Y., & Huan, X. (2022). A frugal eco-innovation policy? Ecological poverty alleviation in contemporary China from a perspective of eco-civilization progress. Sustainability, 14(8), 4570.
Ilyenkov, E. (2012). Dialectics of the Ideal (2009). Historical materialism, 20(2), 149-193.
Kangal, K. (2020). Friedrich Engels and the dialectics of nature. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
Lefebvre, H. (2017). Everyday Life in the Modern World. New York: Routledge.
Levins, R., & Lewontin, R. (1985). The dialectical biologist. Harvard University Press.
Majewska, E., & Rahimi, P. (2025). Toward Feminist and Antifascist Futures: An Interview with Ewa Majewska (July 29, 2024). Chiasma: A Site For Thought, 9(1), 156-178.
Malm, A. (2016). Fossil capital: The rise of steam power and the roots of global warming. Verso books.
Marchenko, O., Pushonkova, O., Gladun, O., Kolomiiets, O., Protsyshyn, V., & Pianzin, S. (2023). Expansion as a Culture-Creating Principle of Post-Modernity: Semantic Contexts and Aesthetic Practices. Journal of Education Culture and Society, 14(2), 57-77. https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs2023.2.57.77
Marx, K. and Engels, F. (2002). Complete Works, vol. 20. Hanoi: National Political - Truth Publishing House.
Mau, S. (2021). 'The mute compulsion of economic relations': Towards a Marxist theory of the abstract and impersonal power of capital. Historical Materialism, 29(3), 3-32.
Merrifield, A. (2013). Henri Lefebvre: A critical introduction. Routledge.
Moore, J. W. (Ed.). (2016). Anthropocene or capitalocene?: Nature, history, and the crisis of capitalism. PM press.
Oldfield, J. D., & Shaw, D. J. (2006). VI Vernadsky and the noosphere concept: Russian understandings of society–nature interaction. Geoforum, 37(1), 145-154.
Ruddick, S. (2018). Notes toward a feminist peace politics. In Anne C. Herrmann, Theorizing Feminism (pp. 196-214). New York: Routledge.
Salleh, A. (2018). Deeper than deep ecology: The eco-feminist connection. In Stevens, L., Tait, P., Varney, D. (eds.), Feminist Ecologies: Changing Environments in the Anthropocene, (p. 25-33). Cham: Palgrave.
Sheehan, H. (2022). Marxism, science and science studies: from Marx and Engels to Covid19 and COP26. Monthly Review, 74(1), 35-48.
Spash, C. L. (2024). Foundations of social ecological economics: The fight for revolutionary change in economic thought. Manchester University Press.
Tasdemir, Y. Z. (2017). The adventure of capital with nature: from the metabolic rift to the value theory of nature. The Journal of Peasant Studies, 44(2), 377-401.
Theckedath, K. K. (2020). Frederick Engels and Modern Science-A Bicentenary Tribute. Marxist, XXXVI(3-4), https://cpim.org/wp-content/uploads/old/marxist/202003-4-marxist-engels-theckedath.pdf
Vo, N. G. (Ed.). (2000). Ho Chi Minh Thought and the Vietnamese Revolutionary Path. 2nd ed. (with corrections and supplements). Hanoi: National Political - Truth Publishing House.
Vogel, L. (2013). Marxism and the oppression of women: Toward a unitary theory (Vol. 45). Leiden: Brill.
Wynter, S. (2018). Beyond liberal and Marxist Leninist feminisms. The CLR James Journal, 24(1/2), 31-56.

Yanshin, A. L. (1988). Reviving Vernadsky's Legacy: Ecological Advances in the Soviet Union. Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development, 30(10), 4-27.
Yurchenko, Y. (2021). Humans, nature and dialectical materialism. Capital & Class, 45(1), 33-43.
Zambrana, R. (2017). Dialectics of Progress. Philosophy Today, 61(4), 1047-1057.

Words: 7553
Characters: 53 935 (30 standard pages)

Dr. Hoa Thi Kim Do, PhD.
Institute of Philosophy
Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences
11-12 floor, A Building , No 1, Lieu Giai, Ba Dinh,
Hanoi
Vietnam
hoatuanphuc@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-8532-6410