Multilectics: Towards a New Enlightenment

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ABSTRACT

A complex system is not constituted merely by the sum of its components, but also by the dynamic intricate multipolar relationships among these components. Broadly speaking, the whole history of philosophy can be noticeable in three phases. The first phase is of formal logic, where truth is sought in a one-dimensional direction. It ranges from the time of Greek philosophers to the end of the European middle ages. The second phase is of dialectical logic, also known as modern dialectics. This phase covers philosophers like Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Adorno. Truth in dialectical logic is always in the form of a binary. The third is the phase of multilectical logic, which develops in the postmodern era. Nonetheless, multilectical logic emerged in the postmodern era and almost every postmodern philosopher discusses the issues on the structure of this logic, but as a logic it is not clearly mentioned by any postmodern philosopher. This research paper investigates this third phase of logic which may seem to be the foundation of the postmodern era and which may be known as multilectical logic, or multilectics. The paper argues that multilectics represents not merely an extension of dialectics, but a qualitative philosophical rupture: a logic adequate to complex, plural, and non-linear reality. The paper further situates multilectics as the contestant foundation for a New Enlightenment one premised not on singular reason, but on relational, multipolar rationality.

Keywords: Multilectics, Dialectics, Formal logic, Postmodern philosophy, Complexity theory, Relational ontology, New Enlightenment, Multipolar rationality.

1. Introduction

Philosophy has always been in dialogue with the logic it employs. The form of reasoning a philosopher deploys is not merely a neutral instrument; it shapes what can be thought, what can be expressed, and what counts as truth. From Aristotle's syllogism to Hegel's dialectic, each epoch of thought has been animated by a distinctive logical architecture. We are, this paper argues, in the midst of a third such transformation — one that remains largely unarticulated as a formal system, even as its outlines are visible in the work of postmodern thinkers from Derrida to Deleuze, from Foucault to Lyotard, from Barad to Haraway.

This third logic, which we shall call multilectics, is not simply the next step after dialectics in a linear progression. It is a rupture: a move from binary to multipolar, from synthetic resolution to productive contradiction, from the singular to the relational. Where formal logic sought to isolate truth in a single proposition and dialectical logic sought to generate truth through the

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collision of opposites, multilectical logic recognizes that truth is always situated within complex, dynamic webs of relation that cannot be reduced to any binary or singular form.

The philosophical need for such a logic is urgent. The problems confronting contemporary thought — ecological crisis, globalization, digital complexity, postcolonial multiplicity, intersectional identity—are constitutively irreducible to binary frames. To think adequately about climate change, one cannot resolve it into a simple thesis-antithesis structure. To think about gender, one cannot simply oppose masculine to feminine. To think about power in the digital age, one cannot simply oppose the individual to the state. Multilectics is the logic that these problems demand.

This paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides a systematic account of the three phases of philosophical logic. Section 3 offers a detailed exposition of the structural features of multilectics. Section 4 situates multilectics in relation to key postmodern thinkers. Section 5 develops the concept of the New Enlightenment as a civilisational project grounded in multilectical reasoning. Section 6 addresses objections and limitations. Section 7 concludes.

2. Three Phases of Philosophical Logic

2.1 Formal Logic: The First Phase

Formal logic, as a systematic discipline, was inaugurated by Aristotle in the *Organon* — a collection of treatises that remained foundational to Western thought for nearly two millennia. For Aristotle, logic was the study of correct inference: the conditions under which a conclusion necessarily follows from given premises. His syllogistic — the theory of deductive inference structured around three terms and three propositions—defined what it meant to reason correctly. The fundamental commitment of formal logic is to the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle. The law of non-contradiction states that a proposition cannot be both true and false simultaneously. The law of the excluded middle states that a proposition is either true or false, with no third possibility. These two laws define the logical space in which formal reasoning operates: a space of binary, static determinations.

The great achievement of formal logic was to make reasoning transparent and checkable. By reducing inference to form — abstracting away from the content of propositions to concentrate on structural relationships — Aristotle created a logic that was universal in scope and precise in application. This formal transparency made it the dominant mode of reasoning through the scholastic tradition, in which the university method of *quaestio, objectio, responsio,* and *solutio* formalised logical procedure into an institution. However, because it operated exclusively with fixed, static propositions, formal logic was unable to capture movement, development, and contradiction within reality itself. The world is not a collection of static facts but a dynamic process of becoming. By the early modern period, this limitation had become philosophically untenable, giving way to the second phase.

2.2 Dialectical Logic: The Second Phase

Dialectical logic emerges as a response to the rigidity of formal logic. Where formal logic treats contradictions as errors to be eliminated, dialectical logic treats contradictions as the engine of development — the very mechanism by which thought and reality move forward. The roots of

dialectical thinking can be traced to Heraclitus and his insight that the unity of opposites is the fundamental structure of reality. But it is in the modern period, with Kant, Hegel, Marx, and the Frankfurt School, that dialectical logic receives its systematic articulation.

Kant inaugurated dialectical logic in the critical sense through his account of the antinomies of pure reason. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant demonstrates that when reason attempts to think the unconditioned — the world as a whole, the soul, God — it falls into irreducible contradictions. The antinomies are not errors of reasoning but structural features of reason itself when it exceeds its proper domain. Kant's insight is that contradiction is not merely a logical failure but a philosophical index of the limits of knowledge.

Hegel radicalized this insight in his Science of Logic (1812-1816) and the Phenomenology of Spirit (1807). For Hegel, contradiction is not a sign of error but the very motor of reality. The dialectical movement of sublation (*Aufhebung)* — the simultaneous negation, preservation, and elevation of opposites into a higher synthesis — is not merely a method of thought but the structure of being itself. History, nature, consciousness, and logic all move through this triadic rhythm of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The Absolute is not a fixed substance but a subject — a process of becoming identical with its own self-comprehension.

Marx appropriated Hegel's dialectical method but inverted its direction. Where Hegel's dialectic was idealist — moving through the self-development of Spirit — Marx's dialectic was materialist. In the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, Marx shows that the contradictions of capitalist society—between use-value and exchange-value, labor and capital— are not merely conceptual but material. History advances not through the self-comprehension of Spirit but through the material struggle of classes.

Adorno, in *Negative Dialectics* (1966), pushed the dialectical tradition further by refusing the moment of synthesis. For Adorno, the Hegelian *Aufhebung* is philosophically dishonest: it resolves contradiction too quickly, assimilating the non-identical to the concept and thereby doing violence to what resists conceptualization. Negative dialectics insists on the irreducibility of the non-identical — the remainder that cannot be sublated — and refuses all affirmative synthesis.

Despite their differences, the dialectical thinkers share a common structure: truth is generated through the relation between two poles. Whether the poles are thesis and antithesis, use-value and exchange-value, or identity and non-identity, the logical form is binary. This binary structure is dialectics' greatest strength and its greatest limitation. It captures the dynamism and contradictoriness of reality with unparalleled power, but it cannot adequately represent reality's plurality, its multiple axes of difference, and its non-linear complexity.

2.3 Multilectical Logic: The Third Phase

Multilectical logic emerges as the logical response to what might be called the complexity turn in contemporary thought. This turn is visible across disciplines: in the natural sciences (chaos theory, systems biology, complexity science), in the social sciences (network theory, assemblage theory, actor-network theory), and in the humanities (deconstruction, rhizomatics, postcolonial theory, feminist new materialism). What unites these developments is a common

recognition that reality is not structured by binary oppositions, however dynamic, but by multipolar, multi-scalar, and non-linear relations among multiple, heterogeneous components.

Multilectics can be provisionally defined as: a logic of irreducible multiplicity, in which truth is constituted not by the opposition of two terms nor by their synthesis, but by the dynamic, non-totalizing interplay of multiple, heterogeneous relata that cannot be reduced to any singular or binary structure. Ratnamuthu Sugathan proposes this new logic which he called polylectics or multilectics. He asserts that multilectics is the logic of postmodernism. Sugathan propounds that multilectics lies not in multiple contradictions, but in the multiplicity of dimensions in each contradiction.[1] Ratnamuthu Sugathan in *Philosophy of Thought: Dialectics and Polylectics* describes multilectics as follows:

"The Postmodern dialectics is something more than dialectics. It is a dialectics that takes into account the rupture of thought, which Derrida talked about, and get ruptured accordingly. A dialectics which is able to hold this collapse within its logical playground and is amenable to 'free play', the post-Nietzschean logic, and cannot be the same as dialectics itself, despite its continuity in the history of thought, is a multidimensional dialectics with qualitatively newer and infinite dimensions. This can be called *multilectics or polylectics*."[2]

The key structural features that distinguish multilectics from its predecessors are examined in detail in the next section. Multilectics does not simply replace formal logic or dialectical logic; it encompasses and transforms them. Formal logic remains valid within domains of static, well-defined propositions. Dialectical logic remains valid within domains structured by two dominant opposing forces. Multilectics identifies the conditions under which neither framework is sufficient and provides the conceptual tools to think beyond them.

3. Structural Features of Multilectical Logic

3.1 Multiplicity Over Binarity

The most fundamental structural feature of multilectics is its insistence on multiplicity as the irreducible condition of truth. In formal logic, truth is single: a proposition is either true or false. In dialectical logic, truth is binary and dynamic: it is generated through the opposition of two terms. In multilectical logic, truth is constituted through the interaction of *n* terms, where *n* is not fixed and the terms are not reducible to a binary schema. This multiplicity is not merely quantitative — not simply the claim that there are more oppositions to consider. It is qualitative: the relations among multiple terms have a different logical structure from binary opposition. Binary opposition is reversible and exhaustive; multipolar relation is neither. A may relate to B, C, D, and E in qualitatively different ways, and the relation A-B cannot be derived from or reduced to any other relational pair.

3.2 Relational Ontology

Multilectics is grounded in a relational ontology: the view that entities are constituted by their

[1] Ratnamuthu Sugathan, *Philosophy of Thought: Dialectics and Polylectics*, (Gurgaon, India: Shubhi Publications, 2007), 281.
[2] Ratnamuthu Sugathan, *Philosophy of Thought: Dialectics and Polylectics* (Gurgaon, India: Shubhi Publication, 2007), 280.

relations rather than being prior to them. In relational ontology, there are no pre-given, self-identical substances that subsequently enter into relations. Relations are ontologically primary. What we call entities or things are relatively stabilized nodes within a field of relations temporary convergences of multiple relata that have achieved a degree of consistency. This view is implicit in quantum field theory, in Whitehead's process philosophy, in Donna Haraway's figure of the cyborg, in Karen Barad's agential realism, and in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the assemblage.

3.3 Non-Linearity and Emergence

Multilectical logic incorporates non-linearity as a structural feature of the relations it studies. Linear relations are additive: the whole is the sum of its parts. Non-linear relations are not additive: the interaction of components produces emergent effects that cannot be predicted from any component in isolation. The whole is constituted not only by its components but by the dynamic intricate multipolar relationships among those components which is precisely the insight with which this paper begins. Emergence is the philosophical correlate of non-linearity: the appearance at higher levels of organization of properties, structures, and forms that cannot be derived from the lower-level components. Consciousness emerges from neural activity; social institutions emerge from individual interactions; ecosystems emerge from the interactions of organisms and environment. In none of these cases can the emergent phenomenon be adequately captured by a binary logic or a simple synthesis.

3.4 Situated and Perspectival Truth

In formal logic, truth is universal and context-independent. In dialectical logic, truth is historical and developmental. Multilectical logic advances a third and more radical position: that truth is always and irreducibly situated, constituted from within a particular position in a web of material, social, epistemic, and relational determinations, and that this situatedness is not an epistemic deficiency to be overcome through abstraction but a positive and constitutive feature of truth itself — the very condition of its richness and its adequacy to the complexity of a multipolar world. However, this adherence to situated, perspectival truth must be carefully isolated from relativism because the realisation that all knowledge is perspectival—that there is no view from nowhere, no position outside of all positions from which the totality of reality can be observed in its completeness—does not imply the collapse of all epistemic distinctions or the equalization of all perspectives. Therefore, perspectival character of knowledge does not prevent the rigorous evaluation of perspectives according to the breadth of their evidential basis, the internal consistency of their reasoning.

3.5 Productive Contradiction without Synthesis

Where dialectical logic moves through contradiction toward synthesis — the *Aufhebung* that negates, preserves, and elevates — multilectical logic insists on the value of productive contradiction without resolution. The concept of productive contradiction names the condition in which multiple, irreducibly different perspectives, forces, or positions remain in dynamic relation without being synthesized. This contradiction is not merely a transitional state on the way to synthesis; it is itself the site of creativity, innovation, and ethical richness.

3.6 Multiplicity of Negation

In classical logic, negation is simple: not-A is everything that A is not. In dialectical logic, negation is determinate (bestimmte Negation): the negation of A is a specific, content-rich contrary that carries forward what was valid in A. In multilectical logic, negation is multiple: A can be negated in multiple, qualitatively different ways, none of which exhausts the negation-space of A. The negation of patriarchy is not simply matriarchy; it includes multiple feminist re-imaginings of gender relations, each negating different aspects of patriarchy from different relational positions. This multiplicity of negation has profound implications for political philosophy and for the theory of social transformation. Social transformation is not the replacement of one binary order by its opposite; it is the cultivation of multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory processes of negation that together produce new configurations of social life.

4. Multilectics in Postmodern Philosophy

No postmodern philosopher has explicitly articulated multilectics as a formal logic. Yet the postmodern tradition is, in a precise sense, the philosophical field in which multilectics has been developing. This section examines the contributions of key postmodern thinkers to multilectical thinking, while also identifying the limitations that prevented them from achieving a full systematization.

4.1 Derrida and Differance

Jacques Derrida's concept of differance — a neologism combining the French words for difference and deferral — is one of the most sophisticated attempts in the postmodern tradition to think beyond binary opposition. Differance names the condition in which meaning is constituted not by any positive term but by its relations of difference and deferral from other terms. Derrida's deconstruction proceeds by identifying binary oppositions that structure a text and showing that these oppositions are contaminated by what they oppose. This is a multilectical insight: the apparent binarity of opposition is a simplification of a more complex, multiply-differentiated field. However, Derrida's method remains primarily critical and deconstructive; it does not move to the positive articulation of a multilectical logic.

4.2 Deleuze and Guattari: Rhizomatics

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), develop the concept of the rhizome as a counter-model to the arborescent structure of traditional thought. Where the tree is hierarchical and has a central trunk and fixed roots, the rhizome is horizontal, decentralized, and multiply connected. A rhizome has no beginning and no end; it extends in all directions and can be entered at any point. The rhizome is one of the most powerful anticipations of multilectical logic in the postmodern tradition, imaging a form of thought that is constitutively multipolar, non-hierarchical, and irreducible to binary structure. Their concept of the assemblage — a multiplicity of heterogeneous elements that enter into consistency without losing their heterogeneity — is central to multilectical ontology.

4.3 Foucault: Power/Knowledge Networks

Michel Foucault's analyses of power-knowledge, particularly in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976), are implicitly multilectical in their insistence that power is not a binary relation between dominating and dominated subjects but a multiple, dispersed network of relations. Power circulates through institutions, discourses, practices, and bodies. Foucault's concept of genealogy — a method of historical analysis that attends to the multiple, contingent, and heterogeneous forces that converge to produce present configurations of knowledge and power — is a multilectical method that does not seek a single origin or a final synthesis.

4.4 Lyotard and the Differend

Jean-Francois Lyotard's concept of the differend, developed in the *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (1983), names a conflict between parties that cannot be adjudicated by any common rule of justice. The differend is the irreducible remainder that binary conflict resolution always leaves behind. It is a multilectical concept: it names the condition of multiple, incommensurable positions that cannot be reduced to a single axis of opposition and cannot be resolved by any available synthesis. Lyotard's later work on paralogism — the legitimation of knowledge through dissensus and the productive proliferation of new moves in the game of knowledge — also anticipates multilectics.

4.5 Feminist New Materialism: Barad and Haraway

Karen Barad's agential realism, developed in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), offers perhaps the most systematically developed proto-multilectical ontology in contemporary thought. Barad's key concept is intra-action — coining this term to replace interaction, which presupposes pre-given entities that subsequently come into relation. In intra-action, the relata themselves are constituted through and within the relation. Barad's concept of diffraction — borrowed from physics, where it names the pattern produced by the overlapping of multiple waves — images truth as the pattern produced by the interplay of multiple, non-identical perspectives. Donna Haraway's figure of the cyborg — a boundary creature refusing the binary oppositions of nature/culture and human/machine — is similarly multilectical, inhabiting multiple, contradictory positions simultaneously.

4.6 The Limit of Postmodern Philosophy

What prevents these thinkers from arriving at a fully articulated multilectical logic? The answer is, paradoxically, their own anti-systematism. The postmodern tradition has a deep suspicion of system — of grand theory, of totalizing frameworks, of master narratives. This suspicion is philosophically motivated: the great systems of modernity were complicit in the domination and exclusion of what resisted systemisation. But the rejection of system is itself a philosophical position, and it comes at a cost. Without a systematic articulation of multilectical logic, the multilectical insights scattered across postmodern philosophy remain isolated and occasionally self-contradictory. The task of this paper is precisely to provide that systematic articulation: not as a return to the totalizing systems of modernity, but as an open, revisable, and self-critical framework adequate to the complexity of postmodern reality.

5. Multilectics and the New Enlightenment

5.1 The Crisis of the First Enlightenment

The Enlightenment — as a historical movement centred in eighteenth-century Europe — was animated by the conviction that reason, properly applied, could liberate humanity from superstition, tyranny, and ignorance. Its great achievements — the development of modern science, the critique of religious authority, the articulation of universal human rights, the establishment of democratic institutions — remain central to any vision of human flourishing. Yet the Enlightenment was also, as the Frankfurt School demonstrated, internally contradictory. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the Enlightenment's domination of external nature through instrumental reason was inseparable from the domination of internal nature and from the domination of other human beings — culminating in the administered society and, at its limit, in the Holocaust. The same reason that promised liberation became the instrument of new and more effective forms of domination. What is needed is not the abandonment of reason but its transformation: a richer, more adequate concept of reason adequate to the complexity, plurality, and relational character of reality. Multilectics offers precisely such a concept.

5.2 Principles of the New Enlightenment

The New Enlightenment grounded in multilectical reason would be animated by the following principles:

Multipolar Rationality: Reason is not singular but plural. Different forms of reasoning — scientific, ethical, aesthetic, embodied, tacit — are not reducible to one another and are not arranged in a hierarchy with scientific reason at the top. The New Enlightenment cultivates the productive contradiction among multiple forms of reason rather than seeking to reduce them to a single master form.

Situated Universality: The Enlightenment's universalism is not to be abandoned but transformed. Situated universality acknowledges that universal claims are always made from particular positions within webs of social relation. A new universalism would be genuinely universal precisely because it acknowledges and incorporates the multiple situated perspectives that the old universalism excluded.

Ecological Embeddedness: The first Enlightenment was premised on the domination of nature by human reason. The New Enlightenment recognizes that human beings are embedded within, not opposed to, the natural world. The ecological crisis is a consequence of the dominating, extractive relationship with nature that Enlightenment reason presupposed. Multilectical reason, with its relational ontology and concept of emergence, is inherently ecological.

Decolonial Plurality: The first Enlightenment universalized a particular, European form of reason, suppressing the epistemic traditions of non-European peoples. The New Enlightenment recognizes the plurality of epistemic traditions — Indigenous knowledge systems, non-Western philosophies, oral traditions — as resources for thought rather than mere objects of Western analysis.

Democratic Complexity: The first Enlightenment bequeathed a model of democracy premised on the aggregation of individual preferences. This model is inadequate to the complexity of contemporary societies. Multilectical democracy would cultivate multiple, overlapping forms of democratic participation and deliberation across different scales and domains.

5.3 Multilectics as Civilizational Logic

It is possible to see in multilectics not merely a logical system but a civilizational orientation adequate to the challenges of the twenty-first century. The dominant civilizational logic of modernity has been binary: East versus West, nature versus culture, development versus underdevelopment, reason versus superstition. These binary frames have generated enormous productive energy, but they have also produced enormous destruction — environmental, social, epistemic, and spiritual. Multilectics as a civilizational logic would cultivate the capacity to hold multiple, heterogeneous, and sometimes contradictory positions in productive tension: to see the world as a complex ecology of perspectives; to value the richness of difference rather than seeking its resolution into sameness; to think in terms of webs, networks, assemblages, and rhizomes rather than hierarchies and binaries. The question of climate change requires multilectical thinking that holds together scientific knowledge, Indigenous ecological knowledge, economic analysis, political philosophy, and ethical theory without reducing any of them to the others. The question of global justice requires multilectical thinking that holds together the perspectives of the Global North and the Global South, of states and social movements, of present and future generations, without resolving them into a single, dominating perspective.

6. Objections and Limitations

6.1 The Objection from Relativism

The most common objection to any logic of multiplicity is that it collapses into relativism: if truth is perspectival and multiple, then any position is as valid as any other, and critical discrimination becomes impossible. This objection mistakes perspectivism for arbitrariness. The claim that all knowledge is perspectival does not entail that all perspectives are equally valid. Some perspectives are better informed, more internally consistent, more attentive to the evidence, more sensitive to the voices of those affected. Multilectical logic does not abandon the evaluation of perspectives; it insists that this evaluation cannot be done from a view from nowhere but must be done from within a web of relations, with humility about its own situatedness.

6.2 The Objection from Practicality

A second objection holds that multilectical logic is practically unusable. Decision-making requires clear choices; action requires determinate positions. Multiplicity, on this objection, is a luxury of the seminar room that cannot survive contact with the need for decision. This objection confuses complexity with paralysis. Multilectics does not claim that all decisions must await the resolution of all relevant perspectives. It claims that decisions are better — more just, more effective, more sustainable — when made in awareness of the full complexity of the relational field rather than by artificially reducing it to a binary. Moreover, the history of

political catastrophe is largely a history of the violent simplification of complex social realities into binary oppositions. Multilectical politics is not indecision; it is the discipline of thinking before deciding.

6.3 The Objection from Formalism

A third objection holds that multilectics, as developed here, is not yet a genuine logic — that it lacks the formal precision of a logical system and the tools for the systematic evaluation of arguments. This objection has merit, and this paper acknowledges it as a limitation. What has been offered is a philosophical framework for multilectical logic rather than a formalized logical calculus. The development of a fully formalized multilectical logic remains a task for future research. Promising avenues include paraconsistent logics (which allow for the productive coexistence of contradictions), fuzzy logics (which allow for degrees of truth), and category theory in mathematics (which provides tools for the formal analysis of relations rather than objects). The philosophical framework must precede the formalization; the conceptual ground must be prepared before the formal edifice can be built.

7. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the history of philosophical logic can be understood as a progression through three phases: formal logic, dialectical logic, and multilectical logic. Each phase has been adequate to the problems of its time; each has been superseded as the complexity of reality outstripped the logical resources available for thinking it.

Multilectics is the logic adequate to postmodern reality: a reality characterized by irreducible multiplicity, complex non-linear relations, emergent phenomena, and the incommensurability of different perspectives and epistemic traditions. While postmodern philosophy has been the philosophical field in which multilectical thinking has developed, no postmodern philosopher has achieved a systematic articulation of multilectics as a formal logic. The task of this paper has been to offer such an articulation, identifying the key structural features of multilectical logic: multiplicity over binarity, relational ontology, non-linearity and emergence, situated truth, productive tension without synthesis, and the multiplicity of negation.

Multilectics is not merely a logical system; it is a philosophical foundation for a New Enlightenment — one that inherits the Enlightenment's commitment to reason, freedom, and universal human flourishing while transforming each of these commitments in light of postmodern, feminist, decolonial, and ecological thought. A New Enlightenment grounded in multilectical reason would be committed to multipolar rationality, situated universality, ecological embeddedness, decolonial plurality, and democratic complexity.

The New Enlightenment is not a project waiting to be inaugurated; it is already underway, in the fragmented, dispersed, and often contradictory struggles for justice, recognition, and sustainability that define our present moment. What it lacks is a logic — a coherent framework of reasoning adequate to its complexity. Multilectics aspires to provide that framework, not as a final answer but as an opening: a beginning adequate to the unfinished task of thinking the world in all its irreducible multiplicity.

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