THE CUNNING OF “AWAKENING”: A HEGELIAN READING
OF BENJAMIN’S “DIALECTICAL IMAGE”

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The socialist sees that “finer future of our children and grandchildren” in a condition in which all act “as if they were angels,” and everyone has as much “as if he were rich,” and everyone lives “as if he were free.” Of angels, wealth, freedom, not a trace... where are the conditions for revolution? In the changing of attitudes or of external circumstances? That is the cardinal question that determines the relation of politics to morality.¹

Reading Benjamin’s “dialectical image” within a Hegelian framework illuminates how a narrative of emancipation in Benjamin’s thinking avoids the risk of reducing “awakening” to a mere formula. Benjamin’s analysis of dreaming in Convolute K of the Arcades Project echoes Hegel’s critique of the understanding (Verstand) as both expose the indifference that conceals contradictions and sustains the status quo. Consequently, dialectical reversal and awakening—key concepts in Convolute N, “On the Theory of Knowledge and the Theory of Progress”—appear as forms of Hegelian sublation (Aufhebung), or overcoming.² Does Benjamin offer a promise, or even hope, of human emancipation?

In the Arcades Project, Benjamin dissects the nineteenth century, tracking the optimism of the enlightenment and the ideal of economic progress promised by the emerging capitalist system. Writing between the two world wars, he questions what the nineteenth century has produced: poverty, failed revolutions, humans reduced to commodities, coupled with spectacles of wealth, comfort, and convenience. Neither the promise of economic prosperity nor the dignity for human kind has been fulfilled. Benjamin, thus, sees that a reevaluation of the “dreams” of the nineteenth century is in order. How do those mighty and haughty ideals “sanction” such failure? How do they persist, so indifferent to the reality that incessantly repudiates them? And which
surreptitious “dreams” do indeed form the present; which hidden interests are the genuine driving forces of history as it unfolds? The nineteenth century was oblivious to the real makers of its present, because the legacy handed down to the next century, to coming generations, has been precisely that of the failing ideals of the nineteenth century.

Benjamin’s new historical materialism is an attempt to uncover these two forms of indifference: the indifference of abstract ideals and theories to lived reality, and the indifference of the many particular interests, which are indeed making our present, to one another. Benjamin’s analysis reveals the first form of indifference in dreams that do not find expression and thus lack agency, and the second in dreams that find expression without the acknowledgment of and responsibility for their agency. Both forms of dreaming, as attitudes of indifference, attest to a lack of political agency. Theories of progress that read historical development as conditioned on universal ideas (such as reason or freedom) or on economic necessity exemplify the first form of indifference. Such an understanding of history either trivializes the political act of “choosing our values” (since we choose as we must) or makes genuine political agency impossible (as we are the pawns of a necessary unfolding). On the other hand, theories of market capitalism and liberal democracy that regard civil society as the sphere where individual needs and desires clash and are negotiated exemplify the second form of indifference. To view the present as an arbitrary outcome contingent on individual choices that simply happen to have transpired precludes any overarching account and robs humanity of any collective agency. Such a framework reflects humans as isolated individuals, doing what they see fit or best, as if their freedom were absolute and their definitions of a meaningful and successful life existed in a vacuum. Such a view also abolishes political agency because, insofar as each person is living in and for his own little sphere, he can claim to be innocent of and refuse to take responsibility for the resulting order.
The legacy of the nineteenth century is marked by this effacement of political agency in the midst of an alleged championing of subjectivity and freedom.\textsuperscript{4}

Benjamin employs dialectical thinking to expose the contradictions of the nineteenth century. His thinking begins with a suspicion of indifference, which exposes the contradictions between and within ideas and lived reality. The recognition of such contradictions is the recognition of a dialectical reversal, such that a particular interest plagues a universal ideal, or a valued ideal is the very source of the problems it supposedly solves. The dialectical image is the concrete locus of such contradictions and presents a snapshot of the dialectical reversal: it is the witness of the dialectical movement of thought frozen in an image. The commodity, fashion, the flaneur, the collector, the gambler, arcades, and the angel of history are dialectical images in a “now of recognizability,” a historical-political conjuncture that exhibits the contradictions of the macro in the micro, and vice versa.\textsuperscript{5} Thus, a political temporality rules the possibility of awakening:

Formerly it was thought that a fixed point had been found in “what has been,” and one saw the present engaged in tentatively concentrating the forces of knowledge on this ground. Now this relation is to be overturned, and what has been is to become the dialectical reversal—the flash of awakened consciousness. Politics attains primacy over history. The facts become something that just now first happened to us, first struck us. [K1,2]

Convolute N maps Benjamin’s approach to a new historical materialism through a dialectic of awakening and remembrance. This dialectic is not a method or argument, but rather a
constellation (i.e., the *Arcades Project*) of dialectical images that expose the contradictions of capitalism, both theoretical and concrete, as they mark the nineteenth century.

Benjamin’s analysis is situated within and differentiated from two dominant perspectives on history\(^6\): 1) an orthodox Marxist-positivist historical materialism that analyzes historical development through necessary causal relations; and 2) an idealist universal history that premises itself on the perfectibility of man and progress of mankind. However different and opposed these positions may seem to be—as the former privileges economic facts while the latter stipulates a rational theodicy—both chart a necessary course of historical progress. Perhaps precisely due to this optimism, neither offers an adequate account of the persistence of the status quo. This is, in Benjamin’s view, a catastrophe.\(^7\)

Rather than explicitly arguing for the claim that the persistence of the status quo is a catastrophe, Benjamin makes this critique by illustrating the contradictions of the material reality and self-understanding of the nineteenth century. His methodological choice to not say “but show” does not exclude rational philosophical analysis; it accomplishes precisely that with the added benefit of avoiding a positive/positivist narrative:\(^8\)

> to cultivate fields where, until now, only madness has reigned… (to) forge ahead with the whetted axe of reason… Every ground must at some point have been made arable by reason, must have been cleared of the undergrowth of delusion and myth. This is to be accomplished here (in the *Arcades Project*, and specifically, Convolute N) for the terrain of the nineteenth century [N1,4].

Thus, Benjamin’s rational analysis does not take the form of an exposition or argumentative essay geared to offer us a formulaic result, but rather “cultivates the fields” where that argument
may emerge. “The destructive or critical momentum of materialist historiography is registered in that blasting of historical continuity with which the historical object fist constitutes itself” [N10a,1]. Rather than ascertaining meanings of events or citations once and for all in a narrative whole, Benjamin presents us with their juxtapositions. In accomplishing this task, dialectical images are key, for they exemplify proper “historical objects”: genuine objects of historical analysis and objects with a genuine history of their own, a history that unhinges the dominant understanding of the relation of the present to the past.⁹

In the concluding section of the Exposé of 1935, Benjamin identifies dialectical thinking as the agent of awakening. In this passage, Benjamin refers to Hegel’s idea of a cunning of reason as an early expression of this insight. He writes,

The realization (*Verwertung*) of dream elements in the course of waking up is the paradigm of dialectical thinking. Thus, dialectical thinking is the organ of historical awakening. Every epoch not only dreams the one to follow but, in dreaming, precipitates its awakening. It bears its end within itself and unfolds it—as Hegel already noticed—by cunning. With the destabilizing of the market economy, we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled.¹⁰

Benjamin describes the dialectical image as the organ of awakening. The metaphor of organ suggests that the dialectical image is not just a tool, but the tool of awakening: The particular and the universal, the micro and the macro, coincide as the status quo and its contradictions become alive in the concrete event/image. The self-recognition the image enables is the trigger that awakens the epoch to its own contradictoriness by exposing at least two relations of dreaming:
One, by proving the present to be one of individual dreaming, of oblivion, where individuals have forgotten that they are makers of reality; and two, by proving that the present is the result of a collective dreaming such that it did not come to be “by itself” (through a mechanistic or teleological determination) but was brought forth by the collective actions of the people.

This conclusion connects dialectical thinking, awakening, and dreaming, which are all key concepts in Benjamin’s theoretical framework. The monuments of the bourgeoisie—such as arcades, cafes, antique stores, and world exhibitions—are dream elements, both as objects of fantasy (enchantment of commodity) and as signs of oblivion (devaluation of labor). As objects of fantasy, these monuments express the dream that drives and lulls the striving laborer. As signs of oblivion, these monuments testify to the unquestioned acceptance of the values and results of capitalism, especially the reification labor. Recognizing them as such enacts a dialectical reversal: the monuments turn to ruins. Through the course of awakening, we dream the epoch to follow: a world free of commodity relations. However, the relation is dialectical such that acknowledging the dream of a post-capitalist world is that which awakens us to our present. Given Benjamin’s general skepticism concerning any theory of progress, these emancipatory implications are rather curious. Coupled with this tone, Benjamin’s reference to Hegel’s cunning of reason is difficult to decipher, especially as it stands at the conclusion of the text, which according to Rolf Tiedemann was the outline of the Arcades Project.

Benjamin’s allusion to Hegel invites a reconsideration of the relation between his conception of the “dialectical image” and Hegel’s dialectic. What is dialectical about the dialectical image? For Hegel, the dialectical is the moment of self-contradiction that drives thought and reality to the sublation, or overcoming, of that contradiction. This overcoming results in a new entity—category, idea, law, or institution—that has “corrected” the contradiction
that is its origin and reason. Dialectic as the moment of self-contradiction is thus the reason as well as the impetus for change; it actuates the emergence of the new, and, in Hegel’s philosophy, it is the driving force of freedom in history.

It must be noted that there are significant points of divergence between the two philosophers: Benjamin objects to the Hegelian idea of progress in history that is based on a necessary resolution of dialectical oppositions, and Hegel’s distinction between what is actual and what is merely existent relegates much of the objects of Benjamin’s analysis (such as fashion, architecture, furniture, and figures of the collector, gambler, etc.) to the category of “the rest” which defies understanding and cannot offer insight. However, the parallels between them are striking: Both Hegel and Benjamin attempt to walk the difficult line between positivism and relativism; they both expose the dialectical nature of historical objects and use such exposition to offer an objective analysis of the present; and they both create methodologies for philosophical and political critique that resist a prescriptive tone. Is there a relation between awakening and emancipation, or awakening and progress? This question connects the Benjaminian dialectical image to a narrative of emancipation; it runs the risk of tempering it, reducing it to a formula, and creating precisely the kind of historical narratives Benjamin sought to overhaul with his new historical materialism. Hegel’s idea of a “cunning of reason” might be the unlikely tool Benjamin needed and found.

Hegel’s “cunning of reason” operates at the intersection of necessity and contingency.\textsuperscript{14} Reason fashions its own necessity by positing it as such. Only the willful act of positing reveals the necessity of the event or idea, because that necessity entails a new evaluation of the past (a Hegelian “positing of presuppositions”), a rewriting of the logical development from the new vantage point, with the advantage of retroactive analysis.\textsuperscript{15} Political agency works exactly in this
manner. A particular demand or political agenda is merely particular or arbitrary until it succeeds in the political arena and affects such a restructuring, which changes the context of meanings in such a way (positing the presuppositions) that makes the outcome necessary retroactively. For Hegel, “cunning of reason” represents the necessity and non-arbitrariness of spirit’s rational self-determination. History follows a rational course, wherein the contradictions between the ideals and the reality of the epoch are sublated, bringing forth a new system with corrected ideals and new institutions that express those ideals. This clearly is not Benjamin’s viewpoint, given his critique of reason, progress, and historical causality. However, Benjamin’s analysis of the dialectical restructuring of the present moment (and its history) triggered and fulfilled in the dialectical image is an expression of Hegelian dialectic of retroactive self-determination: “[E]very stage in the dialectical process (like every stage in the process of history itself), conditioned as it always is by every stage preceding, brings into play a fundamentally new tendency, which necessitates a fundamentally new treatment. The dialectical method is distinguished by the fact that, in leading to new objects, it develops new methods” [N10,1]. Thus it is no wonder that, in this reference to Hegel’s idea of a cunning of reason, Benjamin conspicuously leaves out “reason” and mentions only the “cunning” by which every epoch bears “its end within itself and unfolds it.” Benjamin’s cunning is one of a political nature: a call to action, a call to reinterpretation, a call to an awakening that will unhinge convenient narratives that predict, affirm, and sustain the present, the catastrophic status quo.

Benjamin’s analysis of historical objects shares a core element with Hegel’s dialectical analysis of philosophical concepts. That core element is a critique of indifference central to Benjamin’s attempt to rethink historical materialism. Hegel’s analysis of self-determination in the Logic is premised upon the necessity and impossibility of indifference (Gleichgültigkeit).
Hegel argues that the analysis of any object of thought, i.e., the logically real, includes three moments: a) the understanding fixes the object of analysis and situates it in relations of exclusion and opposition; b) dialectical reason shows the intrinsic incoherence of the fixed definitions and relations of exclusion and brings forth their self-sublation; and, finally, c) the speculative moment comprehends the movement as an activity, as the development of the subject-matter itself. The first two moments of self-determining thought—abstraction and contradiction—are marked by indifference. The third moment—speculative self-sublation of contradiction—is an overcoming of indifference.

The critique of indifference results in a dialectical reversal, which is the logical exposition of a contradiction. This takes many forms and shapes in Hegel’s Logic: the universal proves itself to be a particular, the identical shows itself to be the different, the quantitative relation becomes a qualitative one (and vice versa). These movements and relations expose a contradiction because the originally stable meaning of each concept becomes not only conditioned by its other, but it shows itself to be its other. The term dialectical reversal, thus, is remarkably appropriate since dialectic exposes most of our allegedly semantically stable concepts (such as identity—or, the expression that something is identical to itself—) as becoming its opposite.

Thus, dialectic, for Hegel, is not a method to be employed for philosophical analysis, but rather expresses the very nature of existing things, the history of human development, and the dynamic of freedom as self-determination. That which is dialectical cannot be analyzed through a linear, self-contained logic of causality because it lacks a fixed unity (of meaning and reference) and is in a state of becoming, through its ongoing relations with and differentiations from what is other. The recognition and appreciation of the contradictory nature of our everyday
concepts, institutions, laws, even understanding of nature, echoing Benjamin’s “realization (Verwertung) of dream elements,” enacts a critical method. That which is entwined in self-contradiction does not spontaneously annihilate itself. The proof of the self-contradictory nature of reality, or its dialectical nature, is a philosophical-political critique of the status quo.

Unquestionably, significant points of divergence exist between the two philosophers: Benjamin objects to the Hegelian idea of progress in history based on a necessary resolution of dialectical oppositions. Hegel’s distinction between what is actual and what is merely existent relegates much of the objects of Benjamin’s analysis (such as fashion, architecture, furniture, and figures of the collector, gambler) to the category of the irrelevant. However, the parallels between them are striking: Both Hegel and Benjamin attempt to navigate the tricky path between positivism and relativism; they expose the dialectical nature of historical objects and use such exposition to offer an objective analysis of the present; and they create methodologies for philosophical and political critique that resist a prescriptive tone.

To understand and evaluate an object of analysis (whether it be a theory, an artwork, a political event, or human action), one must pay attention to its context and take into account what events precede and coexist with it, which ideals and ideas are brought forth in its categorization and evaluation, together with the history and application of those very ideals and ideas. However, what is perhaps overlooked in this attempt at contextualization is the foregrounding of that very object itself. Unless the reason for privileging one object (or question, or policy, or even quotation) over others is made explicit, inquiry will be limited by the object’s unquestioned givenness. As Benjamin writes, “It is said that the dialectical method consists in doing justice each time to the concrete historical situation of its object. But that is not enough. For it is just as much a matter of doing justice to the concrete historical situation of the interest taken in the
One can do justice to “the concrete historical situation of the interest taken in the object” by uncovering and/or owning up to the political framework that drives and defines the interest. In Benjamin’s own words, the aim of dialectical analysis is “To treat the past (better: what has been) in accordance with a method that is no longer historical but political. To make political categories into theoretical categories…” [O°,5]. The interest is never just about the partial, or the particular, but always has a dream (a “North Pole” [N1,2]) that drives it. It is this implicit ideal which needs awakening.

Thus, for Benjamin, nothing is irrelevant, nothing is indifferent, and everything should be taken into consideration. This principle guides his collection of citations, images, objects, figures, and theories in the Arcades Project, a project that perhaps never was meant to be completed. Benjamin invokes the “necessity of paying heed over many years to every casual citation, every fleeting mention of a book” [N7,4]. These citations and fleeting images are not a motley set of curiosities, but rather the treasures of a collector; that is, they bring together seemingly disparate objects and ideas exposing a new order. In the beginning of Convolute N, Benjamin states his guiding principle:

Comparison of other people’s attempts to the undertaking of a sea voyage in which the ships are drawn off course by the magnetic North Pole. Discover this North Pole. What for others are deviations are, for me, the data which determine my course.—On the differentials of time (which, for others, disturb the main lines of the inquiry), I base my reckoning [N1,2].

Benjamin’s task is to find the implicit stakes or hidden interests, i.e., the North Pole, that surreptitiously drive and inform philosophical and historical analysis. In Convolute K, he identifies this North Pole as the oblivion of the nineteenth century: “a spacetime <Zeitraum> (a
dreamtime <*Zeit-traum*>) in which the individual consciousness more and more secures itself in reflecting, while the collective consciousness sinks into ever deeper sleep” [K1,4]. This is the key moment in Benjamin that exposes the two forms of indifference and their mutual dependence. As individuals increasingly “enjoy” an apparently enlarged sphere of private life, participating in an emerging public sphere, judging art, or following fashion, they more strongly embed themselves in the cycle of consumption, leaving the status quo to itself. Reflection loses its critical potential, because the individual seeks its unique personality “in the tritest, the most obvious, the closest” [K1,2], in a world of commodities. There is no point in political action, because nothing is “critical” anymore, the system is given, it has its own laws of development, and the individual has no contribution to the things that matter. The positivism of the previous perspective and the relativism of an unruly multiplicity feed off of each other:

The nineteenth century: singular fusion of individualistic and collective tendencies. Unlike virtually every previous age, it labels all actions “individualistic” (ego, nation, art) while subterraneanly, in despised everyday domains, it necessarily furnishes, as in a delirium, the elements for a collective formation… With this raw material, we must occupy ourselves—with gray buildings, market halls, department stores, exhibitions. [K1a,5]

The indifference of the world of commodities to human ends and suffering justifies a form of relativism with respect to human values. Any challenge to the status quo or to the developmental histories is relegated to arbitrary opinion in the hands of a system, assured of its success and value. However, the concrete, material elements of the present express truths that go beyond the merely subjective: The monuments become ruins, signs of wealth expose the price of poverty,
dialectical reversals are the proofs of the contradictory nature, not merely of this or that event or thing, but of a system and a time.

Lifting the indifference of particularity, finding the universal in the particular, and exposing the objective course of history in the subjective interest is one form of dialectical reversal. The second form of dialectic reversal is the critique of the indifference of abstract universals, of historical accounts in general. This is carried out by discovering the privileged particular in the abstract universal. The claim that nothing should be left aside as irrelevant implies that we must not take for granted the relevance and significance of the objects, theories, and so-called facts and truths that enjoy unquestioned acceptance. As Benjamin writes, “It may be that the continuity of tradition is mere semblance. But then precisely the persistence of this semblance of persistence provides it with continuity” [N19,1]. The indifference to the false account permits the false to keep its veneer of truth. But, in the case of an interpretative or purely conceptual category, such as a tradition and its authority, believing that tradition is authoritative makes it so, even if the authority, or continuity, in Benjamin’s example, is questionable.

It is also necessary, then, to provide the counterpart of the first methodological rule, that everything is relevant: The persistence of the skewed dominant perspectives and the persistence of the status quo will be exposed, and exposed as a catastrophe. Benjamin asks:

What are phenomena rescued from? Not only, and not in the main, from the discredit and neglect into which they have fallen, but from the catastrophe represented very often by a certain strain in their dissemination, their enshrinement as heritage.”—They are saved through the exhibition of the fissure within them.—There is a tradition that is catastrophe. [N9,4]
This perspective allows Benjamin to make the paradoxical statement “that things are “status quo” is the catastrophe” [N9a,1]. Rather than seeing the present as the positive step towards a promised future that is always already at work in the making of the present (a linear teleological account), Benjamin asks us to see the present as the culmination of a past, a past that only becomes meaningful as it gives up its futural (has-been) hope in our failed present. What is Benjamin’s new historical materialism? “[W]ith the intensity of a dream, to pass through what has been (das Gewesene), in order to experience the present as the waking world to which the dream refers” [F°,6], Benjamin writes,

It is not that the past casts its light on what is present, or what is present casts its light on what is past; rather, the image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. [N2a,3]

For Benjamin, as for Hegel, the main question is not whether this constellation grasps the heart of the matter, or truth as such, or the essence, or what the thing is in itself. For there is no constant, stable, such truth to be found: the event being understood cannot be severed from all that it is used to explain. The event’s significance is not singular and ascertainable once and for all, but rather evolves as it is incorporated into changing narratives.

For Hegel, the question is whether such analysis allows us to see our present as self-determined: owning up to the causes of our present means positing them as reasons. This self-understanding, on our part, is crucial for our self-determination because it allows us to either affirm our present as self-willed or change it. Benjamin’s call to situate the interest and form a
new constellation that is politically self-aware is an appeal for renewed and critical self-understanding, like Hegel’s, but more importantly a call for political agency. What is at stake is the ability to break into the dream narratives, to rescue the historical objects from two opposing but complementary forces: the forgetfulness of irrelevance and the authority of tradition.

Like Hegel’s dialectical moment, Benjamin’s “dialectical image” houses contradiction. However, the moment/image does not bring forth its necessary sublation; rather, it is the site of a momentary awakening: It is the clashing and seemingly impossible unity of dream and wakefulness, of the past as history and the past in its “Now-being.” The image is the place where the apparent opposition of the fictional and non-fictional, the historical and the political, both emerge and disappear. The dialectic involved in the image is not one that results in a restful unity, an overcoming of contradiction: It is rather the exposition of the contradiction in its magnified form.²¹ It is the container/locus of the process of becoming that switches the fictional into the non-fictional, and vice versa.²² It shows the dream in what is concrete and shows the concrete to be a dream: “Progress has its seat not in the continuity of elapsing time but in its interferences” [N9a,7].

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2 Walter Benjamin, Arcades Project, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) [K6,4]. Hereafter, references to this text are cited within square
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brackets by convolute number.

3 Benjamin’s new historical materialism has the following methodological principles: “1) the historical object is that for which the act of knowledge is carried out as its “rescue.” 2) History decomposes into images, not into narratives. 3) Wherever a dialectical process is effected, we are dealing with a monad. 4) The materialist representation of history entails an immanent critique of the concept of progress. 5) Historical materialism supports its procedure on the foundation of experience, common sense, presence of mind, and the dialectic” [N11,4]. In my essay, I interpret Benjamin’s “monad” as similar to Hegel’s “concrete universal”: a “concrete universal” is a substantive whole that contains both the abstract principle and the particular in a dialectical unity, as truly bivalent—affecting each other and restructuring meaning.

4 Benjamin’s clearest and most systematic exposition of the duplicitous simultaneity of individualism and privacy coupled with mass servitude and disenfranchisement is in the 1935 Expose: “the amorality of the business world and the false morality enlisted in its service” (5); world exhibitions that “open a phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted… surrenders to its manipulations while enjoying his alienation from himself and others” (5); “the ruling class makes history; that is pursues its affairs… the private individual, who in the office has to deal with reality, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions” (8).

5 “The image that is read—which is to say, the image in the now of its recognizability—bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded” [N3,1]. Awakening is contingent upon a critique of the present that cannot be subsumed or subverted into the very narratives that sustain the status quo. Reading an image, recognizing the kernel of the present in an image, is a momentary affair; it is an event that requires protection from corrupting interpretations. Benjamin’s fragmentary style is a tool of deterrence.
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regard to its form, the logical (das Logische) has three sides: a) the side of abstraction or of the understanding, b) the dialectical or negatively rational side, and c) the speculative or positively rational one. These three sides … are moments of … every concept or of everything true in general” (§79). “The dialectical moment is the self-sublation of these finite determinations on their own part. … Hence, the dialectical constitutes the moving soul of scientific progression” (§81 and Remark).

14 “The particular interests of passion cannot be separated from the realization of the universal. … The particular has its own interests; it is of a finite nature, and as such, it must perish. Particular interests contend with one another, and some are destroyed in the process. But it is from this very conflict and destruction of particular things that the universal emerges… It is what we may call the cunning of reason that it sets the passions to work in its service” (G. W. F. Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 89).

15 “In order for a part of the past to be touched by the present instant <Aktualität>, there must be no continuity between them” [N7,7].

16 “It may be considered one of the methodological objectives of this work to demonstrate a historical materialism which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress. Just here, historical materialism has every reason to distinguish itself sharply from bourgeois habits of thought. Its founding concept is not progress but actualization” [N2,2].

17 The Arcades Project, p. 13.

18 See note 12 above.

19 For example, Hegel writes on this dialectic reversal of identity and difference: “Essence is pure identity and inward shine only because it is negativity relating itself to itself, and hence by
being self-repulsion from itself; this it contains the determination of distinction essentially” (§116).

20 *The Arcades Project*, p. 13. See also “The new, dialectical method of doing history presents itself as the art of experiencing the present as waking world, a world to which that dream we name the past refers in truth” [K1,3].

21 “The Benjaminian “dialectical image” has as many levels of logic as the Hegelian concept. It is a way of seeing that crystallizes antithetical elements by providing axes for their alignment… (Benjamin) charts philosophical ideas visually within an unreconciled and transitory field of oppositions that can perhaps best be pictured in terms of coordinates of contradictory terms, the “synthesis” of which is not a movement toward resolution, but the point at which their axes intersect” (*The Dialectics of Seeing*, 210).

22 Benjamin uses the term “what has been” instead of “the past” to foreground this process of becoming.

**WORKS CITED**


