Dialectics Unbound: On the Possibility of Total Writing
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In order to unbind dialectics from the violence of closure, in light of the preceding work, much more than abstraction is needed. The following annotated bibliography points out several resources and further trajectories for dialectical thinking in order that it might be reimagined and given new life. I have annotated each resource with brief commentary on the role of dialectics in the work, accompanied by occasional suggestion regarding new directions for research.


Given the quality of the translation, I have used an online draft version by Dennis Redmond, rather than the one by E.B. Ashton (detailed reasons for this choice can be found in a note that prefaces Fredric Jameson's Late Marxism). In general, for Adorno, dialectics must be unbounded from the positive, and more specifically, "Dialectics is the consistent consciousness of non-identity." Against conflating difference with contradiction, Adorno points towards the con-
cept of nonidentity as that which is subjugated by ‘identitarian’ thinking: identity that is too fixed and too strongly individuated. The heterogeneous multiplicity of difference, according to Adorno, is done injustice by the dialectical tendency to reduce all divergence to contradiction. Throughout Negative Dialectics, Adorno presents a rightly troubled picture of the dialectic, not through definitions but rather through models, or exemplary constellations.


*Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* serves as a conjugation of the dialectic of Hegel and Marx (and others), with Roy Bhaskar’s Critical Realist philosophy. Despite the heavy terminology and use of acronymic short-forms, the work does give some of the most lucid descriptions of the dialectic available to the contemporary reader. Bhaskar describes the dialectic first in terms of social or conceptual “conflict, interconnection and change” (3). Opposition then leads to transcendence, and in such a way that does not necessarily (for Bhaskar) include sublation or preservation (*Aufhebung*). With a focus on ontology, Bhaskar puts emphasis (like Kristeva and Adorno) on negativity, absence, and non-being. The work also proceeds from an important distinction between dialectical connection, and contradiction—meaning that the former need not necessarily indicate the presence of the latter. In addition to this, Bhaskar traces the lineage of the dialectic back to Aristotle, and then further to Zeno and his paradoxes. Lastly, and importantly,
Bhaskar’s nuanced version of the dialectic also includes figures such as “the hiatus, chiasmus, and pause” (8).


Where other works referenced above and in this bibliography treat the dialectic in abstract terms (which is a valid approach to a properly theoretical figure), Fanon’s treatment of the dialectic in Chapter Five of *Black Skin, White Masks* is much more immanent to real social concerns. For Fanon the dialectic is, at least in part, a reductive figure. Arising from his introspection Fanon’s concern is that his being situated between the desire to be black, and the desire to be white, is reduced to a mere stage of a greater dialectic. The perspective of a supposedly greater context, given by the dialectic, is a condescending and supremacist perspective that would use the dialectic as insulation against the singular reality of concrete and immanent situations. This is a problem for dialectics in that, given an optimistic reading, it is against the dialectical impulse of totalization to be reductive in any way. The question for many, then, is whether the dialectic is idealistic (in the pejorative sense), and therefore inevitably reductive. I take this to be a pessimistic view, but I grant that the spirit of caution within it is very important for a nonviolent dialectics.


For Boris Groys, in his short treatise, the heart of the *logos* is paradox. This intensely dialectical


The eleventh chapter of Jameson’s collection, titled “Persistencies of the Dialectic: Three Sites,” is an excellent introduction to the dialectic and its history as a figure. Jameson avoids some of the traditional descriptors associated with the dialectic (sublation, negation, etc.) and instead turns to reflexivity, narrativity (telos, history), and (appropriately) contradiction. Articulating a sensible and sensitive understanding of the dialectic, Jameson also clarifies the question of the relationship between the dialectic and ‘method,’ early on in the essay.


In the second section of Kristeva’s work, there is a chapter entitled “The Fourth ‘Term’ of the Dialectic,” which outlines the concept of ‘nega-
tivity’ also outlined in the preceding work. For Kristeva the dialectic is structured by a negativity that is distinct from nothingness and negation, and which mediates and supersedes being and nothingness as a “liquefying and dissolving agent” (109). While critiquing the supersession in Hegelian dialectic as “erasing heterogeneity,” she posits that negativity, in the true dialectic, “prevents the closing up of Being” and allows us to move from triality to this fourth term (113).


An excellent introduction to dialectical materialism, Lefebvre’s study of Hegel and Marx digs into the mechanics of the dialectic. Addressing contradiction, negation, and sublation (*Aufhebung*), the book puts dialectical terminology and vocabulary to work, and puts forth a refreshingly positive view of contradiction: “dialectical unity is not a confusion of the contradictory terms as such, but a unity which passes through the contradiction and is re-established at a higher level” (27).