Dialectics Unbound: On the Possibility of Total Writing
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think dialectics unbound of closure, whether that closure is borne out via synthesis, atonement, reconciliation, or another supposedly static result of mediation. As mentioned previously, the concern is such that in synthesizing or reconciling opposed or contradictory terms, the resultant third thing does violence to the distinct identities of the originally opposed terms. This respect and concern for the particular identities, in contradiction or opposition, often results in a resistance to dialectics because of the potential for loss in particular identities as they become part of the process of totalization. The worry that dialectics transgresses or violates the boundary of identity is a laudable pacifist impulse. However, what remains unconsidered by those overly concerned with the conservation of identities is the always-already of dialectics—that is, the embeddedness of dialectically opposed contradictions in identity, namely the interior oscillation of excess and lack, and the exterior exchange of gain and loss, that occur in the encounter between identity and other.

§ Totalization without Totality

At its worst, the attempt to preserve particular identities against potential contamination with their opposites is a supremacist idealization of purity. At its best, the impulse to preserve the particular identities against their opposites is treated as a necessary part of the process of individuation in which identities are fixed upon by the perceiver. The question is, then, whether or not we can imagine a new term of the total, dialectically, and without the violence of closure. Rather than seeking a totality without totalization
I would suggest, in the Žižekian spirit of reversal, that the opposite is a better option: a totalization without totality. This is because a process of totalization as *becoming*, without any achieved goal or preoccupation with totality in-itself, lacks its object and can continue on a trajectory towards an unachievable *telos*. A totality without totalization may look like a complete system which does not (need to) subsume identities because it already has. On the other hand, totalization without its objectified end, totality, may be the better option because of its affirmation of the *process* of dialectics over the *product* of a completed totality.

The link between dialectics, identity, and totality is such that a totalization-without-totality dialectically incorporates or integrates particular identities without violating the sovereignty or sanctity of their particularity, and while also weakening the identity boundary by allowing for inter-contamination among contradictory identities in the context of the paradoxically un-whole whole of a totalization without totality. In writing, this may be evident in the paradox of the impossibility of truly completing a work, alongside the necessary practical closure of writing in submission or publication. The process of writing is a totalization without the finality of totality as an object in-itself, meaning that the work of writing is never complete, and yet in the last instance it must be completed in order to be called a singular thing.

The paradoxical act of writing is as much a symbolic act as an ontological one—a truth given to us by philosophical hermeneutics. The significance of hermeneutics for an understanding of dialectical totalization-without-totality is found in the importance it places upon the vital link
between ontology as the question of the meaning of being, and semiotics as the inquiry into the symbolic referent function of language. The ontological and symbolic act of writing is an exemplary manifestation of a nonviolent process of dialectical totalization. Michael Rosen writes in *Hegel’s Dialectic and its Criticism* of the important connection between Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* and the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer and Heidegger. Reading Adorno as a hermeneutic thinker, Rosen locates seven contradictory claims made by Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*: cognition of nonidentity, secularization, exceeding the object, historicity, revelation, the construction of models, and the critical recuperation of history. Following from this, Adorno’s rejection of systems, standpoints, or methods, leads him to an affirmation of what Rosen calls an “interpretive discipline of experience” (164)—a focus which he mobilizes in his critique of the dialectic.

**§ Adorno’s Immanent Critique and the Assertion of Nonidentity**

Quoted in Rosen’s work, Adorno affirms the primacy of experience, writing that “dialectical theory must be immanent” (154) and not only immanent, but also a materialism. Rosen writes that, in asserting the materiality of the dialectic, “Adorno is not making the banal Marxist criticism that Hegel mistakes for mind what is really

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