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Gestalt-Dialectics

Its Thesis, Anti-Thesis and Synthesis

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1. The Thesis of Gestalt-Dialectics = Positive Transformational Universal Energies

A Pedagogical Philosophy

From a social, historical, psychological, philosophical and theological perspective, “Gestalt-Dialectics” may be defined for all practical and philosophical purposes as the transformation of spiritual development and human consciousness into a higher level of awareness, especially in regards to cultural understanding, reasoning, ethical and moral behavior in any human being. Insofar as child development is concerned, “Gestalt-Dialectics” may be approached from a pedagogical philosophy that includes at least three major factors:

- A) Individualized Education
- B) Cultural Understanding and Reasoning
- C) Spiritual Development¹

These three factors should be viewed as the end results of a transcendental pedagogical philosophy as well as the means per se. Furthermore, they are postulated as the corner stones of character and personality development, without which no transcendental education is possible.

The means to achieve such “transcendental end results” may be found in a theory of human development based on transformational processes that are dialectical in nature. In this sense, a human being may be transformed via the internalization of certain culturally bound sign systems. This is the essence of Vygotsky’s dialectical approach (1978, 2002). In other words, the sign systems that humans have developed in order to conduct themselves in a given culturally bound enterprise are the very means of cultural development once they become an integral part of both, the individual and the social consciousness as a whole. Humans, in this sense, construct their own paradigms of social and individual development and as such become the very founders of their monuments.

In Gestalt-Dialectics the means, (e.g., the internalization of the sign systems) and the end results (e.g. the aforementioned three factors) make up a dialectical unity. In other words, both establish the processes by which psychic transformations become possible. The ends cannot be achieved without the means and vice versa. However, it is imperative to mention that the energy used in such dialectical unity consists of the **spoken word** under which all sign systems may be reflected. That is to say, the “spoken word” becomes the “transformational force” of the entire phenomenological and dialectical approach to teaching and learning. Furthermore, **music and poetry** become the two most significant vehicles in order to carry out the human enterprise of teaching and guiding a child in his overall education via the power of the spoken word.

It is the spoken word via music and poetry in combination with the three aforementioned factors that allow for the best education to take place. In other words, individualized education, cultural understanding and reasoning plus spiritual development (ethical and moral education) are best reflected in a pedagogical philosophy in which the spoken word becomes the spirit and the essence of the activities taken place under the guidance of a master teacher or tutor. At any rate, the dialectical process in and of itself is as transcendental as the very objectives per se. It is important that the children reach higher

¹ Issues related but not limited to ethics, morality, education, character and personality of a child, etc.

academic standards, but equally important are the means by which the children achieve them. The ends may or may not justify the means (that depends on a lot of factors that cannot be discussed in this introductory phase of Gestalt-Dialectics), but one thing is sure: as far as the pedagogical approach is concerned, the means, in this case the power of the spoken word and the internalization of cultural sign systems as a whole, do justify the ends.

This should not be viewed as the negation of any teleological perspectives in which for example an objective may become so vital that if not taken into consideration the corresponding classroom or cultural activity may become monotonous, dull or meaningless. However, when the power of the spoken word becomes the means to an end, that is, the very vital force in order to reach an objective, then it is not the objective or the goal per se that is guiding the entire learning process, but rather both the goal and its corresponding means², both factors bound together in a **dialectical unity** that bring forth the dynamics of all paradigms related to teaching and learning.

1.1 Individualized Education and the Power of the Spoken Word

The spoken word becomes transformed into the most powerful means of teaching when it is focused within a pedagogy based on “individualization principles.” A simple fact of life is that a child needs individualized attention in all matters concerning his/her cultural and spiritual development. If that is the case, then we must realize that a teacher with 20 plus pupils is not able to individualize most areas of the curriculum (with some exceptions such as sports and other “group activities”).

Under Gestalt-Dialectics, the following hypothesis is postulated:

In order to individualize the school curriculum, the “teacher or tutor” would have to spend anywhere from 3 to 6 hours a day with each pupil within the realms of “intensive instruction.”

Notice that I said “teacher or tutor” in order to make the point that individualized education must not necessarily be taught by a credentialed teacher. Under this thesis, a curriculum activity may also be taught by a tutor, that is, by any individual who is capable of inspiring and motivating any pupil in the mastery of any skill whatsoever. In this regard “individualized education” may become “**infinite**” as far as the spectrum of possibilities is concerned such as but not limited to the following cultural activities:

- A) A grand mother teaching her grand daughter how to sew a skirt or do any other needle work.
- B) A grandpa teaching his grandson how to play guitar.
- C) A mother teaching her son how to cook or how to decode the sounds of letters.
- D) Big brother teaching his little sister how to draw a horse or any other animal or object.

² The internalization of cultural sign systems via the spoken word.

- E) The local church pastor teaching a child (under the auspices of the church's children ministry) how to recite a bible verse so that he may recite it before the church congregation.

Notice that the education process is a function of all interpersonal learning possibilities within a community. It should not be viewed as a direct consequence of learning within the four-wall environment of the classroom, but rather as a function of all social interactions taking place with all adults that interrelate with the child in any social or academic context.

Most of all, learning takes place at an optimal level either within a small group or within a one-to-one ratio. For this very reason, Gestalt-Dialectics postulates the following hypothesis: **learning is optimized in small groups consisting of seven children or less guided by either a teacher or a tutor.** In most cases, small group and individual experiences for all practical purposes become equivalent in their function. That is to say, learning in such a small group environment is equivalent to learning in an individualized format because the teacher or tutor is still capable of meeting the needs of each individual child. With 5 pupils for example, the tutor does not lose sight of every child, but in a larger group context, such as trying to teach phonemic awareness to 20+ pupils even the best teacher is, in most cases, not capable of remedying the deficiencies or teaching to the capability of each specific child. Teachers in such cases do not teach to the individual, but to the theoretical average child. That is absurd from the sociological and anthropological point of view.

With a group of 20 children or more, a teacher may spend a couple of minutes with one particular child, but we know from experience that the "rest of the pupils" need constant attention. Thus, it becomes increasingly difficult to spend quality and individualized time with children in groups bigger than seven. Thus, Gestalt-Dialectics postulates individualized education in the form of a 1-to-1 ratio (pupil-tutor or pupil-teacher), a 1-to-5 ratio (likewise pupil-tutor or pupil-teacher) and a 1-to-7 ratio (pupil-teacher or highly qualified tutor-pupil). Each minute spent in either of these three forms is defined as "individualized education" for all practical and functional purpose. Thus, all efforts must be made in order to fulfill the time-requirements (anywhere between 3 to 6 hours of daily intensive individualized instruction) related to any cultural activity in which the aforementioned three factors become the ends to the powerful means of the spoken word and of other significant sign functions that need to become internalized in order to elevate the human spirit to the highest possible levels ever achieved by any human enterprise.

2. The Anti-Thesis of Gestalt-Dialectics = Negative Transformational Universal Energies

School Failure

From a theological perspective, human beings may be characterized as potential “semi-Gods,” endowed with the means__ via the internalization of cultural signs systems and especially via the mastery of the spoken word as a means to conquer the world__ of reconstructing the Tower of Babel in an unlimited fashion. That is to say, their “human potential” may become transformed into unlimited possibilities. That is nothing new!!! In the realm of grammar for example, it has been found out that the number of sentences that a human being is able to perform is “unlimited” (Pinker, 1994) and thus universal. In my opinion, the unlimited potential found in Chomsky’s generative grammar is just but one of the many examples that characterizes humans as potential “semi-Gods.”

However, from the perspective of the human spirit we are not “semi-Gods.” We tend to act as if we were however, which could bring catastrophic consequences to humanity. Thus, crime, chaos, street violence and other social maladjustments of today’s society, especially in inner city life (schools, streets, homes, etc.) represent a mere avenue for the disoriented youngster (or should I say, “gangster?”), whose main objective is to reinstate his subconscious desire to be “God-like.” Should I call this the “God-Like Complex”? A gangster in Los Angeles kills another gangster. Why then? Why should any person take the life of another if not to reaffirm in some way that he’s immensely superior to the victim? In the same sense, a highly academically deficient student (especially in some school districts located in “socioeconomic depressed areas” with larger minority populations) may defy the orders and values of his teacher and creates chaos in the classroom with his egotistical behavior. The ruler of his actions is his inflated EGO, the one that allows him to act as a careless despot.

In a sense, all human beings try to elevate themselves vis-à-vis other members of society in one way or another. In many cases of extreme social deformation, there exists a tendency for spiritual transformation of the very wrong kind: disappointment, despair, disdain, arbitrariness, injustice, discrimination, indifference, hopelessness and above all, vanity represent the major social ills of many youngsters and children in any given city and community. In many cases, dishonesty, indifference, vanity, selfishness in several ethical and moral questions and a general lack of philosophical, cultural and social vision may become the order of the day in the lives and experiences of many individuals as well as in the actions of many institutions, beginning with the school authorities and ending with the preschool child. In general, these forms of antisocial behavior by the individual and the anti-social and anti-philosophical attitudes of some institutions (the lack of ecological and aesthetic awareness in our urban schools for example) tend to disintegrate and deform the individual from the very essence of being and becoming a human being.

Most of our schools in South Central Los Angeles for example have failed to serve as model institutions. Social disorder and chaos, especially in the upper grades of the primary schools and most emphatically in the High School setting, may become the order of the day instead of a dynamic and cultural transformation of the very child that the teachers are trying to promote. Gang activity, classroom disorder, undisciplined students, irreverent teachers, and a general disregard for a true academic and scholarly attitude seem to be the daily constants and variables against which most of the financial, administrative and instructional means are spent. In some cases, the principal and the teachers have to spend more time to things related

to the general social and pedagogical disintegration of the school than to other more important needs such as parental involvement and curricular development.

Drop-out rates in some of our High Schools in South Central Los Angeles are catastrophic and nobody seems to have a transcendental answer to the real issues at hand. The fact remains that the needs of most High School and upper grade elementary school students are not being served or met. If there are any means available, then most likely they are spent in order to meet the needs of the teachers first and foremost. In other words, it is my opinion that in any scale of needs assessments, the needs of the administrators and teachers are first considered and targeted. In practical terms, the pupils end up at the rear of the line although in theory, everything is done in order to promote a pedagogy in which the pupil plays the central role.

Take out for example the needs of a child during recess time in South Central Los Angeles. Is he really able to run and play in accordance to his psychophysical needs? Not at all! First, there is no grass in most school playgrounds in South Central Los Angeles. Thus, if the child tries to run, he may fall down on the cement, hurting himself on the knees, face or other parts of his body. Thus, children have no access to nature (to grass, trees, flowers, plants, water, rivers, and the like), which in my opinion should become the very essence and foundation of the school science curriculum as well as a transcendental departing point for many a social activity. Do school principals and teachers in general really understand the transcendental academic and social ramifications of such “anti-social and anti-pedagogical conditions” in the school play grounds? Not in my opinion! Except for some superficial “psychomotor activities” and other social interactions that naturally take place in some wide open areas of the school (e.g., the use of the auditorium for school assemblies), very few factors concerning science and social education are included in the school plan and/or curriculum. After all, science can be offered via a picture representing some sort of scientific phenomena and social activities are to be promoted within the context of a four-walled classroom environment. That is nonsense!

The dialectical unity of social and ecological awareness within a true natural setting (e.g. the planting of a garden), for all practical purposes, is non-existent and thus its pedagogical potential is not considered in most of the decisions taken by teachers and principals. They are more concerned with a possible lawsuit as a result of a child hurting himself on the overcrowded playground than on the unlimited possibilities that such an open area could mean for the social, pedagogical and spiritual transformation of the child in the event for example that we could transform such playgrounds in open green and garden like areas full of life and natural surroundings. Instead, curriculum activities are given within the context of a four-walled environment. There is no interaction between a child and nature in the broadest sense of the word. Children may at best be confronted with a set of seeds here and there and with an explanation of the corresponding targeted concepts, but everything is done via a very superficial format in order to fulfill the demands of the school science curriculum, but not the demands of the human spirit, who is crying out loud for interaction with green-based natural environments. Consequently, Gestalt-Dialectics postulates the interaction with “NATURE” (plants, trees, mountains, etc.) on a daily basis as one of the most basic needs of human development, a factor forgotten and disregarded in most urban schools, especially those in South Central Los Angeles.

If that is not enough, let us take just another example of the inability of the school authorities in some urban areas to meet the social, aesthetic and spiritual needs of the individual child. For example, “art” in general has been proven to be one of the best avenues

of natural learning. Here, Gestalt-Dialectics postulates that children learn best if they are confronted with an artistic phenomenon: if a teacher for example were to dramatize a story instead of just reading it, then most likely the children would listen with eagerness and enthusiasm. There is nothing more dynamic and pedagogical than presenting a lesson plan via a very artistic and thus interesting format. The curricular activities become a true vehicle of social and pedagogical transformation. Pupils would tend to become active listeners and participants, resulting in a greater degree of understanding and mastery of the corresponding activities at hand. Art per se is the greatest motivational factor that elevates the spirit to higher levels not just of art appreciation, but of pedagogical principles and overall cultural understanding. However, because of the naïve understanding of human development (e.g. the lack of a transcendental philosophy) and in several cases because of the vain indifference vis-à-vis the proven facts of music and artistic methodologies around the world, including the superiority of an open-ended artistically based school curriculum, some school administrators and teacher nevertheless prefer to promote a superficially scripted and mechanically oriented standards-based “**commercial curriculum**” (one developed not by the teachers, but by some corporation) as demanded, so they claim, by the powers that be at the state and national level.

In some cases, it seems to me that such administrators and teachers are more interested in the status quo, that is, in controlling the educational establishment as a mere monopoly of political and financial orientations than in promoting “artistic avenues” based on the “artistic and highly creative teacher.” As a result, any proposed dynamic and artistically based curricular pedagogy is discarded as a non-essential. Principles related to educational philosophy such as the role of a teacher’s freedom in the decision making process, the teacher’s creativity in curricular implementation or the role of the teacher’s authority in the planning and development of teaching materials tend to be disregarded. The teacher is no longer a teacher, but rather becomes a mere instrument of the established monopoly of the “powers that be.”

3. The Synthesis of Gestalt-Dialectics = Transcendental Transformational Universal Energies

Answers to School Fatalism and Failure

What forms of energies bring about a change towards the most accepted forms of ethical and moral behavior? How do we change an egotistical, irreverent and malicious child into a well-behaved social human being?

If we want a transcendental and transformational change in the life of a child, all we need to do is to bring him into harmony with a group of loving and caring individuals in a social and pedagogical setting³, guided by its own set of moral and ethical values. Children become social failures not because of some intrinsic spiritual disorder, although according to Alfred Adler their physiological make-up may indeed become the cause of several behavioral deformations (e.g. inferiority complexes, shyness, etc.), but mostly because of the dire and disturbing social factors that have poisoned their soul and spirit from the very first day of their existence. The so-called unwanted child, the single parent family (especially the absence of the father figure in many Afro-American families), the physically-socially-morally neglected child and the social and cultural disintegration of some families are but a few causes of social and behavioral maladjustments in the life of a child.

How do we cure such a social disease from its roots? First and foremost a child needs a least one binding-individual (“Bezugsperson”) as a personal frame of reference, that is, someone with an intrinsic interest in the welfare of the child, such as a loving and caring parent, teacher or tutor. However, if a child lives under disastrous circumstances at home and if he cannot find comfort and security at school, then most likely he will seek support and recognition in an antisocial setting. In Adlerian terms, humans are not meant to be alone. They need to be wanted and they have a deep desire to belong to a particular group. This desire may be characterized as an intrinsic sense of belonging to a “we-complex” and thus as a “sense of community-belongingness,” which may be postulated as the metaphysical make up of the child’s spirit for lo and behold, according to this thesis, the child’s innermost sense of being is rooted not in his ego, but rather in the social attitude of wanting to belong to someone or to some group (in Adlerian terms, “Gemeinschaftsgefühl”). However, children not only want to be part of a “group complex,” but they also want to be recognized for who they are and for what they do within the context of a “social attitude of belonging” per se. **Social recognition is food for the soul !!!**

However, “social recognition” may become a “social nightmare” for many children not just in the schools from South Central Los Angeles, but also in other schools throughout the world in which pupils are graded according to some **static** academic standards. In the Los Angeles Unified School District for example, pupils may receive either a 4, a 3, a 2 or a 1 as a grade for any academic activity. In my opinion, the four means academic excellence, the three means high academic achievement, the two means below academic achievement and the one is complete academic failure. These definitions may differ from the official statements given by the school district. However, nobody would disagree that the four means excellent academic achievement and that the one means complete academic underachievement, or total failure. The point here for example is that pupils who are slow and especially those who have

³ An example of a loving and caring environment is reflected in a five-week pilot program in a Montessori preschool in Germany (see Appendix C: A Testimonial of the Vieyra Reading and Writing Method).

an abnormal psycholinguistic development (e.g., their speech development is below age accepted levels) will tend to read below grade levels and children, whose psycholinguistic development is at or above age level (e.g., a five year-old child speaking like a seven-year old) will tend to comprehend faster all academic areas and in particular will tend to read at or above grade level.

Now taking into account the biographical information of these two types of children, it is reasonable to expect that a grade system will tend to award the high achievers at the expense of the low achievers. A child in third grade, who's reading at a first grade level, will naturally get "2s and 1s" in their academic scores. After all, he's expected to read at grade level, but he can only read books meant for a Kindergarten or First Grade class. Thus, the teacher has no option than to let him know that he is not good enough for the class. In other words, he does not fit the academic characteristics of a third grade classroom and as such he's an academic failure and an academic outcast. The glory, recognition and all the academic awards are reserved for the very few best pupils, who all together comprise in reality nothing more and nothing less than a very small group of children in any classroom. Thus, the grade system is set up to reward to best and to punish the worst academic students!

The teachers and school principals may defend this grade system however they want to. The fact remains that even if the very low students were to make their very best efforts, they will not be able to achieve academic excellence under such "dire circumstances." As a direct consequence of their academic failure, they find themselves out of touch with the social and academic expectations. They suffer under the constant pain of becoming academically isolated in the classroom. Instead of recognition, they feel rejection. In effect, they are rejected as academic outcasts, that is, as the children who do not belong to the popular "in group" of the high achievers. Their work is rarely posted on the bulletin boards, or is in any way the subject of admiration by anybody. On the contrary, their work becomes the target of the grading system because instead of receiving the inspiring high 4 or 3 of the best and glorious pupils, at best they get a boring 2. To make things worst, they have to constantly hear the praises given to the heroic high achievers. They have to constantly hear the comparative remarks made by the teacher and by their peers. In a way, they have become conditioned, ___day in and day out, in a constant vicious circle of pessimism and negativity towards themselves___, to believe that all their peers consider them as somewhat unworthy, inadequate, incompetent or outright "stupid" and likewise they have come to the conclusion that the "intelligent ones" are those high achievers who belong to the "inner circle of friends" because, after all, those are the praiseworthy pupils who get all the academic awards.

In other words, these so-called low achievers lose their feeling of belonging and may suffer the effects dealing with several types of inferiority complexes (e.g. a low or negative self-esteem) and social maladjustments (antisocial behavior, discipline problems, etc.). A fatalistic outlook toward life, a deformation of his spirit, and an infinite number of social and psychic abnormalities may begin to transform the entire personality of the child. The same pupil who started as a proactive, enthusiastic and happy child in preschool or kindergarten may end up as a fatalistic, irreverent, and antisocial human being by the time he enters High School.

At any rate, what may be the major factors and causes of a negative transformation in the life of a child? In many cases, it is not just the parents or the socioeconomic conditions to be blamed, but rather the entire academic and school culture that is set up for failure for most minority children not just in South Central Los Angeles, but for many children around the world.

3.1 The Thesis of Transcendental Spiritual Change in Gestalt-Dialectics

How do we change the spirit of a child? What can we do in order to bring about positive changes in his entire character development? How do we create an enthusiastic outgoing and charismatic personality in the life of a child? The answers to such questions may be found in the following statement: we transform a child into the right positive light of human development by creating a loving and caring atmosphere in an individualized and social context⁴. If the home environment, the community or society in general have failed to bring about a nurturing environment in the life of a child, then it is up to the school and other social institutions, especially the church, to do so. In the case of the school, then it is up to the school authorities to create the right school culture that may be able to promote “individualized education in a small group setting.”

Thus, Gestalt-Dialectics postulates the following thesis:

The key to success is not the establishment of academic standards, not the isolated grading system (the one that rewards the best and punishes the low pupils) and not even the introduction of newer methodological systems per se, although these may create positive energies in the transformational process, but rather a **philosophical system of individualized education** in which the social, psycholinguistic and spiritual needs of every child are met under the power of the spoken word, especially in relation to the native language of the child.

In this respect, the transformational processes do not take place in an academic format in which the written language takes precedence, but rather in one in which the native language of the child is reflected through the spoken word as the main medium of human communication in an individualized system of interactive activities with peers, adults, parents and other members of the community.

The child learns and develops via an active personalized perspective of human reasoning and understanding that is best reflected in poetry, music, drama, social interactions and other sign systems related to the power of the spoken word in a rather small group frame of reference. Not the written instructions on the classroom board, not the written tests, and not even the reading of books are the real causes of academic development. According to Gestalt-Dialectics, these media are not the causes, but rather the end results of psycholinguistic development that undergoes a child with a specific interlocutor. Furthermore, this child-interlocutor relationship is optimized in a very small group activity or in a one-to-one discussion either with the teacher, an adult (such as the mother or parent), or a peer. In groups of 20 or more children only the most harmonious activities dealing with drama, music and poetry can ever achieve an “individualized equivalent.” For example, let us suppose that in a choir activity a music teacher introduces a song to an entire assembly of 200 children. Is it possible to achieve such an “individualized equivalent,” that is, in a way equivalent to a one-to-one interaction? No doubt about it! As the music teacher sings, the choir members sing as well, or at least have the potential or singing just as well and beautiful as the music teacher. This is not the case of a typical lesson in the classroom with a 20-to-1 or a 30-to-1 relationship. As the teacher tries to teach how to multiply, for example, 13×12 via a very special holistic format ($13 \times 12 = (13 \times 10) + (13 \times 2) = 130 + 26 = 156$), all children are not necessarily capable of following the specific directions and as such this math lesson cannot be considered to be “individualized equivalent” in any way. In this case, as already explained above, mostly the high achievers may be able to follow the teaching instructions, while the

⁴ Please read the testimonial given in the appendix for a better understanding.

low or the very low pupils become confused with the entire operation. Math, especially its higher forms (i.e., algebra) requires higher forms of abstraction that can only be achieved at certain stages of cognitive development as the research from Piaget and Vygotsky clearly show.

The “individualized equivalent-thesis” postulates that only in very few exceptions, such as in sports, singing in a choir, acting in a drama, or practicing a song under the guidance of a music teacher, should teaching and learning take place in large group constellations. A group size of 7 children should be the optimal upper limit for a professional such as a teacher or well trained teacher assistant, and thus, in most cases it is recommended that the groups should consist of seven children or less. Any group consisting of 8 children or more, even for the most professional teacher, will no longer be consistent with activities that become “individualized equivalent.” In such bigger groups, especially in dealing with 20 or more pupils, the most that a teacher can do is to teach to the “average child.” If he tries to complicate the lesson, then only the very high achievers would be comprehending and performing appropriately under the laws of the zones of proximal development in accordance to Vygotsky. If the teacher were to overly simplify the lesson, then the high achiever would be learning nothing new. In other words, the high achievers and even most “average children” would not be challenged according to the zones of proximal development. In a normal curve, most scores tend to fall around the medium (plus or minus one standard deviation). Likewise, with large groups, the teacher tends to teach towards the average child in order to find the greatest reception. This is the typical frame of reference for all practical purposes in most public schools in the world. They have not figured out the best way to individualize the educational process.

As ridiculous as it may sound, Gestalt-Dialectics postulates the following statement:

If we cannot individualize education in large groups of pupils (such as the 20- or 30-to-1 ratios) because it would become economically impossible to hire three teachers for a group of twenty children, then it is best to give up the services of the typical teacher in favor for the services of three artistically minded and professional tutors.

The above statement should not be taken as a general thesis for all levels of education, from preschool through university. However, it is a firm statement of Gestalt-Dialectics in regards to the first years of elementary school education, especially for preschool, Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 3th grade. In other words, it is better to have three “artistic tutors” rather than one teacher if we have to choose one of the two options. In most cases related to public education, the typical teacher should be replaced by three or more professional artists who, under the guidance of a master teacher, may be trained to individualize the learning process in all academic areas of the curriculum, especially in regards to music, poetry and drama, the new three foundations of the psycholinguistic development in Gestalt-Dialectics.

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