

# THE SURVIVAL OF THINGS

---

ELOISE COVENY

A thesis/dissertation submitted to  
Auckland University of Technology in  
fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil)

**2015** | SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

11	ABSTRACT
14	PRELUDE
18	LIST OF CAST
23	INTRODUCTION
28	1994 - UPON BEGINNING A REPEAT VIEWING OF THE LAND BEFORE TIME
31	2015 - AN EARLY RECORDING OF MY INSTALLATION
39	CHAPTER ONE - PASTNESS
40	1.1 ARCHIVES AND HISTORICISM
	The archive
	Out-siding official archives
	The time of historicism
	Out-siding official histories
49	1.2 BENJAMIN'S HISTORICAL MATERIALISM
	Anachronisms
	Distance and loss
54	1.3 REPRODUCTION
59	CHAPTER TWO - PRESENTNESS
59	2.1 COMMODITIES AND OBJECTS OF DESIRE
	Modern allegory
66	2.2 DIALECTICAL THINKING
	Constellations
	Benjamin's physiognomics
70	2.3 THE DESTRUCTIVE CHARACTER
72	2.4 THE UNCANNY
	The bell
77	CONCLUSION
84	BIBLIOGRAPHY
90	DATABASE OF IMAGES

# ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: .....

Date: .....



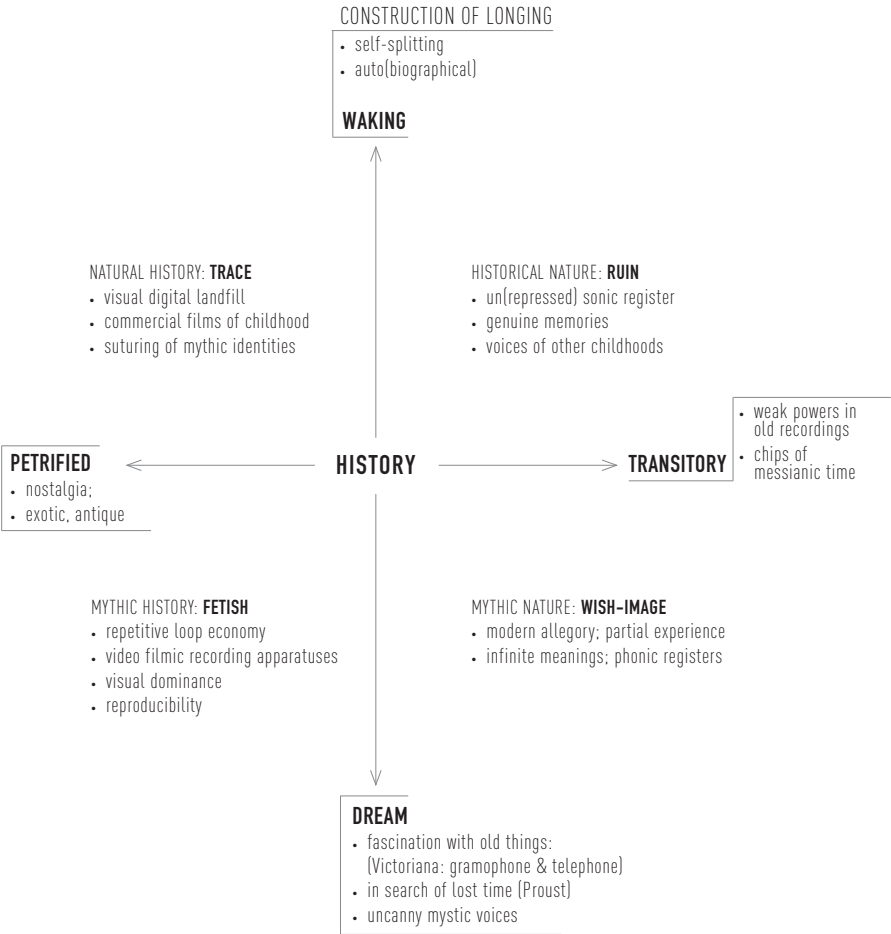
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly I want to thank my supervisors, Maria O'Connor and Amanda Yates, for your guidance and support throughout the year. I also want to thank my family and my friends who have supported me through thick and thin; you know who you are. I could not have done this without you all.

Thank you to my dear friend Rod Cornelius for your kind generosity, and many thanks to Harold Barton and the wonderful technicians at the AUT 3D Lab.

Lastly I want to thank Gábor Mihucz, your unrelenting love and support shan't go unrecognised.

# ABSTRACT



*How might a sonic archiving installation practice produce conditions of history other to orthodox narratives of time? What might a Benjaminian “destructive character” today make of analogue and digital archives for producing uncanny encounters within chips of messianic time?*

The above dialectical image maps out my research site. At my crossroads stands History proper and historical

ambiguity—spoken as ‘I’, my site inscribes difference in archiving *things* from Victoriana inspired moments, filtered through a girl from Auckland, New Zealand circa 1980s and 1990s (culminating most poignantly in 1994). My installation practice evokes particularly voices materialised through sonic forces aided through photographic, filmic, and recording apparatuses and their representational modalities. These sonic forces material my artistic research practice as a *historic figure existing within me as an artist-researcher figuring out (my) different narratives*. I employ *myself* here as a type of *destructive (Benjaminian) figure*, making radical sonic interventions as historic otherness appear to me to bring to ‘light’ Walter Benjamin’s conceptual historic materialism of time as: *the true picture of the past; time at a standstill; moment of danger; ambiguity; dialectical image that is pregnant with tensions; uncanny limits to ourselves*. I unpack these radical expressions of time and history—that are marked out above in my dialectical image; my site of research—through the following exegesis. I figure my practice (my self) dangerously between the dominance of orthodox archiving narratives to specify an acute ‘familiar’ moment—say 1994 (*1994: Time-space encounters between digital forces and analogue ghosts*). I read my project as the dialectical image above and hope that one can better understand this site increasingly throughout the reading of this exegesis. This understanding of time at a [dialectical] standstill is taken from the philosopher Walter Benjamin. This time of arrest is counter to linear time that is often posed as the dominant voice throughout historicism [discourses] (i.e. writing history) that marginalises other voices and other experiences. My practice works within this site of investigation to privilege lost voices that explore a longing for historical *authenticity*—where the location of authenticity lies in its alterity, in what is distant to the present time and space.<sup>1</sup>

Benjamin practices [destructive] lyrical configuration through the modern allegory, which I here explore through my practice in the form of anachronistic spatial configuration (installation) as a method for [sonic] archiving. The anachronistic structuring of my installation tests activate dialectical tensions that *speak* to us of the

---

1. Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 139-40.

---

hidden voices repressed by the orthodox structure of things; through juxtaposing and rupturing orthodox histories via my relations to things in the world. This has become in part an autobiographical tenor that lyrically composes my exegesis and installation as a methodology. It does this bearing in mind the viewer’s independence, where my own *autos* is largely heterogeneously fractured into the archival installation final exhibition aiming for uncanny registers that can only be designed by the ‘hand’ of *weak messianic power* (Benjamin).

My *sonic* forces mapping out the research aims of this installation archiving practice are inspired primarily by the work of Walter Benjamin’s concept of Messianic time in relation to historical materialism. My artistic research has focused in on relations of voices through time; voices that have spoken to me throughout (auto)biographical encounters with artefacts; things that continue to return and inhabit me more so than I realise. These things are speaking to me *now, here; at a crux moment* of a self-splitting between some fantasy *autos* of my biography, and yet they are shot through with the voices of those philosophers I am engaging and their *autos*. In this sense, my artistic material and precedence gather around the literary, poetic, and mystical voices of others (people, antiques, commodities, spaces, places, photographs, films and other textual forms of archival material). The images that make up my work emerge from the imagination, now brought to the fore through these textual methodological encounters that inspire my way through. In this sense, my practice appears on the surface to be voiding the proper of art historical practitioner precedence, and yet in this way I have followed an *authentic* (unorthodox) path that is akin to the *destructive character* Benjamin evokes. The images of others sit below this surface only to rise uncannily in the strange present that this time evokes. The concept of the *uncanny*, guided by voices of Martin Heidegger, Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin, open up my mystical moments for installing such an encounter of *strange time* as a *survival of things*.

## PRELUDE

It is confounding when the moment you discover that the subjects of your longing desires growing up as a child were engineered by the powerful manipulating machines of late-capitalism, you had but no control out of your own meagre emotional defences and openness to the world. I can trace back these palpable moments of dissatisfaction through the origins of such things as films, images, and sounds. The fetish loop economy that was capitalised by the video home system (VHS) during the 1980s and 90s in New Zealand started what I would only now come to realise as a long-winded sense of loss activated by unfulfilled promises of my fetish desires. In this sense, children's films (and television series) present a danger that has accelerated premature habits of commodity consumption since Walt Disney began producing children's films in 1937. Perhaps Disney himself is largely responsible for the acceleration of consumerism throughout the twentieth century, since children are of all but the easiest targets of such emotional manipulation. I developed frequent obsessions with Disney films as a child that consumed me emotionally to all ends. Not only would I watch a given film repetitively, but I would also surround myself with its commercial appearances (commodities) as an attempt to close this gap between real life and the fantasy world of the fetish economy. Nostalgia is enamoured by this distance of loss (of this gap between past and present, reality and fantasy), it nourishes my *longing*, strengthening my impetus to locate some manner of historic *authenticity*. This nostalgic manifestation [of longing] telepathically materialises in my practice as a method of testing this gap for its limits of unification, and in expressing my sense of pathos from a distance (of empathy and longing). For example in reproducing Walter Benjamin's childhood reading box I was attempting to close the gap between

---

2. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 263.

---

Benjamin and I in order to understand him, when in fact I was able to understand his genuine ethos only after I had attempted and failed to close this gap. The sonic reveals *other* historic moments, which I have attempted to release as chips of messianic time. As a practitioner who has privileged the visual register (i.e. in working with photographic and filmic mediums), other registers [such as the sonic] are repressed due to visual domination. Cryptically and compellingly, it has been the sonic moments that have undone me. I have learnt through this project to *hear* differently; to see differently through sonic registers. The sonar has become my uncanny marker for revisiting without returning to dominant voices of history. Hence my installation archives the sonic in the form of a *compositional score*, through the juxtapositions I curate. Throughout dialectical tensions, I experience the uncanny traces of my own repressed *reverberations*—genuine memories—as disembodied experiences of past and present, voice and image. My installation does not promote notions of fixed or homogeneous (linear) narratives; it summons one's own production of heterogeneous (non-linear) narratives [that are shot through with chips of messianic time<sup>2</sup>] upon hearing those *authentic* voices through the ability to lose oneself from orthodox ways of knowing.

## EXCAVATION AND MEMORY

Language has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium. It is the medium of that which is experienced, just as the earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the "matter itself" is no more than the strata which yield their long-sought secrets only to the most meticulous investigation. That is to say, they yield those images that, severed from all earlier associations, reside as treasures in the sober rooms of our later insights—like torsos in a collector's gallery. It is undoubtedly useful to plan excavations methodically. Yet no less indispensable is the cautious probing of the spade in the dark loam. And the man who merely makes an inventory of his findings, while failing to establish the exact location of where in today's ground the ancient treasures have been stored up, cheats himself of his richest prize. In this sense, for authentic memories, it is far less important that the investigator report on them than that he mark, quite precisely, the site where he gained possession of them. Epic and rhapsodic in the strictest sense, genuine memory must therefore yield an image of the person who remembers, in the same way a good archaeological report not only informs us about the strata from which its findings originate, but also gives an account of the strata which first had to be broken through.

—Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings IV*

LIST OF CAST

LEADING PROTAGONISTS

GRAMOPHONE

Materials:	Re-stained dark oak gramophone box with lid-stay Plywood insert with burgundy velvet ribbon pull-up tab Projector Mini Mac Digital moving-image Electrical power board
Features:	Back-lit silhouette Illuminated projection surface Projected digital moving image of rotating record to-scale Hand that appears to reset the record then disappear Analogue and digital “His Masters Voice” logo overlay Repetitive cyclic movement Silence Flickering shadow on effacing wall

PROJECTED DIGITAL IMAGE ON WALL

Materials:	White wall Projector Mini Mac Electrical power board Digital moving-image
Features:	Small projected moving image in circular shape on wall in colour Stillness, however with extremely subtle movement (i.e. record moving) Woman dressed in period clothing Contemporary digital sound recording studio Documentation of recording process Silence Durational fading of image to nothing until it gradually reappears slowly over time restoring to its brightest state

TELEPHONE

Materials:	1918 Ericson wind-up standing telephone Installed live-feed microphone with 60 second delay FX Movement sensor Arduino + code Various electronic components fitted in a blonde plywood box with a transparent perspex cover Edison filament bulb (E27) Electrical power board
Features:	Telephone has black body with wooden feet (one restored), a pick-up hand-held receiver with speaker in ear piece and original analogue ringing bells  Telephone rings abruptly during one’s consumption of the gramophone in the adjacent corner of the room  Ringing of telephone activated by the movements of the interlocutor in the room  Suspended lightbulb dims and brightens in tandem with the telephone ringing and as one lifts the receiver off hook  Sound/Audio – listening to the delayed sound of your own footsteps; your own spoken voice

ADDITIONAL CAST

READING BOX

Materials:	Mahogany (African Sapele) reproduction of the reading box [Lesekasten] once belonging to Walter Benjamin as a child  Calico rag  Display case with diagonally slanted slide-in glass panel  Matte black and white fibre-based photographic print of Benjamin’s original reading box  90-volt miniature light bulb with battery pack
Features:	Beautifully crafted box with meticulous detail and measured to scale of original  Alphabetised letters of the German alphabet in <i>Schwabacher</i> font screen-printed with black ink on coaster board  Smell of tung oil and cinnamon leaf oil

COLLECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Materials:	Lightbox
	Six pairs of white cotton gloves, two pairs in each size (small, medium and large)
Features:	Glossy black and white fibre-based photographic prints: European series shot on 35mm Kodak colour film printed in black and white (some painted by hand using photographic colour dyes), reprints of old negative glass plates dated circa 1900 (some painted by hand using photographic colour dyes), Victorian portrait series in various sizes of a young woman dressed in costume (some are long-exposures that reveal little precise detail), miniature prints of the interior of a cinema theatre
	Matte standard print colour photographic prints: European series shot on 35mm Colour Kodak film
	Bright emanating white glow from light box
	Fibre-based prints are silhouetted as they are spread out on the surface of the light box
	Minor visibility through the fibre-based prints
	Clear visibility through the standard colour prints, overlapping these prints creates visible overlay

ANTIQUE MUSIC BOX PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

Materials:	White wall
	8 x matte black and white fibre-based photographic prints shot on medium-format Ilford 120 film with white borders around each image
Features:	A photographic representation of a collection of antique music boxes in New Zealand

SINGING GRAMOPHONE

Materials:	Re-stained dark oak gramophone box with lid-stay
	Ply-board insert with burgundy velvet ribbon pull-up
	MP3 player
	Mini portable speaker
Features:	Quiet sounds of audible singing wafting up like the scent of an irretraceable perfume

OLD BOOTS

Materials:	A pair of old black ankle-high boots
Features:	An old spread of a German newspaper; <i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i> dated Tuesday 23 December 1975
	Lived relic of my wanderings throughout the city of Berlin over three years

MINIATURE BENCH

Materials:	Blonde plywood miniature bench
Features:	Designed for a child or a hunchback to sit on
	Invites a subject to view the world from a low height

ARCHIVE VIDEO FOOTAGE

Materials:	Backlog digital footage recorded over the year 2014: locked off shots from different angles of New Zealand bush (shot in Russell), locked-off durational shots of ferry journeys—shot in Auckland from the Downtown Auckland Ferry Terminal to Devonport from the front of the ferry (daytime), and shot in the Bay of Islands from Russell to Paihia from the rear of the ferry (night time), footage of the AUT Postgraduate quarters; my studio desktop space, an HMV model 107 gramophone playing a record (Peter and the Wolf)
	Backlog of digitally recorded sound over the year 2014: sound recordings of Swiss made antique music boxes dating back to 1830—brought over to New Zealand by early English settlers, and a digital recording of Edison’s early monologue addressing the “New World” from a phonograph wax cylinder

## INTRODUCTION

It is a valuable process to reflect upon in what eras we spent our youths, what was most defining for one's emotional and sensory development. It has been a daunting task to recount the relations I developed early in life that would be crucial in influencing my relations to the world later in life. As I was born in the mid-1980s, my childhood spanned over the 1990s and into the new millennium. To reflect on this era growing up in New Zealand (largely representational of a typical western or highly American influenced Anglo-centric upbringing of this time) is to reflect on the commodities of this time; such as the influences that film, television and early digital interfaces had on my upbringing. What is becoming only recently clear to me is the nature of such relations I had with these powerful tools of commercial media consumption at such a young age, and how this has affected my current relations to the world today as a young woman now living in Western society.

What Charles Baudelaire recognised as empathy towards the commodity (Buck-Morss), has since magnified almost beyond recognition. The way Walter Benjamin recounts his Berlin childhood and the objects that he had intimate relations with—such as his reading box—exemplify an *amplification* of empathy towards things. What the emergence of the commodity has done is extend our propensity to empathise with the realm of object and consumption. We live in a world of things through which we manifest fetish desires that are strategically engineered through the fetish economy. The fetish economy has intensified over the past century with powerful social force that it is perhaps the greatest social phenomenon of capitalism. The fetish here is a manipulative force. It conditions the appearance of things—typically commodities—in having a powerful



effect on us; it arouses seemingly palpable desires within us that appear satisfiable upon a thing's consumption. And, through such behavioural patterns that follow this fetish *disorder*, lasting habits and obsessions can form. As a child growing up in the 1980s/90s, the excitement aroused in me by commodities—such as films and television—gave way to the most enlightened moments within the scope of childhood experience. I was consumed by the fetishistic loop economy of visual stimulants; I would watch films repetitively, and by doing so, I was strengthening what fetish-driven desires would wish to transcend the gap between the real world and the fetish world (i.e. fantasy world). So, the force of the fetish controlled my desires; I was a slave to the fetish. My installation plays out the power dynamics of the fetish as an emancipatory reconciliation between my figure as artist-researcher now and my figure as a child growing up in the 1980s/90s.

Where this project initially began as identification with the past in the realm of romanticised aesthetics, it has become, in fact, an amplification of my own narratives through my own self-experience of reading things. My emotional relations and responses to things herein structure my being in the world. This initiative has mobilised a search of some form of historical *authenticity*—genuine memory, however through an identification with my own narratives I have begun to understand this project in light of its initiative; that of being 'in search.' Much like Marcel Proust's opus *In Search of Lost Time*, I find myself instead heading in search for *authenticity*. Although unlike Proust, I have grown up in late capitalism in the digital milieu. Proust is a well-known novelist and literary figure throughout literary discourses on memory, and we can access his official biographical narratives through the Internet. Although ironically, these readily available, mass-published orthodox narratives of Proust's life contradict his unique study on the essence of genuine memory—or *involuntary* memory—that contradict orthodox notions of history-telling. Proust's delightful story of the Madeline cake exemplifies his notion of involuntary memory. When he is shocked by a sudden, unexpected sensation of pleasure (isolated and embodied experience),

he later realises it was triggered by his memory of the Madeline cakes his aunt Léonie would give him before mass on Sunday mornings as a child. These moments of involuntary memory that shock us are uncanny as they take over us when we least expect them to. Proust's profile today within the digital age is brought to a *crescendo*; his statuesque significance appears larger today than it ever was before. I can read narratives on Proust through both i) official narratives that I find through meta information databases [such as the Internet] and ii) *authentic* narratives experienced by him alone that are expressed through his use of language in his novel *In Search of Lost Time*. So in light of Proust's "search" I am thus reflecting on my own lived-experiences upon my encounters the world of things, and how I have arrived at this point of being in search for *authenticity* now.

As a young girl, I was emotionally drawn to things; particularly the films I watched (such as Walt Disney's *The Lion King*). These films consumed me, as I equally consumed them. I would obsess over a film for months, sometimes years, then to obsess over another. I would long to escape the real world by withdrawing into the fantasy worlds of these films; they were exciting and eternal (hence I could repetitively watch them over again, reliving the same moments exactly the same every time). Such modalities of technology as the video home system (VHS) during the 1980s and '90s allowed me to watch films and recorded television shows repetitively, so I could continuously re-live them. They were as eternal worlds, perennially exciting. The fetish loop economy that was capitalised by these modes of technology gave rise to a dominant narrative structure for capitalist modes of framing one's imagination; giving rise to fetishist habits that automatised children's entertainment from this era onwards. This economy inevitably left me feeling disappointed and dissatisfied as a child, as the film and other commodities failed to deliver on their promises (the emancipatory promise of the fetish) that so left me feeling lost and disembodied; I was not able to transcend the real life with the fantasy world of the film. I was left feeling as hollowed out as the commodity, and I

became a very frustrated child, for this reason. However, my ongoing efforts to amalgamate the two worlds (between reality and dream) never did cease out of my longing. I will demonstrate how this has also come to influence my fascination with the past through my relations to things, particularly to old things.

What is helpful to consider here first is how I myself relate to the digital object, as it may lend an insight into a collective empathy towards the digital; particularly so perhaps for those growing up in the latter quarter of the twentieth-century and after. We live in a highly digitised environment now where the transient nature of digital production and interface is in constant flux. The digital subject can be at the same time everywhere, and yet it can disappear irretrievably without a trace. The digital is at the same time real as it is virtual. Digital technology and innovation is always revealing “new”; always emerging and yet quickly disappearing—ending up buried in the rubble (landfill) that is humanity’s backyard. This is in the name of progress. As a result of this quickening pace at which systems function now, all things seem to have become temporary, somewhat fleeting. The consumer’s dependency upon instant gratification within late capitalism gradually increases as the external pressures upon production and performance also increase. So, consumers consume more and production lines produce more. It is a diabolical state of affairs really, and it is, after all, the pre-determined fate of capitalism. Do we ourselves feel more like transient beings as a result of the ephemeral nature of the digital and the temporary nature of things in general? If so, then empathising with the digital would leave me feeling helpless and, perhaps, rebellious.

To use Susan Stewart’s words, “Within the development of culture under an exchange economy, the search for authentic experience and, correlatively, the search for mediated and abstracted, the lived relation of the body to the phenomenological world is replaced by a nostalgic myth of context and presence. “Authentic” experience becomes both elusive and allusive as it is placed beyond the horizon of present lived experience, the beyond in which the

3. Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 133.

4. Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 255.

5. *Ibid.*, 261.

antique, the pastoral, the exotic, and other fictive domains are articulated.”<sup>3</sup> Here I begin my search for historical *authenticity* through Walter Benjamin’s dialectical image (see figure 1), as the “true picture of the past.”<sup>4</sup> Stewart’s notion of authentic experience seems to be that which is distanced from the present. For example, I may glorify the antique as something belonging to mystic origins that bears witness to the authentic [as an alterity]. So it would seem the authentic here can be something self-engineered through a longing or desire. Benjamin’s version of historical *authenticity* is an experience of time at a standstill, which he refers to as the now time of recognition [Jetztzeit].<sup>5</sup> Through my search for authenticity in the past, Benjamin’s philosophy here points me towards liberating the now; that is, liberating myself now from my past self. To say if neither the past nor the present [era] attests to authenticity, then what is an authentic experience and how is it to be located in late capitalism? This project attempts to dig up what *authenticities* speak now and of the past (such as genuine memories) through the psychic register of my work, dialectically composed by the sonic modalities of an archiving installation practice. The sonic here has the ability to yield those “long-sought secrets” while secreting my own site of empathy.

Throughout this exegesis I will take you through my research journey as a series of tests and narratives that have engendered moments of discovery and also moments of failure that have enabled my search for *authenticity* (for genuine memory), beginning with a secret composition as *my past*.



---

# 1994

## UPON BEGINNING A REPEAT VIEWING OF THE LAND BEFORE TIME

With the VHS tape in my hand  
I push it into the VCR recorder  
Through the slot  
Waiting  
As it mechanically slides in  
I'm excited  
I lie down on the carpet  
With my feet  
Facing the television  
Resting my head on my left arm  
As I lie on my side on the floor  
As I wait in anticipation for the film to begin  
I'm apprehensive because  
I must watch through  
This horribly upsetting  
Scene when Littlefoot's mother dies  
The beginning is always  
My favourite part  
As it's exciting  
At the beginning of the journey  
Just as I am at the beginning of the film  
I have the entire film to look forward to  
The beginning of  
Any one of these films  
It is always exciting  
And yet I know that  
Soon the mother is going to die  
And it is going to break my heart all over again  
But I'll watch through it  
As hard as it may be  
The film is starting  
I see this holographic image  
'Universal'  
Gosh, this brings back so many memories

This washed out image of Saturn  
It reminds me of *E.T.* or *Star Wars*  
It reminds me of my childhood  
My mother  
And just how comfortable I am in my little world  
In the little world of this film  
Where I can get lost  
Inside this world  
I would like to remain in this little world  
This image reminds me that I am about to watch  
Something very heartbreaking  
This underwater scene  
In the introduction  
And the music  
It is very heartfelt  
Very grand  
Very delicate  
It reminds me of childhood innocence  
I feel sad already  
Because the music reminds me  
Of the sadness that will soon be encroaching  
For Littlefoot and I when his mother dies  
This is a world  
The world in the film  
It's a world  
No less real than the world in which I live in  
It is an ecosystem  
Just as in our world  
I still feel  
Like I'm anticipating  
This entire adventure before me  
The entire film  
That is already beginning to unfold in front of me  
But mostly  
I am anticipating the death of Littlefoot's mother

I feel as though I could also be in *The Neverending Story*  
The atmosphere is similar  
The colours and the terrain are similar  
It is as if it is completely disconnected from this world  
The real world I live in  
Although it is a safe haven  
Somehow threatening but at the same time familiar and  
Comforting  
This world it feels sheltered  
The voice of the narrator  
Is gentle  
Like a grandfather  
Sounds just like a storyteller  
It already feels ...  
It is very sad  
Because I know that these dinosaurs no longer exist  
...  
Every single one of these scenes  
I know it  
I've seen it so many times  
The movements  
The speed  
The characters  
They are children just like I am  
And my role is Littlefoot  
The longneck  
It is also my favourite dinosaur  
They are the most elegant of the dinosaurs  
The most gentle  
The most relatable

---

# 2015

## AN EARLY RECORDING OF MY INSTALLATION TESTS

As I step into the room  
As I close the door  
It shuts behind me  
The room is rectangular  
And I am down one end  
The right-hand end  
The floor is cold vinyl  
Mottled with uniform circular reliefs the size of  
Old fifty cent coins  
As I look around the room  
I see three concentrations of light  
Two lit up objects  
And a projected image on the wall  
Down the far end of the room there appears to be an  
object  
A box-like object placed on the ground  
About the size of a domestic bird cage  
But it is solid  
Like a television monitor from the 1980s  
And behind it  
Obscured from our view  
There is a light shining onto the box  
I can see only the silhouette of the box  
And the pulsating glowing illumination  
That reflects from the box  
Onto the wall behind it  
Like the reflection from a  
Television screen  
Of a square box  
And before that  
On the right-hand wall half way down the room  
Appears to be a small image that is being projected  
Onto the wall  
So small in fact I would need to be closer in order to see  
What it actually is  
However, it has disappeared now

So I can no longer see  
What it was  
I thought that I had seen  
And just before my eyes directly before the entrance  
Is a wooden construction  
A small table or stand  
That has rested on it  
An old telephone  
I can tell this telephone is old because it has a handle on the side of it  
That requires winding  
By hand  
The telephone is not wall mounted  
Hence, it is a standing phone  
With a receiver  
Much like telephones were up until twenty years ago  
Now I have just noticed the projected image on the wall  
Has reappeared  
As I walk into the space  
It feels very private  
No one can see me  
I feel alone in this room  
As I walk over to the projected image on the wall  
I feel my pace quicken as I wish to examine the image before it  
Disappears again  
I walk up to the wall  
The image has disappeared  
Before my eyes  
Instead, I will go over to this  
Back-lit object  
As I walk over to it  
I must really walk right into the corner of the room before  
I am able to see what  
Is actually on the projected side of this object  
As I approach this object  
I realise that it is a gramophone  
An empty gramophone box  
Like Pandora's box  
There is a record playing on it  
And this record  
This record is visual  
However  
It appears to be a projection  
A digital moving-image projection  
The gramophone is lying on its side  
But why?  
There is no sound

A silent  
Digital  
Gramophone  
With an analogue body  
I wonder what is going to happen  
Will something happen?  
Or something unexpected happen  
This is very strange  
I sit down  
And I watch the record  
Turning...  
...or wait...  
Perhaps when the record reaches the end of its cycle  
Something might happen  
...  
*So silent*  
...  
Oh  
There is a hand  
A hand that is reaching across the record  
And pulling the record arm  
Over to the record  
And starting the record from the beginning  
Placing the needle on the outer rim of the record  
The hand disappears  
The record plays  
...  
I wonder why  
...  
What is wrong with this gramophone?  
What is special about it?  
...  
The record is turning  
I wish I could hear it  
I wonder what song it is playing now  
...  
I believe we have reached the same point  
Where I arrived  
...  
It is so bright  
The projected image  
It is almost just like watching a television screen  
It is just as captivating  
Just as intriguing  
And yet

The video is a repetition  
Of a record turning  
Unlike  
Those scripted television shows that  
Are saturated with movement  
That draw their spectators in  
Only I find myself just as captivated  
Sitting here in this dark space  
On this vinyl floor  
In front of this screen  
Watching this record  
I am becoming gramophone  
I still feel like something is going to happen  
Like I am anticipating something  
It is very fascinating  
I notice a large shadow  
On the wall in front of me  
I get up to move to the middle  
Of the room  
The show forms a  
Big dark castle  
I can hear inside  
The deep hollow concrete echoes  
That bounce from all surfaces  
There is a light on  
That is shining  
Something or someone stirs at night  
This shining light spills light on  
The floor like  
A still lake  
Dark and murky in the night  
There is a  
Disturbance in the castle  
While the rest is  
Fast asleep  
It is in northern Europe  
The sky reflects that  
Dense dark purple shade  
During the European winters  
That remind one  
Of the depths of  
Winter  
Impenetrable windows  
I am looking up  
At the castle from  
The plains below

There are no  
Other domiciles for miles  
...  
I stand up  
And I walk over to the image on the wall  
As I am walking over to the image  
Perhaps as if  
These objects are watching me  
The image appears  
I walk up to the wall  
To get closer to the wall  
This concrete wall is  
Is peppered with indentations  
It looks as if a war has taken place in front of this very wall  
It is very textured  
And yet smooth  
The image appears to be looking into a window  
Looking into a small room  
It is a very small image  
The projector is very close to the wall  
The hues and the colours are beautifully rich  
It is a rich image  
Visually intriguing  
We are looking through a window  
Just looking into a room  
Perhaps as if we were looking into a dolls house  
There is a woman inside the room  
Although  
She is almost out of view  
Since we can see more of the room  
Behind her  
I can see shadows on the walls  
There is a confined space through the window  
And the woman is just merely at the periphery of the space  
She has in front of her a gramophone  
Her right hand is resting on the gramophone handle while  
Her left hand rests on the Wooden frame itself  
The woman stands there still  
It appears to be a still image  
Upon re-adjusting  
To the miniature details of the image  
She appears to be inside a contemporary recording studio  
Where we can see contemporary recording equipment  
Only upon  
Really close recognition  
The record on the gramophone is moving

It is a moving image  
The woman is still and yet  
Now I can see there is some movement  
Very, very subtle movement  
And the image is gone  
Some bells are ringing  
I look to the other side of the room  
Of what could be a fire bell  
Is actually the telephone  
In front of the entrance  
It continues to ring  
Should I go over there and answer it?  
I walk over to the telephone in a hurried fashion  
This telephone is awfully loud  
It is making me nervous  
I walk over to the telephone  
I take a deep breath  
I pick up the receiver  
I place the earpiece to my ear  
And listen  
Hello?  
I speak into the receiver  
...  
I can hear something  
What is it?  
...  
I listen  
...  
It sounds  
Like the scratching texture  
Of a gramophone record  
...  
Perhaps  
What I can hear  
Is occurring  
At the same  
Time  
As is the gramophone record  
That is playing on the other side of the room  
And the gramophone record that is being recorded  
In the recording studio  
...  
Is this not  
The same moment

...  
Is this the same moment?  
Then who is calling me?  
Who wants me to listen to this?  
Why am I here?  
I place the phone receiver down  
It instantly starts ringing again  
I haven't  
Picked it all up  
There is something  
That doesn't make sense here  
Obviously, whoever is calling me  
Realises this  
And  
Would rather that  
I hear something further  
I pick up the receiver  
Put the earpiece to my ear  
I can hear the record  
...  
I can hear the record  
There must be something else  
Perhaps I should wait  
...  
Okay  
I can hear the hand  
The hand is winding up the gramophone  
Perhaps the record will begin to play  
...  
I wish I could bring the telephone  
Over to the gramophone  
So I could experience them both together  
But I can't  
The telephone is  
Stuck  
It is wired here to the wall  
I can't possibly listen to the audio  
While at the same to watch the gramophone record turning  
I cannot  
See them at the same time  
Why is that?  
Why must I experience them separately?  
...



## CHAPTER ONE | PASTNESS

I have always been fascinated by the past; the aesthetics, the smells, the sounds, the secrecies; the other-worldliness. It is as if there is still yet so much to be explored and discovered. We are simply left with material traces of the past, objects and documents that herald to past times, events, and individuals who have left their mark in time. But how we come to understand these traces is mostly mediated by the official commentaries that claim to obtain superior means of historical interpretation; they write fixed narratives on histories that are likely skewed or they represent only one fraction of those involved in the actual events that took place. So we are left with archives containing purified objects and documents of “cultural value” that have been consigned to the authorities; that is, archons and their representative institutions (Derrida). Historical objects of consigned value (artefacts) are here serialised using scientific data that map the physical properties of artefacts. Through resisting these official modes of history telling (i.e. archives and historicism), I have here conducted my own study of the past in search for its *authenticity* through the sonic register that is otherwise repressed throughout official narratives of history. I have collected technical objects that I have come into contact with, either accidentally or intentionally, those that have stirred within me a particular curiosity or longing. I have studied these objects by *listening* to them and testing them for their reproducibility; reproducing them digitally and analogously. Through re-contextualising these mechanical-digital machines as installations and spatial configurations, the tensions they activate leave behind their uncanny traces. I set out to awaken them so as to *hear* them.

Benjamin’s concept of historical materialism offers me an entry point into the heart of his philosophy of history. As his philosophy involves amalgamating philosophical,





theological, and political tendencies, it requires some openness to the mysticism that it so prescribes as a result of the “*weak* messianic power” that we have inherited since the dawn of capitalism. Since the emergence of the commodity, our mystical powers have increased. Benjamin’s historical materialist locates the *authenticity* of the past within his or her encounter with a dialectical image—upon which experience the dialectical image flares up in a moment of danger, never to be seen again. Benjamin’s dialectical image here determines those encounters that we have when a register of some kind, such as a sight, smell, or sound etc., has the ability to instantly propel us on a journey; a narrative of some kind, or an involuntary memory. The historical materialist’s experience of historical authenticity would seem to be in moments when time enters time as a spatial register of entry, where experience rises up through heterogeneous triggers, fracturing any simple notion of linear existence. This “true picture of the past” or now time of recognition [Jetztzeit] is a dangerous moment that is *other* to the safe house of the official historian’s knowing of history. Hence, it is a time and space structured by a linearity of causal narratives: a linear structure of homogenous, empty time that is filled in with causal events. Depending on with whom the historian empathises will naturally determine those causal narratives that are prioritised. Hence, the classic hero male causal narratives dominated our school history books.

1.1 ARCHIVES AND HISTORICISM

With the help of Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin, I have formulated a partial introduction on the origins of the archive and historicism. I have inquired about the role the archive performs within the context of the authorial role of the institution, and how the archive influences and determines official discourses of history-telling (historicism). As Benjamin would argue, it is important to question these roles prior to any means of honest criticism. So I will begin here with my reading of Jacques Derrida’s introduction to the origins or *arkhē* of the archives from his book *Archive*

6. *Arkhē* is the Greek term for one’s “beginning” or “origin”

7. I am referring here to the fundamental principle of the *arkhē* as that which donates laws.

8. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1.

9. *Physis* is the Greek term for “nature”

10. *Thesis* is the Greek term for a “proposition” or “statement”

11. *Tekhnē* is the Greek term for “technology”

12. *Nomos* is the Greek term for the “law”

13. *Ibid.*, 1.

14. *Ibid.*, 2.

15. *Ibid.*, 2.

16. *Ibid.*, 2.

17. *Ibid.*, 3.

18. The archon is one who rules: e.g. the lord or magistrate; he who controls the archive.

19. *Ibid.*, 3.

*Fever*. And from there I will introduce you to Benjamin’s view of traditional historicism, taken from “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”

THE ARCHIVE

Derrida begins his introduction to *Archive Fever* with the etymological origins of “archive;” the term *Arkhē*<sup>6</sup> as a nomological principle.<sup>7</sup> Derrida suggests that *arkhē* “names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, things *commence* according to nature or history and also law, and things *command* according to authority where social order is exercised. Hence *arkhē* embodies more than one opposition; namely those “between *physis*<sup>9</sup> and its others, *thesis*<sup>10</sup>, *tekhne*<sup>11</sup>, *nomos*<sup>12</sup>, etc.”<sup>13</sup> As Derrida points out, the meaning of archive “comes from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded.”<sup>14</sup> Those citizens who represented any such political power were held responsible for representing the law. Hence, official documents were entrusted to those individuals, who would file and store these documents in their homes (i.e. private or family home). These politically powerful individuals were thus also responsible for interpreting the archives. Hence, the archives both officially represent and impose the law. According to Derrida, “...this domiciliation (house arrest), this place where documents or artefacts dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public.”<sup>15</sup> Derrida goes on to say that, “[w]ith such a status, the documents, which are not always discursive writings, are only kept and classified under the title of the archive by virtue of a privileged *topology*.”<sup>16</sup> So there appears to be a *topo-nomology* intersection between the place (*topology*) and the law (*nomology*) that constitute the archive as a place of “election where law and singularity intersect in *privilege*.”<sup>17</sup> The “archontic function” (i.e. the function pertaining to the archon<sup>18</sup>) involves not simply the gathering of documents but also their unification, identification, and classification that Derrida names “the power of *consignation*.” The power of consigning also involves “the act of *consigning* through *gathering together signs*.”<sup>19</sup> *Consignation* here aims at drawing

together a “single corpus” as a system through “which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration.”<sup>20</sup> So at which point does this *topology* and the *nomology* and the process of *consignation* by the archontic become instituted? Derrida asks, “[w]hat comes under theory or under private correspondence, for example? What comes under system? Under biography or autobiography? Under personal or intellectual anamnesis? In works said to be *theoretical*, what is worthy of this name and what is not?”<sup>21</sup> I ask myself: in what order of things can we have assurance, if any?

I believe this is important to remember as official archives are structured by conditions of curation (i.e. consignation) by those obtaining hereditary powers and influence (such as the institution). This was particularly important for Benjamin, he incessantly criticised the hereditary nature of official discourses throughout his literary work. Benjamin’s literary work, his style of writing and his uses of allegory and ficto-biography etc., enables a reading of his work that remains in keeping with his philosophy of history; as reading his literary work becomes an experience where the production of ambiguities play out for the reader, particularly through sound. Sonic tensions are produced through the juxtaposing *sounds* of his vocabulary—as one reads one can *hear* the palpable nuances that *speak* to one another, generating tensions and ambiguities that stimulate the reader’s sensibility. His literary work invites me through multiple readings that he archives through the materiality of his language (I *hear* associations in his words that juxtapose and draw narratives to mind), further mediated by my own lived experience. Hence, this literary force resists the laws of fixity structuring official modes of history telling. My installation archives *sonic* registers through activating paradoxical tensions through the juxtapositions that structure one’s personal encounter with the work. There is no grand fixed or prioritised narrative to my installations, they invite *authentic* narrative encounters (genuine memories) through the repressive sonic registers and psychic economy of my work, leaving behind their uncanny trace. This site of excavation that I mine here today—the fetish-loop economy, the mass production of commodities, and

20. Ibid., 3.

21. Ibid., 4-5.

the acceleration of speed and demand belonging to the late-capitalist manipulation machine—brings to the fore those archons (gatekeepers) and profiteers of this system who currently control this site of my excavation; such as Apple, Sony, Samsung, Bill Gates, Walt Disney, 21st Century Fox, BBC, His Masters Voice (aka HMV, to EMI, to RCA Records...) etc. Since the era of my birth, Neoliberal forces seem to be accelerating us on a path of destruction, now an unstable social-economy increasing economic margins of inequality and global warming. Although being within a “liberal” system, I feel a loss of liberty due to increasing work-economic pressures and decreasing standards of living. Benjamin criticises the long line of historic victors (those of the ruling class) as being economic profiteers, inflicting long-winded oppressive conditions on the masses throughout the course of history. For Benjamin, in order to redeem the oppressed past we should first liberate the *now*. So in order to redeem my childhood, I must first liberate myself now through the very excavation of this *site*.

Derrida goes on to question the *Freudian signature*; that is, “on the concept of the archive and of archivization, which is to say also, inversely and as an indirect consequence, on historiography. Not only on historiography in general, not only on the history of the concept of the archive, but



perhaps also on the history of the formation of a *concept in general*.<sup>22</sup> So in referring to the *Freudian signature*, he is questioning what is in-between the name Sigmund Freud and the invention of psychoanalysis (which is in itself a “project of knowledge, of practice and of institution, community, family, domiciliation, consignment, ‘house’ or ‘museum,’ in the present state of its archivization.”<sup>23</sup>) This is to say that Freud’s former ‘home’ and manuscripts have become a site worthy of archiving. The archive essentially has an institutional and conservative function which “posits and conserves the law”<sup>24</sup> through what Benjamin would call the “violence of a power (*Gewalt*).”<sup>25</sup> The archive itself is a form of violence: “as archive, as archival violence.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, the archive commands the power of economy as a capitalisation of memory. Derrida asks us: where does the outside of the archive commence? For Freud, the printing press was an archiving machine that unnerved him as he felt he must produce revelatory new analyses of psychoanalysis worthy of archiving (i.e. in passing it on *to the press*), otherwise his work would essentially amount to wastage unworthy of archiving. The Internet is also an archiving machine that has shifted the nature of publishing today into a culture of self-publishing the everyday, private to public. The democracy of knowledge that is made available to us intensifies our speed and haste of knowing. Through this process, we lose our democratic *voice* slowing down to a pace that would allow us more time for critical thinking and creative processes. Svetlana Boym would argue here that nostalgia today is activated through our longing for a slower rhythm of time where we would have more time to think critically. Anyone who has an Internet connection can publish information online creating a gigantic vacuum of information. However, as international governments have begun to seize power of the Internet as a propaganda machine, the Internet as archiving machine poses an even greater violence or threat to our democratic rights.

#### ***Out-siding official archives***

I find it is interesting here, as in Freud’s case, the way that mass reproduction produces a method of “archivization”; as if something that is reproduced *en masse* must be considered

---

22. Ibid., 5.

23. Ibid., 5.

---

24. Ibid., 7.

25. Ibid., 7.

26. Ibid., 7.

worthy of archiving. The rise of mass reproduction in Freud’s (and Benjamin’s) time produced an increased anxiety. Freud felt an unnerving urgency to produce *current* material (research that would essentially determine or measure his worth). However, this is a temporal *disorder* because being current does not necessitate the finest work since urgency is added to the equation. This also suggests that worth is measured *en masse* and not in terms of quality and minutiae. Despite psychoanalysis—a new science that Freud establishes to study the symptoms of everyday life and its perversities—Freud ironically becomes caught up in the machine of this archiving disorder.

It is worth considering the sound archive, given that recorded sound and the mass-reproduction and distribution of audio did not occur until this rise in mass reproduction from the time of Freud and Benjamin (late nineteenth to early twentieth century). I have been attentively and carefully *listening* to the sonic register throughout my practice, conducting various tests that involve reproducing recorded sound from analogue to digital form. For the first-time, our voices became disembodied from our bodies with the invention of the early sound-recording machines and the telephone. The record disembodied our voices by cutting out a live performing scenario and stitching it to a material substitute that could be purchased and brought into the home to play on loop—*His Masters Voice* for instance. Hence the record and the gramophone are archiving machines as they activate the repetitive loop economy. For the first time, someone is able to record his or her own voice and play it back. Do you remember the first time you heard your own voice on playback? History began to record itself.

Mechanical reverberations imprinted; soundwaves detected, repressed voices; shrilling, quivering vocals, resonating baritones, dutiful harmonies, the storyteller. There is something uncanny about early analogue sonic recordings that I find particularly fascinating. Digital apparatuses record sound according to a set of numerical values that limit the scope of recorded audibility. So there is a liminal sonic register that is unable to be recorded by the digital apparatus, thus repressing it. Freud talks of the uncanny as





being the experience of hidden repressions coming to *light*, it is what reveals the limits of our existence. He suggests that the uncanny is characteristically encountered within the familiar environment—such as the home. The uncanny prescribes a moment of shock when we are overcome by our own self-estrangement or disembodiment. What I am attempting to explore here through the strange juxtapositions and the psychic economy of my sonic archiving practice, is how the uncanny reveals the essential nature of Benjamin's chips of messianic time. Chips of messianic time (as with the uncanny) rupture linear narratives by chipping open *other* temporal moments in historical narratives that enable those voices that have been repressed to speak and be *heard*; hence they yield long-sought secrets that have been severed from all earlier associations.<sup>27</sup>

---

27. Benjamin, "Excavation and Memory"

---



---

28. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 256.

---



---

29. *Ibid.*, 261.

---

## THE TIME OF HISTORICISM

Benjamin writes in his "Theses" that "[t]here is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another."<sup>28</sup> Such that the on-going passage from one victor of history to the next is a bloodthirsty cycle that has not taken place without committing blasphemous acts of brutality. These atrocities, although ignored and kept secret over time, can still be silently witnessed on account of the cultural treasures that *speak* of such brutal atrocities. There is an unspoken history of barbaric violence that lurks in the dark murky waters of past victories. These documents of civilization are proof of such unpaid dues, and they live on as reminders in museums and public archives; on display as bloodstained trophies. Hence, Benjamin warns us to treat every significant historical document of civilisation with the utmost caution, heeding to their archival devices. By whom they have been archived and for what purpose? He suggests we should approach all orthodox manifestos with caution and criticism, we may observe them and *listen* to them objectively in silence.

Benjamin argues that the historian views the course of history as a linear structure that is filled with significant events and causal narratives. He writes "[t]he concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous, empty time. A critique of any criticism of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself."<sup>29</sup> That is to say, that the ruling class relies on the concept of progress, with technological innovation on today's front line. The speed at which technical development occurs reflects accelerated volumes of consumption today. Technical consumables such as mobiles phones, computers, music devices etc. are designed only to fulfil short-term needs, requiring frequent upgrades to ever 'newer' and 'smarter' technology. I find myself unknowingly fostering dependent ties to my mobile phone. It has become my personal gatekeeper, thus letting in only

the elect.<sup>30</sup> As a miniature computer, it is like a small window into my portable *interior*, ensuring the functional cohesion of my everyday organisation. Hence we have come to rely on our mobile phones and our technical devices, in order to keep up with the accelerated pace of production-labour. Thus, as ground-level consumers we are ourselves being consumed by the ruling class.

### ***Out-siding official histories***

As Benjamin critiques the notion of homogeneous [or linear] time (as that of progress) he also suggests a heterogeneous [or non-linear] structure of time that is instead experienced, as one might experience a sudden arrest in time, or an uncanny encounter. Benjamin believed that a true picture of the past can only be experienced within heterogeneous time; hence it is not a spatializing of time, but a temporalizing of space.

---

30. This is an adaptation from Benjamin's quote: "...like a gatekeeper whose job was to admit only the elect." From his text "The Reading Box" in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, 141.

---



---

31. Szondi, "Hope in the Past" in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, 1.

---

If we imagine a fixed path, that of official history, then to wander off the path as one goes on their own independent wanderings is to allow oneself to truly get lost. Benjamin writes in his childhood memoirs, "Not to find one's way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one's way in a city, as one loses one's way in a forest, requires some schooling."<sup>31</sup> What Benjamin means is that in order to get truly lost, we should first understand what structures (what paths or city streets) we are straying *from*. My project explores this terrain of heterogeneous time [as history] through the sonic register of my work that *attunes* to those repressed voices that have been *silenced*. The tensions that arise through the strangely juxtaposed objects of my installation psychically activate or invite one's own production of narratives stimulated by genuine memories that brush official histories against the grain. My installations advocate wandering.

### **1.2 BENJAMIN'S HISTORICAL MATERIALISM**

Benjamin's notion of historical materialism is adapted from Marxist origins, only he presents us with a theological counterpart that is represented by the image of the disguised automaton playing chess in the introduction to Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History." This puppet dressed in Turkish attire named "historical materialism" is being controlled by an expert chess-playing hunchback sitting inside, guiding the puppet's hands by use of strings. The hunchback, who is the puppet's theological counterpart, possesses the required mystic powers to win every game of chess, and yet he must stow himself from sight. This image of the automaton demonstrates Benjamin's incorporation of separate official schools of thought. He believes they often have much in common and much assistance to offer one another. For instance, the Marxist and the Jew both wish to redeem the oppressed past. Benjamin suggests that we have each inherited a "*weak* messianic power"<sup>32</sup> from past generations as "there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one."<sup>33</sup> The historical materialist understands history as belonging to heterogeneous time where he or she encounters a historical

---

32. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 254.

---

33. *Ibid.*, 254.

---



subject dialectically in the form of a monad. A monad, for Benjamin, is formed in the moment “[w]here thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which is crystalizes into a monad.”<sup>34</sup> This heterogeneous configuration (like a constellation) presents us with a dialectical image, which Benjamin argues is the true picture of the past that flits by in a moment of danger, and this danger never ceases to loom over us. Benjamin iterates that “[i]n every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, I sense dangers, many dangers, and I believe that many people do today. Particularly those dangers immediately before me that threaten my liberty, they also threaten the survival of *authentic* art practice. After three years living in Berlin I returned to Auckland just one year ago—to the city of my birth<sup>36</sup>—where I would carry out this MPhil research. Much like any return home, I was at once surrounded by those *things* from my past that stirred familiar sights, sounds, and smells connecting to former identities. Having lived in financially stressful conditions for three years in Berlin, I owned very few possessions and rarely did I indulge in something that was not out of need. Upon my return to Auckland I was confronted by a highly driven consumer culture, particularly in the way television and other commodities are readily consumed (the mall culture for instance). I found this disturbing as I was at odds with myself; while on the one hand I was satisfied being impoverished, and yet on the other I was enticed by the temptations that offered themselves to me—those small indulgences that present themselves in the comfort of one’s mother’s home. This made me feel very ill-at-ease as a power play took place between my self-consciousness and my fetishistic desires that had newly awoken. This marks the site of a true picture of the past—a now-time of recognition—as I return *home* from Berlin, revisiting the ghosts of Auckland that have come out of hiding; thus reproducing all the power plays of consumer culture and my crises concerning my longing/belonging. This is a monad *pregnant* with tensions; me as an impoverished child-adult in Auckland.

---

34. Ibid., 263.

35. Ibid., 255.

---



---

36. Referring to Benjamin’s monologue in his introduction to *Berlin Childhood around 1900*: “In 1932, when I was abroad, it began to be clear to me that I would soon have to bid a long, perhaps lasting farewell to the city of my birth.”

---



### ***Anachronisms***

Artefacts and all manner of objects, documents, historic traces, etc. can reveal to us the process of nature becoming ruin. This is key for the historical materialist. As things move around in different contexts, they too change in significance. For example, if something is put on display in a glass case in a museum, or it is part of an art installation, it can reveal different physiognomic appearances of something. The gramophone in a museum becomes petrified, like a fossil, whereas the gramophone in my installation becomes a ruin; an historic object isolated from the context of other preserved antiquities beckoning the past, revealing its lived relations to the world *now* through its physical signs of decay in *contrast* to other elements of the installation. The fossil is a form of natural history, and the ruin is a form of historical nature. When things of different pre-contexts are installed together in opposition, this is an anachronism.

If I play a gramophone record from my collection—say *The Bell Song* sung by Amelita Galli-Curci from the opera *Lakmé*—as I *listen* to the singer’s voice floating through the mechanical apparatus, it *sounds* distant and old-worldly to



me. The ruinous signifiers here reveal i) the artefacts of sound within the recording itself (such as faint crackling, softened phonetics, piercing pitches, etc.), and ii) the style of her vocal performance which *speaks* to the fashion of a past era when this style of vocal singing was in fashion (*Lakmé* was first performed in 1883, Paris). If I juxtapose the sound recording of Galli-Curci's vocal performance (now in ruin as it has been isolated from the fetish economy) against the digital-analogue gramophone in my installation, the anachronistic structure activates the dialectical tensions that *speak* to us of the hidden voices repressed by the orthodox structure of things. The sound of Galli-Curci's voice disembodies me from what I see—a gramophone lying on its side with a digital record spinning—I feel disembodied, self-estranged and uncanny. Historical materialists rely on this ability to mobilise things and juxtapose them in order to awaken dialectical relations.

### ***Distance and Loss***

I believe that Benjamin's notion of "*weak* messianic power" is a form of historical consciousness connected to our longing—today commonly expressed as nostalgia. Nostalgia relies on the necessary gap between resemblance and identity, between sign and what is signified.<sup>37</sup> Without this gap between the past and the present (expressed as a form of loss), nostalgia would not sustain itself. Hence, "nostalgia is enamoured of distance."<sup>38</sup> The loss experienced by this gap, which I experienced as a child when I was unable to transcend the real world with the fantasy world of the film, is also materialised through the disembodiment caused by the telephone. The translation of the word *telepathy* means pathos [or empathy] from a distance. This telepathic pathos at a distance becomes spatially and temporally exasperated through my installation as the older technologies that I use frustrate the desires of the audience to physically encounter all the material at once—one must be really disembodied in order to truly engage the work. This is an unnatural disembodiment that leaves its uncanny trace. Hence, loss is privileged not in a nostalgic way, but through the uncanny. In Benjamin's Berlin childhood memoirs, in the passage on his reading box, he writes: "[w]e can never entirely recover

37. Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives on the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 145.

38. *Ibid.*, 145.

39. Benjamin, "The Reading Box" in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, 140.



what has been forgotten. And this is perhaps a good thing. The shock of repossession would be so devastating that we would immediately cease to understand our longing. But we do understand it; and the more deeply what has been forgotten lies buried within us, the better we understand this longing.<sup>39</sup> It is most interesting to come across these words written by Benjamin, to hear him speak of longing in a way is unusual. That said, what I believe is critical for Benjamin here is that we nurture our longing, and we can do this through our natural course of forgetting. My reproduction of Benjamin's reading box is a good example of the sense of loss that I experienced early in my MPhil journey where I attempted to close the gap between Benjamin and I, to somehow uncover an *authentic* Benjamin underneath all the piles of primary and secondary literature. So I went about reproducing an exact copy of his childhood reading box as an attempt to telepathically connect with him through our mutual connection to *things* in order to close this gap. The reading box is particularly significant here as it was the



object of Benjamin's memory [as an adult looking back on his childhood] that aroused the strongest sense of longing within him. It was the object where his initial affections towards the written word originated (in a sense it futures him). To reproduce this reading box today stirred within me excitement and anticipation as *if* I was about to reawaken some dormant mystic powers belonging to Benjamin. It was for me an object of primarily telepathic concerns. And although I was not able to close the gap (between Benjamin and I), it helped me in the initial stages of my project to understand him.

### 1.3 REPRODUCTION

The reproduction of things here is significant when considering the nature of the modern archive and historicity. As Freud emphasises through his perplexity over the archiving machine (of press publishing), the implications

---

40. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 221.

---

41. Ibid., 221.

---

42. Davis, "The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction (An Evolving Thesis: 1991-1995)," 381.

of publication *en masse* promises an on-going survival and significance of a particular work. Benjamin discusses in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" the key effects that mechanical reproduction has on practices of art and the "aura" of a work of art that he believes is lost upon its mechanical reproduction. The aura of a work of art belongs to the presence of its unique existence that can only be *heard* or encountered through the original. That is to say, that an original work of art is subject to a series of different contexts that only the original itself can testify to. Reproduction allows us to meet the original work halfway, "be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record."<sup>40</sup> He writes: "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter."<sup>41</sup> The gramophone in my installation has the propensity to pull its viewers in and stare at it for a substantive duration. It is mesmerising, entrancing, and somewhat addictive. The dark stained oak gramophone box lies motionless on its side, turned facing the opposite corner of the room. Upon approach it reveals to us a luminescent digital record rotating on the inside. It is *silent*, there is no sound coming from it, and yet it is set in a constant motion, illuminated by all the lived life it promises us. I sense the gramophone represses its hidden secrets. The gramophone box (as historical ruin) juxtaposes the ephemeral nature of the digital moving-image in a way that is disturbing and unsettling. These enigmatic tensions reveal a faculty of hidden repressions or uncanniness that have the ability to reveal *authentic* histories (or genuine memory) to us through our *own* uncanniness.

Douglas David in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction" argues that with digital technology there no longer exists the original and the copy; hence, the aura is stretched "into the rich realm of reproduction itself."<sup>42</sup> Davis suggests that the aura resides "not in the thing itself but in the originality of the moment when we



see, hear, read, repeat, revise.”<sup>43</sup> I tested this theory through my attempt to reawaken the aura of Benjamin’s original reading box by reproducing it, however the auratic quality was not so much of the box itself but through the very process of reproduction. Hence, it lies in the anticipation and the excitement that takes us over, and the way we get lost in the process—much like the repeat viewings of my favourite films. The repeat viewing of a film reveals the auratic quality through its exact same-ness; every viewing exactly the same as the last; the same voices, same tones, same images, same duration, everything perfect and saved as the original. The repeat watching of a film bears witness to its reproduction, while it is also being reproduced in my psyche; by re-living the exact same experiences I learn to memorize them which would never occur normally as the lived-experience is generally fleeting. I can still to this day remember every spoken line in Disney’s *The Lion King*, and every word to every song. If the aura should transition from residing in a work’s materiality (Benjamin) to a spatio-temporal register (David) within the digital milieu, then this suggests that there may no longer be such a thing as *original*. My practice tests out this shift in aurality through this spatio-temporal realm of auratic encounter such that heterogeneous time can propel us into multiple, diachronic spatial journeys or narratives. The gramophone and the telephone are contaminated by their lived pasts, they are at odds with the liveliness of their digital counterparts, glowing and thriving like parasites on old *creaky* bodies. Sound is also ephemeral and fleeting, like the digital image we see. Sound is a key device in my practice as it has the power to disrupt notions of fixity and materiality.

---

43. Ibid., 386.

---

## CHAPTER TWO | PRESENTNESS

The present era that is characterised by late capitalism proves its mighty progressive developments-to-date within areas such as technology, global trade, politics, and communication. While being inside this information age, we have also become information ourselves, such that we have also become images, marketable online profiles, and cyborgs capable of projecting ourselves across the globe. I lead an ephemeral existence, fleeting and transient. If I borrow Arthur Rimbaud’s words here, “I is already someone else.” The time of today is now. Through the ongoing substitution of my transient existence into things, they leave behind traces of my misplaced habits whereby I can no longer find myself.<sup>44</sup>

44. An adaptation of Benjamin’s wording in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, 140.

### 2.1 COMMODITIES AND OBJECTS OF DESIRE

In order to begin considering what semiotic relations we foster to things in the world, it is important to consider the Marxist concept of commodity fetishism. If commodities are essentially *things* that are intended for our consumption then the fetish is that which tends to satisfy our desires. The core of the fetish, as that which drives the capitalist accelerants of production and consumption, reveal what psychological and emotional desires we foster towards things in the world. Hence my site of excavation locates the fetish economy as the emotional force that controlled my experiences of commodity consumption as a young girl growing up in New Zealand during the 1980s and 90s. The deep disappointment that I often experienced as a child surfaced when the commodity failed to fulfil its emancipatory promise—the promise of fulfilment via the fetish—leaving me with the sense of loss (that is exaggerated by the commodity). To repress this loss was to return to the fetish and re-live the initial excitement that I desired, imminently



drawing me further into commodity consumption. The fetish controlled me as a child, it won me over; it had me hooked—hook, line, and sinker. As commodities economise on [current modes of] production, their appearances take shape according to the repetitive cycles of fashion. Fashion enables commodities to perennially take on new forms in order to attain a fetish sensibility, through which they acquire novelty as a renewing sense of newness. Benjamin argues that fashion is perpetually new and yet it is essentially an on-going recurrence of the same.<sup>45</sup>

With the increasing ease of mechanical production (manufacturing) that arrived with the grand European arcades (circa 1822-1837), commodities found their new place in shop window displays. Benjamin recounts how as a child he would discretely look into the shop window display of his favourite store on Krumme Strasse in Berlin:

In such twilight the store window promised even more than at other times. For the magic spell, which was cast on me by the undisguised lewdness of the jocular postcards and the booklets, was strengthened by my awareness that I had reached the end of this day's work. What went on inside me I could warily bring home and find again under my lamp. Yes, even the bed would often lead me back to the store and to the stream of people that flowed through Krumme Strasse.<sup>46</sup>

I imagine one day the gigantic shopping malls of the twenty-first century may become, like the arcades, decaying ruins of this consumer epoch. The European arcades were precursors to the modern department store, selling luxury novelty goods of fetish appeal, plunging Europe into, what Benjamin calls, the phantasmagoria. He suggests that with the rise of capitalism, Europe plunged into a new dream sleep that reactivated our mythic powers. This would suggest that these mythic powers (or *weak* messianic power) are established through our relations to *things*, to commodities. I have tested these relations through my test installations, first isolating the gramophone and the telephone from the context of their era. Now that they have lost their former identity as antiques, they are digitally reproduced so that the gramophone no longer needs to be wound by hand,

---

45. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, 293.

---



---

46. Benjamin, "Crooked Street" in *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, 93-4.

---

and the telephone now receives incoming calls. The work is visually captivating and mesmerising at times. Although as for sound-producing machines, I am perplexed by their apparent silence. The sonic is my liberating force, emancipating me from the hold that the fantasy figure of the scopic regime has had on me since my childhood. This is why the visual filmic apparatuses in my installation are so entrancing. The autonomous turning record in the gramophone, turned on its side, reveals my childhood fetish reworked. The record turns repetitively, eternally, without end. Through these tests I have attempted to listen to my historical consciousness through the repressed sonic register that dialectically *speaks* throughout my *compositional scoring*.

As a young girl I would enjoy setting up shops in the living room, I would gather my belongings together and arrange them as a shop window display. However, what I was most excited about was in fact the concept of exchange. That is to say that the excitement was not so much the setup of the shop as it was the moment of exchange, as the point of sale. I would ask family members to pretend to buy things from my shops, and as this was not so frequent I spent the majority of the time pretending, speaking to make-believe customers who would purchase items from me in exchange for artificial money or an expired credit card that I would swipe along the indentation between the keyboard and the monitor of my *SmartStart*. I had a miniature 'pre-computer' called a *SmartStart*, which I pretended was my cash register, and a black plastic tray with separated partitions which I could use as a till, where I separated the different denominations of coins. As I got older, the size of the shops increased and they became more sophisticated. In 1997, when we arrived back in New Zealand after a four-week family trip to the USA, I designed a national park that filled our rumpus room. I had gathered all of my toys, and strategically placed them around the room, as nature parks often do, in keeping with a particular linear path. Each of the toys had an information card describing what animal it was and the nature of its habitat and diet. The critical component to the national park, however, was the souvenir shop, which

was my domain. I would sell customers entry tickets upon their arrival, and then souvenirs on their way out. Much like the small privately owned museums we would occasion upon visiting my Grandmother in Whangarei, such as the *Museum of Dolls* and *Claphams Clock Museum*. Shopkeepers were members of society with whom I held a great amount of respect, and in my eyes, they were among the very elite. Ironically (around the same time or just prior), Margaret Thatcher who introduced some of the first conditions of late-capitalism as British Prime Minister was the daughter of a shopkeeper.

The ability to empathise with the commodity presents a phenomenon that is perhaps *amplified* along with a *crescendo* of capitalist modes of consumption. That is to say, that with a greater accumulation of things comes a finer aptitude to read the world of things. The world of things becomes like a language, a semiotic structure that gives form to a system of values; such as *use value* and *exchange value*.<sup>47</sup> Depending on the specific era of one's youth, which caters to specific systems and modes of production, this has determined how we have each developed an empathetic faculty towards things. For me it was virtual pets, early computer games, miniature plastic figurines, cassette tapes and the VHS that surrounded me in my youth. As modes of technology change, we are now in the digital milieu and those who are ten years younger than me will have a greater proficiency towards newer forms of technology than I will have.

---

47. Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives on the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 6.

---



---

48. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, 186.

---



---

49. Ibid., 187-8.

---

The poet Charles Baudelaire was perhaps the first lyrical poet to express his innermost *authentic* experience of the commodity through the phenomenon of the modern European metropolis. Baudelaire's experiences of the modern metropolis take form through his uses of symbolism and allegory, reflecting the essential nature of the commodity. Baudelaire "empathised himself into the soul of the commodity,"<sup>48</sup> and alternated his characteristic appearances to emulate physiognomies of the commodity. Modern Europe no longer seemed to require poets. Baudelaire takes on the guilt of the commodity when he writes:

Ceaselessly, the devil agitates my ribs  
 Surrounding me like an impalpable vapour  
 I swallow, and sense him burning in my lungs,  
 Filling them with endless, guilty desire  
 ...  
 He throws in my eyes, bewildered and deluded,  
 Soiled garments, opened wounds,  
 And the bloody implements of destruction.  
 —Baudelaire, "La Destruction," *Les Fleurs du mal*

Benjamin responds here by saying: "The 'bloody implements' [*appareil sanglant*], the display of which is thrust upon the poet by the devil, is allegory's courtyard: the strewn implements with which allegory has so disfigured and mauled the material world that only fragments remain as the object of its contemplation."<sup>49</sup> Benjamin beautifully brings into picture these fragmented implements that structure the allegory through a necessary course of destruction. So the modern allegory proposes a destructive method of lyrical configuration that I explore through my practice as a form of archiving and spatial installation, producing conditions of destruction. I put a great deal of attention into laying out the shelves in my bookcase as a young girl. Of the six shelves that my bookcase afforded me, the top two would be reserved for ornaments, trinket boxes, and other miscellaneous items. The middle shelves would be for storing novel sized books, which would allow me the space in front and on top of the books to arrange





other items for display. The bottom two shelves served to store my larger books, those that occupied the entire height and width of the shelves. My bookcase was my display cabinet interior; I took a great deal of pride in arranging it. Once every month or so I would take everything down, only so I could allow myself the pleasure of re-arranging it again; either exactly as it was prior, or testing out a new arrangement.

### **Modern Allegory**

Allegory is a literary device that pre-eminently elicits an experience of the uncanny for the reader. Allegory both reflects and imbues one's apprehension towards the impermanence of the world that is conditioned by our own uncanniness as self-estranged beings in the world. Benjamin suggests that reading a modern allegory is to experience the world from its inner perspective—as Baudelaire did—which he describes as experiencing the corpse from the inside. If the allegory here essentially alienates us beyond our own comprehension (reflecting on the essential nature of the commodity), then Baudelaire's allegory offers us here either an inner experience of the modern subject within capitalism, or a passage into becoming ourselves commodity. The allegory is uncanny as it is already self-estranged; it has the propensity to alienate us from our own knowing giving us the experience of our own disembodiment. The way that our voice becomes disembodied from us through the telephone and other methods of technical sound recording leaves its uncanny traces on us. For Baudelaire the souvenir emblemises this inner world of the allegorical experience. The souvenir authenticates the past while it discredits the present.<sup>50</sup> This gap [of loss] that the souvenir embellishes signals the nostalgic play “between the present and an imagined, prelapsarian experience, experience as it might be ‘directly lived.’ The location of authenticity becomes whatever is distant to the present time and space...”<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the dearest souvenirs for me as a child were film soundtracks. I would play a film soundtrack (such as Disney's *The Lion King* or *Pocahontas*) on my cassette recorder in my bedroom on repeat; I would learn every word to every song off by heart. I would memorise the entire soundtrack by heart as

64

50. Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 139.

51. *Ibid.*, 139-140.

52. Nerds were a branded form of confectionary that became popular in the 1980s. They came in a box containing two separate compartments with a different flavour in each. These miniature, hard-coated rock-type sweets were flavoured like sour sherbet.



an exact copy. I have always been drawn to film soundtracks as they have always provided me with the audio-landscape through which I could re-live the atmosphere of the film through my imagination. Over the past year I cannot count how many times over I repetitively listened to the film soundtracks of Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski's films; composed by Polish composer Zbigniew Preisner. I initially came into contact with Preisner's music as a child as he composed the soundtrack to a beloved film of mine, *The Secret Garden*, which I saw at the cinema with my mother. I remember during the film screening I was eating Nerds<sup>52</sup> in grape and strawberry flavour. Following my viewing of the film, I established a *real* secret garden, demarcating it with a paper key and lock that I stuck to a tree using clear tape. Unfortunately, the garden belonged to our neighbours.

For Benjamin the modern allegory is a method of destruction *par excellence*, as it elicits a more *authentic* experience of the world compared to the Baroque allegory, which prioritises the romantic symbol aiming to fulfil a totality. Hence modern allegory discloses the lack of fullness of the world (as with the commodity) through a disembodiment reading experience. Things themselves (including symbols) here become allegorical pointing outside the borders of the text for interpretations other than eluding to any proper meanings. As Benjamin suggests, “Allegory consists of an infinite network of meanings and correlations in which

65

everything can become a representation of everything else, but all within the limits of language and expression.”<sup>53</sup> The modern allegory is essentially unfulfilling (like the commodity) as the gap between form and meaning opens up to reveal an independency that no longer weds the two together. I believe this is a liberating state of acceptance however, as we can acknowledge the finitude in our ability to know, and this releases us from the bonds of the orthodox knowing machine. In doing so, we can allow ourselves to truly *listen* to the past through the uncanny registers.

## 2.2 DIALECTICAL THINKING

From this epoch stem the arcades and interiors, the exhibitions and panoramas. They are residues of a dream world. The realization of dream elements in waking is the textbook example of dialectical thinking. For this reason dialectical thinking is the origin of historical awakening. Each epoch not only dreams of the next, but also, in dreaming, strives toward the moment of waking. It bears its end in itself and unfolds it—as Hegel already saw—with ruse. In the convulsions of the commodity economy we begin to recognise the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled.<sup>54</sup> —Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century.”

Dialectics offer us a way of seeing and thinking “... through the ambiguity attending the social relationships and products of the epoch. Ambiguity is the pictorial image of dialectics, the law of dialectics seen at a standstill.”<sup>55</sup> Dialectical thinking is key in our ability to detect hidden connections and engage genuine memories residing in the repressed *reverberations* structuring our being in the world. Dialectically, we experience distinctions between signs and signifiers in the form of narratives and mental images (i.e. Benjamin’s dialectical image). Dialectical images forgo any fixed, pre-determined meanings; we encounter them through the experience of our own narratives. The delights of the pioneer village for me as a child, for example, privileged two critical sources of dialectical inspiration: the aesthetics and the olfactory. The olfactory, particularly, would elevate me into a world of self-writing narratives, that is, the narratives that would instinctively unfold upon

53. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, 236.

54. Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” 162.

55. Ibid., 157.

56. Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History*, 27.

my initial encounter with something. This [phenomenon] is what Benjamin calls our mimetic faculty, for we dialectically encounter sensory stimuli (as in a constellation) through which we instantaneously and intuitively realise connections that enable us to produce our own narratives. My own mimetic process of reproducing Benjamin’s reading box is a prime methodological artistic experience. The scents that are produced by the colonial timbers in the pioneer village or the pioneer town mock-up would have been conditioned by years of treatment using traditional wax recipes that include natural beeswax and vegetable oils. My installations encourage one’s dialectical engagement with the work in order that one can *hear* his or her *own* voice (or genuine memories) that can be heard only when one is able to lose oneself in the music.

### *Constellations*

Benjamin’s concept of the constellation refers to our primeval skill to be able to recognise similarities between star constellations (the cosmos) and life on earth. This forms the origin of our mimetic faculty. What began as our ability to read constellations of stars has transitioned into language; that of reading and writing. This skill is also what informs our ability to see and think dialectically, as it relies on our ability to recognise instant connections between things. Benjamin says that, “...it is to writing and language that clairvoyance has, over the course of history, yielded its old powers...”<sup>56</sup> suggesting to me that our inherited weak messianic power is a returning historical consciousness. The constellation here is allegorical as it metaphorically stretches beyond any borders, demonstrating any number of paradigmatic relations. The light that we receive on earth from a star reaches us already from the past; it arrives as a trace of destruction. Hence, reading star constellations is a form of reading or witnessing the past and the present colliding within a configuration where we are at once able to recognise those fleeting connections that reveal themselves in an instant—in a “flash of lightning.” Benjamin’s concepts are metaphors that can be narrated in any number of ways. They are mobile; hence, they can shift around and take refuge in different narratives.



### Benjamin's Physiognomics

Benjamin's interest in the physiognomy of things—as a way of characterising things—influenced his critical observation of things through the eyes of a storyteller. A physiognomy of something is like a caricature, an exaggeration of one's poignant characteristics or appearance. On 25 February 1930 from 18:00-18:25 local time, Benjamin delivered a radio broadcast on Radio Berlin's "Youth Hour" called *Daemonic Berlin* in which he described E. T. A. Hoffmann's phenomenal ways of observing the physiognomies of Berliners that meandered all corners of the cityscape. Benjamin says, "Hoffmann was less of a seer than an observer, which is a good synonym for physiognomist."<sup>57</sup> A German Romantic fantasy-horror storyteller, Hoffmann is known for writing *The Sandman* in 1817, which Freud exemplifies when analysing on the uncanny. Freud argues that it was not the in/animate doll 'Olympus' with whom we feel uncanny, but the 'Sandman's' desire to poke out children's eyes. I remember one of my early encounters with an uncanny sense of dread as a child when I was first read the book, *Grandad's Gifts* by Paul Jennings. The story tells of a boy who finds a dead fox in his wardrobe. The boy wishes to bring the fox alive, so he feeds it lemons from the lemon tree growing on top of his grandfather's grave outside their house. After some time, the fox miraculously awakens, coming to life. The fox has lemons as eyes, for he has been

57. Benjamin, "Daemonic Berlin" in *Radio Benjamin*, 26-27.

granted the ultimate gift of sight from the boy's buried grandfather through the lemons. The uncanniness of this story responds both to this deadlife-force that has seeped into the soil from the dead grandfather, contaminating the lemons, as well as the fox that now has lemons for eyes. The latter frightened me the most as a child.

The gramophone and the telephone are mystic objects (Benjamin) that respond to their own alienation within the world of things. They are foreign objects as they are wish symbols that arrived too early ahead of their time. Their engineered designs are mechanical, and since we have surpassed the mechanical era of sound and telecommunicating devices, they are but foreign, old-worldly mechanical objects. They were foreign at the time of their conception, and they are foreign to us now. Upon isolating them from their mechanical epoch within the digital milieu today, just as Benjamin's "realization of dream elements in waking," the gramophone and the telephone reveal their *authentic* appearances as mythic symbols emerging from a dream world. Susan Buck-Morss designed the following diagram to represent Benjamin's thinking through the coordinates that map the multiple physiognomic appearances of the commodity:

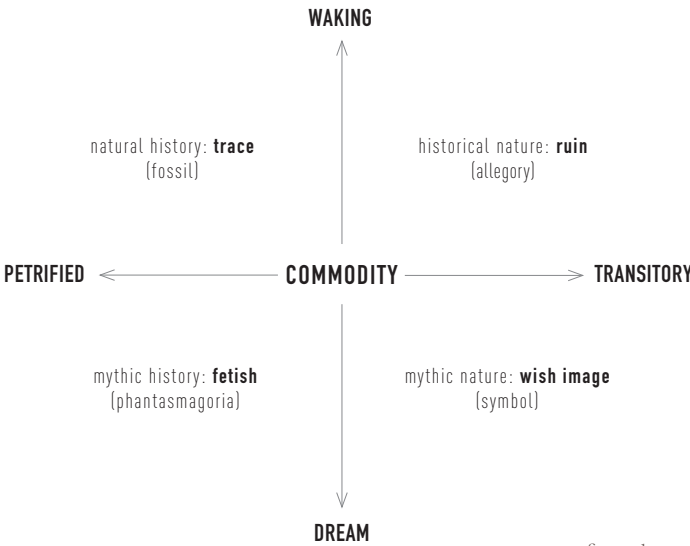


figure. 1

This cross section visually charts a static synthesis of contradictory terms and “transitory field of oppositions”<sup>58</sup> that characteristically demonstrate Benjamin’s tendency to think in paradoxical coordinates. These dialectical “optics” of modernity reveal both the ancient and the now as the “fundamental coordinates of the modern world.”<sup>59</sup> When one positions him or herself at the centre of the axis, a dialectical image presents itself. This is where the historical materialist positions him or herself.

The diagram determines the physiognomic appearances of a commodity when it is shifted through different contexts. Benjamin suggests the following fundamental physiognomic appearances of the commodity: (1) the *fossil* defines the commodity that is generally preserved and put on display in a velvet-lined case in the bourgeois interior as a clue that is useful for the detective examining it as a historical trace; (2) the *fetish* is a mythic phantasmagoria that is an arrested form of history, but which takes on the reified form of new nature through its perpetual sameness. The fetishized phantasmagoria “is also the form in which the human, socialist potential of industrial nature lies frozen, awaiting the collective political action that could awaken it”<sup>60</sup>; (3) the *wish image* is the transitory form of that potential belonging to the fetish. They conjure up images of the collective “wish” for social utopia through archaic meanings and utopian symbols that imagine technology’s role in a revolutionary rupture of a dialectical awakening; (4) the *ruin* is the wish image from the past century that takes on the appearance of rubble in the present day. Ruins can also be the building blocks “out of which a new order can be constructed.”<sup>61</sup> The figures of the artist, the collector, the detective and the rag picker<sup>62</sup> wander through the fields of fossil and ruin, while the shopaholic, the techno junkie and the gambler wander through the fields of wish images and fetishized phantasmagoria.

2.3 THE DESTRUCTIVE CHARACTER

The destructive character is the key paradigm embodying my research methodology, as both a text, and as the embodiment of a “character.” The latter reveals a number

58. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, 210.

59. *Ibid.*, 210.

60. *Ibid.*, 211.

61. *Ibid.*, 211.

62. Benjamin often refers to the figure of the rag picker, who was also a figure from one of Baudelaire’s poems; ‘The Ragpicker’s Wine’ [Le Vin des chiffonniers] or [Der Wein der Lumpensammler]. The ragpicker is an allegorical figure who reflects the essence of an industrial modernity. He finds value in urban detritus; he collects it and sells it for a meagre profit.

63. Benjamin, “The Destructive Character,” 301.

64. *Ibid.*, 302.

65. *Ibid.*, 302.

of possibilities that indicate either the destructive character as a character *trait*, an attitude, or a physiognomic role. The destructive character is driven by mystical powers revealed through a rupture of historical consciousness early in life. Benjamin’s text on the “destructive character” is not a theoretical text, it does not really fit in any prescribed literary category, yet the text speaks of methods of criticism. I find the text extremely cryptic. When reading it through I feel as though I am the witness to some form of *silent, unspoken violence*. Yet, the destructive character is least of all a violent character, for they work only under a longing that calls to their existence. I see the destructive character as one working out of a pure conscience, he or she wishes only to inflict destruction unto the world under the force they feel to be their *authentic* calling. The destructive character blithely clears everything away in sight through the “realization of how immensely the world is simplified when tested for its worthiness of destruction.”<sup>63</sup> This mode of destruction is often performed in the most refined measures as the destructive character does this out of a need.

As a form of allegory, Benjamin’s destructive character text provides a meagre set of clues that even the most experienced detectives are not able to decode. Irving Wohlfarth points out that the narrated character profile takes for granted that a destructive character *trait* has undergone a transition into one *becoming* a destructive character. Wohlfarth acknowledges that there is a significant interaction that is being set up in the text between the portraitist (Benjamin) and the figure that is being portrayed (the portrait of the *destructive character*). Benjamin himself is not the destructive character, but the portrait of the destructive character is likely a portrait of a set of people, rather than an individual, who have had a profound shock effect on the narrator (Benjamin). The narrator preserves the traces of the destructive character, whereas “the destructive character obliterates even the traces of destruction.”<sup>64</sup> The text and thus the destructive character “has no interest in being understood.”<sup>65</sup> Many narratives could be drawn from this text. I position myself in the text, and as I read it as I ask myself “which character do I resemble here?” The narrator



describes the external characteristics of the destructive character, positioning him or her against characters that the destructive character is not. I find myself standing at the centre of this clearing “where the thing stood or the victim lived,”<sup>66</sup> witnessing the emptiness amidst the rubble. As the destructive character sees nothing as being permanent, they see ways everywhere—perhaps this empty space is the one permanent thing eluding the *authentic* register.

## 2.4 THE UNCANNY

The uncanny [das Unheimliche] names an encounter or experience that is (according to Freud) convened by spatial-aesthetic relations. Having its etymological roots in German linguistics, Freud analyses the historic contexts of the terms *heimlich* [homely] and *unheimlich* [unhomely] revealing their shifting, ambivalent characteristics. Freud argues that “[s]tarting from the homely and the domestic, there is a further development towards the notion of something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret.”<sup>67</sup> This suggests the uncanny activates a psychic unveiling where our hidden repressions come unexpectedly to light. Freud suggests that it is characteristically in our most comforting or familiar environments where the uncanny encounter takes place; hence, the uncanny aesthetically has its legacy in the house of home environment.

“Dread can ‘befall’ us right in the midst of the most familiar environment... in dread, being-in-the-world is totally transformed into a ‘not at home’ purely and simple.”<sup>68</sup>  
— Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*

Uncanniness for Heidegger—after Katherine Withy’s dissertation *Heidegger on Being Uncanny*—“names a finitude in our ability to understand ourselves”<sup>69</sup> and “that what we cannot understand about ourselves is precisely how this finitude could be essential to us.”<sup>70</sup> This is to say, “our uncanniness consists in the uncanny ability to make our uncanniness fully familiar.”<sup>71</sup> Hence “uncanniness is a non-linear and self-constituting phenomenon.”<sup>72</sup> As humans, we want to make sense of the world, and through our inability to do so (due to our essential finite nature) we

66. Ibid., 301.

67. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 133.

68. Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, 289.

69. Withy, “Heidegger on Being Uncanny,” 17.

70. Ibid., 17.

71. Ibid., 17.

72. Ibid., 17.

are essentially estranged from ourselves. For Heidegger, this self-estrangement [or uncanniness] is an *authentic* experience of our temporal being in the world. Since the uncanny reveals the limits to our existence, Freud realised his limits of worthiness by becoming caught up in the mass-reproducibility of theoretical research publishing. This familiar way of operating today is thrown in the same way we are thrown into this world by juxtaposing things strangely (as my installation tests do).

### *The Bell*

The dialectical image expressed in this exegesis has given rise to the sonic register as an uncanny call. What calls? Time calls and its timbre splits; standing up in its standstill moment, *these* things survive ultimately in their call. Derrida draws attention to the conceptual *toll* or *ring* of the word *survival* in his text “Living On: Borderlines” where the term ‘living on’ in French etymology translates as *survivre* or surviving; it is paradoxically a living ‘on’ that is both *above* and *beyond*. This ambiguity of the ‘on’ of ‘living on’ can be a conceptual condition for how human beings *survive* both parasitically *on* things around us and beyond as ghosts *after* life. At the centre of this sonic dialectical image of history, Derrida reminds me of the call to being human that I have witnessed from these things that *survive me*. These artefacts, affects and juxtaposing of things live *on* me and *recall* me in the same sonic play as Derrida’s experimental concept of *Glas*. *Glas* is both the title of his most experimental (literary-philosophical hybrid) writing and, as Geoffrey Hartman eloquently posed, *glas* is the leitmotif of the utterance of a literary event. *Glas* is literally a textual sonic play on the sound a bell makes (it activates the tonality of the word ‘glas’), as it is also a ringing of the death knell of the bell. This death *lives on* as the not complete—it echoes time and space; its echography calls into question a death to final truth as absolute knowledge. *Glas* plays with the gathering of multiple texts and burns their *absolute* origins so that we become readers of multiple *authentic* possible combinations. I have taken this death toll as a sign to myself that every demand, every call to knowledge from the signature of things, is also a possible other way through the linearity

of time controlled by a master discourse. This ringing of Derrida's bell is still faint; I am hard of hearing its more profound call, but like Benjamin's historio-graphics, there exists an uncanny register across the artistic works of these two thinkers. They open up a space for thinking through a listening [with the ear] of other(s). When listening to their demands we can perhaps be liberated from *absolute* knowing and certainty, thus in the moments of danger (for not knowing) we hear their voices of difference and the bells that sound our limits. *The survival of things.*



## AS I STEP INTO THE ROOM...

As I step into the room  
 As I close the door  
 It shuts behind me  
 The room is rectangular  
 And I am down one end  
 The right-hand end  
 The floor is cold vinyl  
 Mottled with uniform circular reliefs the size of  
 Old fifty cent coins  
 As I look around the room  
 I see three concentrations of light  
 Two lit up objects  
 And a projected image on the wall  
 Down the far end of the room there appears to be an object  
 A box-like object placed on the ground  
 About the size of a domestic bird cage  
 But it is solid  
 Like a television monitor from the 1980s  
 And behind it  
 Obscured from our view  
 There is a light shining onto the box  
 I can see only the silhouette of the box  
 And the pulsating glowing illumination  
 That reflects from the box

Onto the wall behind it  
 Like the reflection from a  
 Television screen  
 Of a square box  
 And before that  
 On the right-hand wall half way down the room  
 Appears to be a small image that is being  
 Projected onto the wall  
 So small in fact I would need to be closer in order to see  
 What it actually is  
 However, it has disappeared now  
 So I can no longer see  
 What it was  
 I thought that I had seen  
 And just before my eyes directly before the entrance  
 Is a wooden construction

## CONCLUSION

The room is an interior space, enclosed and private containing long-sought secrets within its four walls. The room is dark like a cinema, or perhaps a living room. During the day, when I would watch a film, I would close all the curtains. What a wonderful time of day it was, isolated from the outside world. Within this room, there is no fixed temporal register, hence time can be sped up or slowed down. The vinyl floor is mottled with circular reliefs approximately the size of old New Zealand fifty cent coins, just like the plastic coins I would use when I set up my make-believe shops in the living room. I would stash the coins in a black plastic tray that had partitioned coin compartments. This was my shop till.

These lit-up objects look like historical artefacts put on display in a museum. Their brightly lit-up surfaces give them an auratic quality. Lit-up they look like objects from fantasy narratives, or mystic objects from a fantasy world; like the fantasy worlds of the films I would watch. A lit-up box-like object on the floor is a strange place for any sacred artefact, if it should be one.

A birdcage and a 1980s television set. This connection brings scenes of domestication and entrapment to mind. We had a budgerigar once when I was a child, his name was Peppy. Peppy lived in a small birdcage the size of this box. I remember feeling sorry for Peppy, living in such a small cage. The television enabled me to escape, in a way that Peppy could not, where I could fly away through the fantasy machine of films and television. Its silhouetted form is mysterious and exciting, as I cannot see what auratic visionary spectacle is taking place on the other side of the box.

The projected image on the wall has now disappeared

A small table or stand  
 That has rested on it  
 An old telephone  
 I can tell this telephone is old because  
 It has a handle on the side of it  
 That requires winding  
 By hand  
 The telephone is not wall mounted  
 Hence, it is a standing phone  
 With a receiver  
 Much like telephones were up until twenty years ago  
 Now I have just noticed the projected image  
 On the wall has reappeared  
 As I walk into the space  
 It feels very private  
 No one can see me  
 I feel alone in this room  
 As I walk over to the projected image on the wall  
 I feel my pace quicken as I wish to examine the  
 Image before it disappears again  
 I walk up to the wall  
 The image has disappeared  
 Before my eyes  
 Instead, I will go over to this  
 Back-lit object  
 As I walk over to it  
 I must really walk right into the corner of  
 the room before  
 I am able to see what  
 Is actually on the projected side of this object  
 As I approach this object  
 I realise that it is a gramophone  
 An empty gramophone box  
 Like Pandora's box  
 There is a record playing on it  
 And this record  
 This record is visual  
 However  
 It appears to be a projection  
 A digital moving-image projection  
 The gramophone is lying  
 on its side  
 But why?  
 There is no sound  
 A silent  
 Digital  
 Gramophone  
 With an analogue body  
 I wonder what is going to happen  
 Will something happen?  
 Or something unexpected happen  
 This is very strange  
 I sit down  
 And I watch the record  
 Turning...  
 ...or wait...  
 Perhaps when the record reaches the end of its cycle  
 Something might happen  
 ...  
*So silent*  
 ...

like an automaton, appearing and disappearing at will.  
 Perhaps there is someone or something watching me in  
 this room now, controlling me. This places an image in my  
 head now of an image of a vampire that used to scare me  
 as a child; it was an illustration in a joke book belonging to  
 my sister. I remember the smell of the pages of that book;  
 the smell reminds me of the anticipation of holding this  
 book and knowing that this vampire was hiding among  
 the pages. I can picture the vampire spying on me here,  
 controlling the space.

Despite being roughly one hundred years old, the  
 telephone bears a closer resemblance to the telephone  
 we had during my childhood than those telephones of  
 today. This telephone reminds me of the large, heavy  
 hand receivers that would cup to my ear. They were once  
 so common, these landline telephones as we call them  
 today, only now I spend more time using my mobile  
 phone. Benjamin remembers the ringing of the telephone  
 between two and four in the afternoon, awaking his  
 parents from their midday nap. He describes the sound  
 of the caller speaking to him through the receiver as  
 “nocturnal noises,” travelling through the dead of night.

A private space like my childhood bedroom, everything  
 miniature and internalised. I am alone in my bedroom.  
 The disappearance of the image leaves me feeling  
 frustrated and impatient, like the way I was being  
 controlled by the fetish when I would obsess over films as a  
 young girl. However, I have yet to discover the mysterious  
 back-lit box-like object in the corner, like having presents  
 still yet to open or the beginning of a film.

Seeing the gramophone on its side with a bright illuminating  
 record playing in it reminds me of the miniature records  
 that my mother would put on for me as a child. They were  
 narrated children's stories such as *The Gingerbread Man*,  
*Farmer McDonald*, and *The Little Boy with the Big Horn*.  
 The wolf that is chasing the Gingerbread Man always  
 terrified me for the quickening pace of the chase got my  
 heartbeat racing. My mother used to listen to *War of the*  
*Worlds*, which frightened me. I would look through the

Oh  
 There is a hand  
 A hand that is reaching across the record  
 And pulling the record arm  
 Over to the record  
 And starting the record from the beginning  
 Placing the needle on the outer rim  
 Of the record  
 The hand disappears  
 The record plays  
 ...  
 I wonder why  
 ...  
 What is wrong with this gramophone?  
 What is special about it?  
 ...  
 The record is turning  
 I wish I could hear it  
 I wonder what song it is playing now  
 ...  
 I believe we have reached the same point  
 Where I arrived  
 ...  
 It is so bright  
 The projected image  
 It is almost just like watching a

We are looking through a window  
 Just looking into a room  
 Perhaps as if we were  
**Looking into a dolls house**  
 There is a woman inside the room  
 Although  
 She is almost out of view  
 Since we can see more of the room  
 Behind her  
 I can see shadows on the walls  
 There is a confined space through  
 The window  
 And the woman is just merely at the  
 Periphery of the space  
 She has in front of her a gramophone  
 Her right hand is resting on the gramophone  
 Handle while her left hand rests on  
 The Wooden frame itself  
 The woman stands there still  
 It appears to be a still image  
 Upon re-adjusting  
 To the miniature details of the image  
 She appears to be inside a

**Television screen**  
 It is just as captivating  
 Just as intriguing  
 And yet  
 The video is a repetition  
 Of a record turning  
 Unlike  
 Those scripted television shows that  
 Are saturated with movement  
 That draw their spectators in  
 Only I find myself just as captivated  
 Sitting here in this dark space  
 On this vinyl floor  
 In front of this screen  
 Watching this record  
 I am becoming gramophone  
 I still feel like something is going to happen  
 Like I am anticipating something  
 It is very fascinating  
 ...  
 I stand up  
 And I walk over to the image on the wall  
 As I am walking over to the image  
 Perhaps as if  
 These objects are watching me  
 The image appears  
 I walk up to the wall  
 To get closer to the wall  
 This concrete wall is  
 Is peppered with indentations  
 It looks as if a war has taken place in front  
 Of this very wall  
 It is very textured  
 And yet smooth  
 The image appears to be  
**Looking into a window**  
 Looking into a small room  
 It is a very small image  
 The projector is very close to the wall  
 The hues and the colours are  
 Beautifully rich  
 It is a rich image  
 Visually intriguing

illustrated record book and examine the illustrations while listening to the musical scoring and harrowing narration. I found these records frightening, as their disembodied voices spoke to me from the past. Their voices sounded strange to me, old-worldly. Without their having a visual counter-part, it was like being *blinded* or being thrown out into the world with a blindfold on.

The hand that reaches over to start the record is like my hand pushing the VHS into the VCR player or reaching into my dolls house, as I would re-enact the miniature figurines. The record is turning but it is *silent*, I cannot hear it, and this is unfulfilling. The silence sound like voices repressed; voices from the past and of now. The bright illumination of the spinning record is like watching a television screen; it is just as entrancing and hypnotic. I am sitting on the ground the way I would always sit or lie on the floor to watch the television screen, as if I could never get close enough to it. The anticipation is like watching a film, anticipating a moment of climax or action. This repetitive loop of the video allows me to lose myself within the eternally returning image, always the same. It slows me down and allows me to be with the spinning of the record, to feel safe to fantasise within this private, safe, darkened room.

The projected image on the wall is like looking into the window of a dolls house, perhaps looking at myself as a young girl. Like a photograph, this fantasy world is also impenetrable. On the one hand, it looks like a historic portrait, yet it is digital and moving. It is as if a historic snapshot is brought to life, much like the way the slogans used by pioneer village saying, “Welcome to Living History.” Although perhaps if it is actually myself here in miniature, through this miniature window, then it must be a dream image I am seeing.

The bells are ringing; there is a fascinating sound to this image. There is a strange Freudian slip occurring through the word ‘Bell’ (as it was Alexander Graham *Bell* whom invented the telephone), and here *telepathy* connects the pathos of the name at a distance. When I hear a telephone

Contemporary **recording** studio  
 Where we can see contemporary  
 Recording equipment  
 Only upon really close recognition  
 The record on the gramophone is moving  
 It is a **moving image**  
 The woman is still and yet  
 Now I can see there is some movement  
 Very, very subtle movement  
 And the image is gone  
 Some **bells are ringing**  
 I look to the other side of the room  
 Of what could be a fire bell  
 Is actually the **telephone**  
 In front of the entrance  
 It continues to ring  
 Should I go over there and answer it?  
 I walk over to the telephone  
 in a hurried fashion  
 This telephone is awfully **loud**  
 It is making me **nervous**  
 I **walk over** to the telephone

I **can hear the record**  
 There must be something else  
 Perhaps I should wait  
 ...  
 Okay  
 I can hear the hand  
 The hand is winding up the gramophone  
 Perhaps the record will begin to play  
 ...  
 I wish I could bring the telephone  
 Over to the gramophone  
 So I could experience them both together  
 But I can't  
 The telephone is  
 Stuck  
 It is wired here to the wall  
 I can't possibly listen to the audio  
 While at the same to watch the gramophone  
 Record turning  
 I cannot  
 See them at the same time  
 Why is that?  
 Why must I experience them separately?  
 ...

I take a deep breath  
 I pick up the receiver  
 I place the **earpiece to my ear**  
 And listen  
**Hello?**  
 I speak into the receiver  
 ...  
 I can hear something  
 What is it?  
 ...  
 I **listen**  
 ...  
 It sounds  
 Like the scratching texture  
 Of a gramophone record  
 ...  
 Perhaps  
 What I can hear  
 Is occurring  
 At the same  
**Time**  
 As is the gramophone record  
 That is playing on the other side of the room  
 And the gramophone record that is  
 being recorded  
 In the recording studio  
 ...  
 Is this not  
 The same moment  
 ...  
 Is this the same moment?  
 Then **who is calling me?**  
 Who wants me to listen to this?  
 Why am I here?  
 I place the phone receiver down  
 It instantly starts ringing again  
 I haven't  
 Picked it all up  
 There is something  
 That doesn't make sense here  
 Obviously, whoever is calling me  
 Realises this  
 And  
 Would rather that  
 I hear something further  
 I pick up the receiver  
 Put the earpiece to my ear  
 I can hear the record  
 ...

ringing, I imagine what caller stands waiting for me at the other end of the line. This is an unnerving image, as if feels slightly interrogating. Is it Benjamin calling me? Or is it my 1994-self calling me from my childhood home? Or is it the woman in the projected image? Or is it the stirring nightwalker in the castle calling me? Or perhaps it is simply someone lost in cyberspace who happened to hook up to this telephone line accidentally. The sounds of the bells ringing rings through my ears, making me feel tense and nervous. The speed and the urgency to which I become immediately occupied takes over my being, reflecting here the speed of technological demands today (one of my resistances today).

As my ear is pressed against the telephone speaker, I feel like I am in some strange film noir suspense thriller. Listening and waiting in uncertainty. The strange sounds that come through the speaker are like unfulfilling clues, or red-herrings (if I use film terminology here). As red-*hearing* devices, they work to mystify the viewer [of a film] so they believe that something is a clue when it isn't at all. What this form of slippery narrative suspense does is it betrays the viewer's expectations, essentially derailing them.

My inability to view the entire installation at once—in the way that a tourist attempts to capture the entirety of a historic attraction inside one photographic image—means that we must be unnaturally disembodied in order to encounter the installation. As a twenty-first century being I am used to mass archiving machines and reproduction, and yet on the other hand I am forcing and frustrating the desire of my audience because of these older analogue technologies that debilitate one's ability to physically encounter all the material at once.

ce.

e.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Baudelaire, Charles. *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Belgrade: Josef Nygrin, 2008.  
www.paskvil.com/file/files-books/ baudelaire-fleurs.pdf.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2007.

Benjamin, Walter. *Reflections*. Edited by Peter Demetz. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken Books, 2007.

Benjamin, Walter. *Berlin Childhood around 1900*. Translated by Howard Eiland. Cambridge, Massachussets: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.

Benjamin, Walter. *One-Way Street, and Other Writings*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter. London: Verso, 1997.

Benjamin, Walter. *Radio Benjamin*. Edited by Lecia Rosenthal. Translated by Jonathan Lutes, Lisa Harries and Diana K. Reese. London: Verso, 2014.

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.

Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Massachussets: MIT Press, 1991.

Cadava, Eduardo. *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Translated by David McLintock. London: Penguin Books, 2003.

Hartman, Geoffrey H. *Saving the Text: Literature Derrida Philosophy*. Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1981.

Heidegger, Martin. *History of the Concept of Time*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

Howe, Susan. *Sorting Facts: or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker*. New York: New Directions Books, 1996.

Keiller, Patrick. *The Possibility of Life's Survival on the Planet*. London: Tate Publishing, 2012.

Kittler, Friedrich. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. California: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Olszewski, Czesław. *Warsaw Modern: Architecture Photography of the 1930's*. Edited by Łukasz Gorczyca, Piotr Jamski, Michał Kaczyński and Marta Leśniakowska. Warsaw: Raster, 2012.

Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. London: Duke University Press, 2005.

Taussig, Michael. *Walter Benjamin's Grave*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Withy, Katherine. "Heidegger on Being Uncanny." PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2009.

CRITICAL ESSAYS

Benjamin, Walter. "Critique of Violence." In *Reflections*, edited by Peter Demetz and translated by Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken Books, 2007: 277-300.

Benjamin, Walter. "Doctrine of the Similar." Translated by Knut Tarnowski. *New German Critique* no. 17 (spring 1979): 65-69. DOI: 10.2307/488010.

Benjamin, Walter. "Excavation and Memory." *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 2 (1931-1934), "Ibizan Sequence", 1932, edited by Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005: 576.

Benjamin, Walter. "Fate and Character." In *Reflections*, edited by Peter Demetz and translated by Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken Books, 2007: 304-311.

Benjamin, Walter. "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century." In *Reflections*, edited by Peter Demetz and translated by Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken Books, 2007: 146-162.

Benjamin, Walter. "Rigorous Study of Art." Trans. Thomas Y. Levin. *October*, vol. 47 (winter, 1988): 84-90. DOI: 10.2307/778983.

Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2007: 253-264.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Destructive Character." In *Reflections*, edited by Peter Demetz and translated by Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken Books, 2007: 301-303.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2007: 217-251.

Buchloh, Benjamin. "Atlas/Archive." In *The Optic of Walter Benjamin*, edited by Alex Coles. London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999: 12-35.

Cowan, Bainard. "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory." *New German Critique* no. 22 (1981): 109-122. DOI: 10.2307/487866.

Davis, Douglas. "The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction (An Evolving Thesis: 1991-1995)." *Leonardo*, vol. 28, no. 5, Third Annual New York Digital Salon (1995): 381-386. DOI: 10.2307/1576221.

Derrida, Jacques. "Living on Borderlines." In *Deconstruction and Criticism*, edited by Harold Bloom, Paul De Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey H. Hartman and J. Hillis Miller. New York: Seabury Press, 1979.

Marramao, Giacomo. "Messianism without Delay: On the "Post-religious" Political Theology of Walter Benjamin." *Constellations* vol. 15, no. 3 (2008): 397-405. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8675.2008.00500.x.

Ouzman, Sven. "The Beauty of Letting Go: Fragmentary Museums and Archaeologies of Archive." In *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*, edited by Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden and Ruth B. Phillips. New York: Berg, 2006: 269-301.

Read, Alan. "Redeemed Night." In *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008: 145-156.

Szondi, Péter. "Hope in the Past." In *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, translated by Howard Eiland. Cambridge, Massachussets: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006: 1-33.

Ware, Owen. "Dialectic of the Past / Disjuncture of the Future: Derrida and Benjamin on the Concept of Messianism." *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 5 no. 2 (2004): 99-114.

Wohlfarth, Irving. "No-Man's-Land: On Walter Benjamin's "Destructive Character." *Diacritics*, vol. 8, no. 2. (summer, 1978): 47-65. DOI: 10.2307/465131.

## ARTWORKS

Bures Miller, George and Janet Cardiff. *The Carnie*, installation, 2010, British Columbia.

Bures Miller, George and Janet Cardiff. *The Cabinet of Curiosities*, installation, 2010, British Columbia.

Bures Miller, George and Janet Cardiff. *Dark Pool*, installation, 1995, British Columbia.

Castillo Deball, Mariana. *Parergon*, installation, 2014 (Hamburger Bahnhof Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin).

Grumm, Lisa. *A-Z/A=A s. Identität*, book, 2010 (Spector Books, Leipzig).

Katsiki, Hara. *Moving Forward*, digital paintings on photographs, 2012, Berlin.

Katsiki, Hara. *Peruvian Paso*, gold ink on paper, 2010, Berlin.

Kirby, Leyland. *An Empty Bliss Beyond this World*, recorded album, 2011, England.

Klee, Paul. *Angelus Novas*, painting, 1920 (Israel Museum, Jerusalem).

Paterson, Katie. *As the World Turns*, installation-performance, 2011, Sydney.

Richter, Gerhard. *Atlas*, photographic collection, 1961-2007, Cologne.

Traubeck, Bartholomäus. *Years*, installation, 2011 (Galerie Lisa Ruyter, Vienna).

Traubeck, Bartholomäus. *A Long Echo to Noise*, installation, 2013 (Third Party Gallery, Cincinnati).

Traubeck, Bartholomäus. *Distanz (a+β+γ+δ+ε+ζ)*, installation, 2012 (Vienna).



## FILMS

*Adieu au Langage.* Directed by Godard, Jean-Luc. Switzerland & France: Canal+ 2014.

*Art and Craft.* Directed by Cullman, Sam, Jennifer Grausman and Mark Becker. USA, 2014.

*Colette.* Directed by Bellon, Yannick. France: Les Films Jacqueline Jacoupy, 1950.

*Die Andere Heimat.* Directed by Reitz, Edgar. Germany: Edgar Reitz Film, 2013.

*Ghost Dance.* Directed by McMullen, Ken. England: Channel Four Films, 1983.

*La Jetée.* Directed by Marker, Chris. France: Argos Films, 1962.

*London.* Directed by Keiller, Patrick. England: BFI Productions, 1994.

*Lost Highway.* Directed by Lynch, David. France & USA: October Films, 1997.

*Midnight in Paris.* Directed by Allen, Woody. USA & Spain: Gravier Productions & Mediapro, 2011.

*Nostalghia.* Directed by Tarkovsky, Andrei. Soviet Union and Italy: Mosfilm & Gaumont, 1983.

*Remembrance of Things to Come.* Directed by Marker, Chris and Yannick Bellon. France: ARTE, 2001.

*Robinson in Ruins.* Directed by Keiller, Patrick. England: British Film Institute, 2010.

*Robinson in Space.* Directed by Keiller, Patrick. England: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1997.

*The Decalogue.* Directed by Kieślowski, Krzysztof. Poland: Warner Bros, 1998.

*The Double Life of Véronique.* Directed by Kieślowski, Krzysztof. France: Sédéral Films, 1991.

*The Mirror.* Directed by Tarkovsky, Andrei. Soviet Union: Mosfilm, 1975.

*The Sacrifice.* Directed by Tarkovsky, Andrei. Sweden: Svenska Filminstitutet, 1986.

*The Secret Garden.* Directed by Holland, Agnieszka. United Kingdom: Warner Bros, 1993.

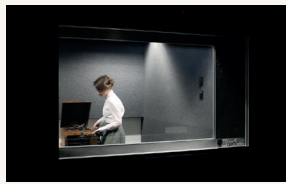
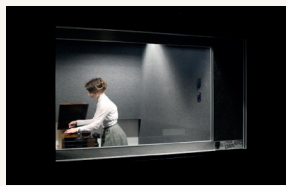
*Trois couleurs: Bleu.* Directed by Kieślowski, Krzysztof. France: MK2 Diffusion, 1993.

**DATABASE OF IMAGES**

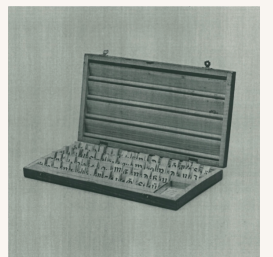
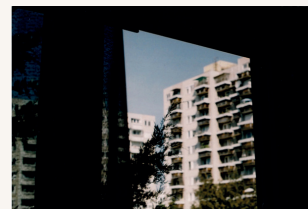




Recording



Remembering









Waking



Watching

