

## **"A warm grey fabric lined on the inside with the most lustrous and colourful of silks":<sup>1</sup> Dreams of airships and tropical islands**

A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul

While perhaps not the "most important testimony to latent mythology",<sup>2</sup> the huge warm-grey steel-and-glass dome of the ex-CargoLifter-hangar at Brand, Germany, is at present one of the largest. It induced in one reviewer "a romantic fascination with architecture as engineering, pure form generated by the rational imperatives of structure and economics" – just like "railway stations" and "exhibition halls".<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin called these emblems of architectural modernity "dream houses of the collective".<sup>4</sup>

In a paradoxical relationship, replaying that noted by Benjamin on the nineteenth century Paris Arcades,<sup>5</sup> the hangar signals technological functionality, while the €70-million tropical rainforest theme park inside proffers an escape from rationality. A "primordial landscape of consumption",<sup>6</sup> where "primal history enters the scene in ultramodern get-up",<sup>7</sup> the complex provides a "surreal experience of artificial sun, sea and sand, all under one roof" for those who cannot afford long-haul flights to tropical islands.<sup>8</sup> Colourful triggers conjure up dream images – in a duality of utopian and cynical elements.

Outside, the East German Brandenburg province suffers from underdevelopment, unemployment, and a history of xenophobia. Inside, everything is for sale: no longer just material but, even more, cultural commodities (services, experience, leisure). The website announces, "Talk to us. Everything you see at Tropical Islands can also be bought. We'll gladly set a price for you."<sup>9</sup> Experience is designed here: thresholds, set up in endless series, produce ambiguity rather than the authentic experience they seek to evoke.<sup>10</sup>

[Fig: dome exterior01.jpg]

### **Thresholds**

Empty, yet full of potential and suspense, thresholds divide and connect two seemingly "pre-existing opposites".<sup>11</sup> They lost their power in modernity: "threshold magic" diminished,<sup>12</sup> not only in buildings. Benjamin also observed a weakening of thresholds between cities and the country, threatening the power of cities to consolidate man-made reality *vis à vis* the elementary powers of nature. Yet, as in the Paris arcades, thresholds continued to gather references to older symbolic universes. They were marked no longer by steps or stones, but "by the expectant posture of [a] handful of people".<sup>13</sup>

For Benjamin, thresholds were significant elements articulating space and time. They index a utopian aspect of his critique of myth: as outmoded forms of experience, thresholds contain revolutionary energies and unredeemed hope – and thus an inherent potential for redemption.<sup>14</sup> Benjamin regarded a mere levelling (or disregard) of thresholds not as a liberating act but as a source of confusion that disarticulates experience.<sup>15</sup> A movement of intensities around thresholds, a dynamic connection of interior and exterior, makes containment difficult.<sup>16</sup> The *Tropical Islands* hangar, as container, is caught up in intensities causing spillage of interior and world. Intermingling and ambiguity are, precisely, a precondition for *Tropical Islands*' existence: the hinterland venue, 60km southeast of Berlin,<sup>17</sup> has to lure the metropolitans to be economically successful.<sup>18</sup> But while the dream houses of Benjamin's *Arcades Project* clearly belonged to the metropolis, *Tropical Islands Resort's* relationship with Berlin is complex. Its initiator, Singapore-based, multi-millionaire Colin Au, claimed it is "Made for Berliners" and expected half of the income to be generated from their visits. For the rest, the resort relies on the 25-million living within three hours' drive, and the 3-4-million tourists visiting the region annually.

In winter, the hangar's membrane separates a freezing outside and a balmy inside. A lustful tarrying on its threshold, however, which Benjamin describes in writing of his Berlin adolescence,<sup>19</sup> is difficult to imagine. As visitors approach the resort on a country road covered in pre-cast concrete slabs, lined by trees in snow drift, they drive past tagged

ruinous buildings, which once housed the administration of the largest military airbase outside the Soviet Union. In the huge, ice and slush covered car park, banners announce the Caribbean and the Pacific. The overheated vestibule, which receives them after a brisk walk from their car, is hardly a threshold experience full of suspense. Beyond, x-ray machines flank the straw-thatched entrance gate to the theme park proper,<sup>20</sup> in what looks like a badly lit, oversized railway station. Everything is dwarfed under the huge grey dome.

[Fig: x-ray gate01.jpg]

[Fig: ornaments\_gate01.jpg]

Around the gate, statues, ornaments and fragments (from almost anywhere in the 'East') are gathered like Benjamin's *penates* – unimpressive threshold gods which, neither "inside nor truly in the open", "protect and mark the transitions".<sup>21</sup> Once powerful guardians of real or metaphorical thresholds, they turned into appliances at the entrance of skating rinks or beer gardens in the suburbs.<sup>22</sup> Such machines, notes Benjamin, flourish only at excursion sites, not in the city. Further along at *Tropical Islands*, the *Bali Split Gate* more mysteriously guards a threshold. According to the website, such gates symbolise holy mountains, "being torn up in the middle", and "mark the entrance to sacred places".<sup>23</sup> A moment of pause could arise – were it not for a human equivalent of Benjamin's machines: a photographer greeting visitors with "Aloha", offering a *lei* and personalised photo shoots – for a fee, as visitors will realise later. The *Bali Split Gate* marks the transition to the *Tropical Village* – featuring the *Bali Pavilion*, *Borneo Longhouse*, *Thai House*, *Samoan Fale* and, on a level up and further in the back, Amazon and Kenyan huts. Occupying the far end of the 360-meter long hangar, the *Tropical Village* spills over into, and is invaded by, an adventure camp, a child centre, changing rooms, fast food facilities, and the souvenir "market place" the *Borneo Longhouse* really is. This internal leakage mirrors the resort's relationship with the metropolis: the mutual spilling, into each other, of a global landscape of consumption and the city.<sup>24</sup>

[Fig: bali gate.jpg]

## Dreaming

For your short trip to the South Seas you need not travel any farther than right south of Berlin. At the Tropical Islands you will find white sand beaches, the world's largest indoor rainforest, a blue lagoon, the South Sea even with its islands, a complete tropical village, show and culture, sports and fun, all at a pleasant temperature of some 25°C.<sup>25</sup>

[I]n the landscape of an arcade [, o]rganic world and inorganic world, abject poverty and insolent luxury enter into the most contradictory communication; the commodity intermingles and interbreeds as promiscuously as images in the most tangled of dreams. Primordial landscape of consumption.<sup>26</sup>

Reminiscent of a famous woodcut in Flammarion's *L'Atmosphere* (1888), the hangar's dome seems (from a particular, interior perspective) like the sky – containing not only a landscape, but a world. At one end, in the midst of the *Tropical Village*, the *Fale* sits on an oval platform and signals, with its open space bounded only by handcrafted Pandanus mats and carved posts, the South Seas' eternal sun and balmy breezes. Carving, weaving and lashing details whisper about an alternative life, and an imaginary place where time moves at a different pace, and simplicity harbours happiness. At equal distance from the *South Sea* beach and the *Bali Lagoon*, the *Fale* houses the *Matai-Lounge* for holders of the *Black Diamond Card* and guests who have booked the "Maharajah for one Day" package.<sup>27</sup>

[Fig: fale\_sylvia.jpg or fale.jpg]

Space-time compression, modernity's dream and inevitable feature, abolishes distance, ruptures tradition, and with it the psychological separation of interior and exterior.<sup>28</sup> Despite its lack of walls, a *fale* in Samoa would be bounded by clear, if invisible lines. In contrast, the *Fale* here is oddly enmeshed in the goings-on of technology and edutainment, in whose constant flow historical layers of time are absorbed into mythical

dream images. Evening shows take place on two islands in the *South Sea*, complete with straw hut and 'carved' stone heads, Easter Island style: "Surrounded by water and palm trees, with a background of water screens and light projections", they provide a backdrop for shows that take "you away to far countries and exotic cultures."<sup>29</sup> On 13 January 2006, the Cuban show begins after an artificial sun has set on giant screens,<sup>30</sup> with "35 genuine Cuban dancers high-kicking ... their way around the South Sea's islands, complete with feathery headdresses, spangly bikinis and bottoms like J.Lo".<sup>31</sup> While the men in the audience seem to enjoy their sexual fantasies, most women look on with laboured tolerance.<sup>32</sup> A little girl plays in the sand of the *South Sea* beach unnoticed, for the moment forgotten. At the end of the show, she mingles with the performers, her face glowing with expectation. Later on, a quieter "image-space" arises.<sup>33</sup> As blue light reflects from the rippling water, and islands and backdrop glow in slowly changing colours, dreams become possible of a palm studded island with a jetty, where a ship is about to arrive.

[Fig: island left.jpg and island right.jpg; or dreaming.jpg; or jetty.jpg]

Dream images, however, are different for locals than for tourists: the 'jetty', it turns out later, is based on a local design of bridges that span across the Spree river's frozen canals. In this locality, Benjamin's notion of "poverty of experience" takes on a peculiar slant: Brandenburger's travels were severely limited by income and exit permits before 1989. For most, tropical islands like Samoa were out of reach. Their imaginary travel, their rest and relaxation, differed from West German leisure, and still do. Global investment in the wake of German 're-unification' produced spectacular failures in the region and unemployment soared to 21 percent. Has the resort improved the region's blighted outlook?<sup>34</sup> What, apart from jobs, can it offer locals? "[L]ightly plumed palms",<sup>35</sup> "six villages representing the cultures of Malaysia, Thailand, the Congo, the Amazon, Bali and Polynesia", "birds, butterflies, pigmy hippos and monkeys" – restaurants offering "authentic cuisine"?<sup>36</sup> ...

Space-time compression meant, at the time of the resort's conception, that Au had little insight into the site of his investment. While he believed he knew "how the Germans tick", and that *Tropical Islands Resort* is just what they want and need,<sup>37</sup> he overlooked significant differences between East and West Germany, and the metropolis and the countryside. In any event, it is ironic that a Chinese entrepreneur from a British ex-colony brought the tropics to Brandenburg-Prussia, when German aspirations for tropical colonies failed a century earlier. Ironic, too, how the representation of the world at *Tropical Islands* reveals how the modern world picture was criss-crossed with imperial territorial demarcations.<sup>38</sup> Yet today, only few Germans recall that Samoa was once a German colony. Apparently without historical awareness (or, *Erinnerung* that could create tradition), a divided world is reified and repackaged under the dome of the hangar.<sup>39</sup> "[U]npredictable and unwelcome elements, both natural (the rain) and social (the poor)" are excluded from this miniature dream-world.<sup>40</sup> The hangar's membrane thus not only separates cold and rain from sun and warmth; but also the purchase of dreams from the spill of hatred. Inside, employees smile. Outside, locals attack strangers, often at bus or railway stations.

Martin Heidegger wrote about boredom, at a "tasteless station of some lonely minor railway", as a relation with temporality where the passing of time amounts to driving it off.<sup>41</sup> Benjamin wrote that we get bored when we do not know what we are waiting for. Boredom is "a warm gray fabric lined on the inside with the most lustrous and colorful of silks", in which "we wrap ourselves when we dream".<sup>42</sup> Or, a dream bird which is easily driven away. Brand station's small nineteenth century brick buildings are bounded by a single concrete platform and its forecourt's cobble stones. Tirelessly, the *Tropical Islands* shuttle bus pulls up here to take visitors to the resort's glimmers. On a grey January evening, when boredom seems everything but warm,<sup>43</sup> a cold and unreal light in the mud caked bus barely illuminates the driver and one lonely passenger. Does he know what he is waiting for? Does he dream of lustrous and colourful experiences lying ahead? In any event, boredom would be driven away once inside *Tropical Islands*' "24/7 of fun" environment.

## Latent mythology

That “correspondences come into play between the world of technology and the archaic symbol-world of mythology” is a key assumption in the *Arcades Project*.<sup>44</sup> Architecture, as a figure of social life and a technical world of things, is an important witness of an era’s latent mythology.<sup>45</sup> Modernity’s myths celebrate humanity’s liberation from necessity through its own creations (commodities, buildings, machines).<sup>46</sup> Thus, the hangar’s thoroughly technological architecture has mythical ingredients. It was once to house the production of 260-meter long CargoLifters airships, which were to provide German firms with a competitive advantage in global markets.<sup>47</sup> Its initiator, German aristocrat-businessman Carl-Heinrich Freiherr von Gablenz, stems from a family of “knights of the sky” for three generations. Gablenz’ ambitions resembled those of Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin, who, at the threshold to the twentieth century, wanted to improve German imperial odds with his airships.<sup>48</sup> The first zeppelin prompted Gerhard Hauptmann to write a poem with nationalistic overtones. Similar feelings may have stirred in some when the CargoLifter’s production hall was built on the ruins of a Soviet military base. It is likely that patriotic associations with German technical ingenuity and know-how helped to rally support for the CargoLifter project from bankers and politicians.<sup>49</sup>

Reviews regularly mention the hangar’s advanced technological features and gigantic proportions. Many emphasise that the “giant palace of glass”,<sup>50</sup> the “world’s largest self-supporting building”, is big enough to contain two national icons, namely, “the Eiffel Tower on its side” and “the Statue of Liberty standing upright”.<sup>51</sup> The hangar’s functional and technological nature is assimilated to images powered by correspondences between technology and mythology.<sup>52</sup> Its “translucent membrane skin stretched taut over an arched steel structure”<sup>53</sup> contrasts sharply with the region’s derelict cities and towns.<sup>54</sup> Inside, dream images of colonial history prevail. As “mythic forms and compulsive repetition” of the archaic and ancient, they insert themselves into “the ultimate site of modernity [where] progress, enlightenment and novelty proclaim themselves most loudly”.<sup>55</sup>

[Fig: dome membrane.jpg; or tropical village.jpg]

*Tropical Islands* packages the world as exhibition almost like nineteenth century world-exhibitions, for instance, the Crystal Palace in 1851. Frankfurt Zoological Gardens’ architectural features were less spectacular, but its Samoan performances in 1896, 1897, 1901 and 1910 similarly combined a show of progress with exotic entertainment. Between 6,500 and 20,000 weekend visitors “experience[d] Samoa through all five senses, without having to take on the cost and hardships of a long journey”.<sup>56</sup> In 1901, a ‘tropical landscape’ with palm trees and a ‘Samoa village’ were constructed. A pontoon led visitors over a pond to a decorative hut on an island, in which the Samoans had settled for the day.<sup>57</sup> Earlier, in Paris, “the ‘oriental quarter’ was the centre of attraction” at the 1867 world exhibition.<sup>58</sup> Two years later, Egyptian visiting scholars found that the street of the Egyptian exhibit was made to resemble a street in Cairo, painstakingly rendered in medieval decay and chaos. The mosque was just a façade, with its interior “set up as a coffee house, where Egyptian girls performed dances with young males, and dervishes whirled.”<sup>59</sup>

Nineteenth century zoological gardens, local beer gardens, and international exhibitions, were temporary refuges from a rational organization of life, which increasingly claimed all of life.<sup>60</sup> Today, the *Tropical Islands Resort*, with the *South Sea*, *Bali Lagoon*, *Tropical Rainforest*, the *Tropical Village*, two stages, eateries, and bars proffer the same. But, just as there was a clear distinction between the general paying public and the dignitaries then, admission to some areas of the *Tropical Village* depends on the status visitors have purchased with their ticket. The Samoan *Fale* was until recently used exclusively for private functions (or those who are willing to pay more for a dream). As at the world exhibitions, most visitors may amuse themselves only by looking: “Look at everything; touch nothing.”<sup>61</sup>

Benjamin’s note that we “have grown very poor in threshold experiences” thus seems to be contradicted at *Tropical Islands Resort*.<sup>62</sup> However, the designed proliferation of thresholds and the provision of endless diversions lead to a loss of experience similar to that he was concerned with. Entertainers and instructors work constantly to ‘be-fun’

(*bespassen*, in New-German terminology) visitors. Waiting, the “lined interior of boredom” is unlikely to arise.<sup>63</sup> Organized pass-times produce a “sleep of the collective”, rather than awakening.<sup>64</sup> One show after another, one ‘tropical island culture’ after another, one snack/drink after another, seamlessly. Yet, the constantly new comes always packaged as units of time, space, or money.

## Awakening

There are exceptions: some visitors refuse to be entertained. Many prefer to play with their children, chat with their friends, swim without instructor or, in significant numbers, nap on the deck chairs lining the *South Sea*. It almost seems as if a part of the masses preferred to get bored. Boredom is, according to Benjamin, not only “the apogee of mental relaxation”.

Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives him away. His nesting places – the activities that are intimately associated with boredom – are already extinct in the cities and are declining in the country as well.<sup>65</sup>

In the mid-morning January light of a quiet day, when the *South Sea* beach looks almost like a well-kept open air pool anywhere in Germany, a family group emerges from the changing rooms. Carrying plastic buckets and shovels, picnic baskets and towels, they take little notice of the rows of immaculately lined-up deck chairs or the exotic paraphernalia. Oblivious even of the magnitude of the grey dome sheltering them from the ice and cold, they cherish a day out, to enjoy time together. In their lack of excitement about what is on offer, the dome’s warm grey might now get lined with colours. Waiting, rather than wasting time (like Benjamin’s gambler and factory worker) the family members take in time and render it up in changed form, as expectation. Boredom then becomes “a warm gray fabric lined on the inside with the most lustrous and colorful of silks”, in which they wrap themselves as they dream.<sup>66</sup>

[Fig: beach left + centre + right.jpg]

Suspended from the daily chores that govern their lives through the repetitive rhythms of work, they may enter a threshold condition where they can perceive with an open mind the different worlds a threshold condition connects and divides. An odd constellation of habit and the extraordinary could provide a transitional space of awakening, in which an image is arrested in a sudden flash.<sup>67</sup> Benjamin argued that it is not “great” contrasts that matter here, but “dialectical” ones, which are often found in nuances.<sup>68</sup> Slight contrasts and similarities can generate new relationships. In this experience, the archaic and Other is not to be found in remote places or times – but “at the very heart of the familiar, in the uncanny passage of modernity into instant antiquity, instant ruins”.<sup>69</sup>

There are layers and layers of ruined past at *Tropical Islands Resort*: that of the Soviet military airbase (built on the ruins of a German dream of world dominance); and that of the CargoLifter (built on the ruins of the airbase, trying to revive the failed Zeppelin dream). The resort itself, which only opened three years ago, has from the beginning existed under the sign of obsolescence. Founded on economic ruin, in the midst of a socio-economically blighted region, it was threatened with its own economic failure already a year into its existence. Each of these ruinous schemes held diverse wish-images, and those that still exist (the hangar and the resort) occupy opposite ends of a nineteenth century architectural desire to juxtapose the outmoded with the new, Nature with History.<sup>70</sup>

Airfield, hangar, the landscape of the resort, *Tropical Village*, and Samoan *Fale* are figures whose energies can be apprehended as “dialectics at a standstill”. Ambivalence becomes “marked by a potentiality” and interruption creates conditions of possibility, bringing “what-has-been” into a constellation with the now.<sup>71</sup> Their semantic potential “activates them as allegories, that is, as figures inviting historical (re)construction or (re)interpretation”.<sup>72</sup> They are traces, “appearance of nearness however far removed the thing that left it may be”.<sup>73</sup>



In its confusion and proliferation of myths, *Tropical Islands* is an extraordinary site. In one way, the hangar's technical form is fully emancipated from art.<sup>74</sup> In another, it is formally congruent with the *Fale's* roof. Supported by columns, the *Fale's* roof covers (rather than encloses) like that of the spacious, half-open structure of a Germanic hall (*Halle*).<sup>75</sup> The hangar – nothing but roof – encloses. In its technological aspects, it is “a monument to the conquest and subjugation of nature by humankind”, a “site of human progress, of the wonders and marvels of technological innovation.”<sup>76</sup> However, in its second life, it saw a return of the organic and the cultural, which it now shelters – as the atmosphere sheltered the world in the *Flammarion* woodcut (where a lonely figure reaches out into the universe, at a point where sky and Earth touch). Taken together, these figures – “a *past become space*” at the threshold to the third millennium – illuminate the constellation of the present with the past.<sup>77</sup>

[Fig: dome interior.jpg]

To be able to recognise this constellation, one may have to cross a threshold, reach beyond the point where the hangar's dome and Earth touch, beyond the landscape of consumption. For Benjamin, mimesis can take us outside and beyond ourselves, through a discovery of similarities. Then, by recognising something of ourselves in the world, and simultaneously assimilating to it, we can come ever closer to it and to others, through imagination.<sup>78</sup> Recall the little girl's expectant face when approaching the Cuban performers. Adults were by comparison disengaged. But for them, too, mimesis can be a threshold condition granting temporary suspense from instrumental rationality, by transcending the ego. For children, and for those of us who have not lost our capacity for mimesis, mimesis enables us to imagine ourselves as other, losing ourselves in a magical connection with the world, and all with whom we share it.<sup>79</sup> Reflected mimesis then moves beyond reified commodities, into imaginative relationships, to discover how things can be otherwise.

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- 1 W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 2002), D2a,1.
- 2 G°,9.
- 3 C. Slessor, 'Super Blimp', *The Architectural Review*, 212, no. 1266 (2002), p. 56.
- 4 Benjamin, *Arcades*, L1,3. “Dream houses of the collective: arcades, winter gardens, panoramas, factories, wax museums, casinos, railway stations.”
- 5 A°,9.
- 6 A°,5.
- 7 D8a,2.
- 8 A. Eames, *Welcome to Germany's Pleasure Dome* (The Sunday Times, May 21, 2006 [cited 6 September 2006]); available from <http://travel.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,10290-2187529,00.html>.
- 9 *Market Place* (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2005 [cited 26 December 2006]); available from <http://www.my-tropical-islands.com/village/souvenirs-e.htm>.
- 10 See W. Benjamin, 'One-Way-Street' in P. Demetz (ed), *Walter Benjamin. Reflections. Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York, Schocken Books, 1986), p. 75.
- 11 Thresholds do not just mediate between two worlds – they also create them. Seemingly pre-existing opposites may even be produced through mediation (W. Menninghaus, *Schwelkenkunde: Walter Benjamins Passage des Mythos* (Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 55). At the resort, a negative is enfolded into a positive, as the 'world' is brought into an interior space (see A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul, '-13.833333/-171.73334 in 51.466667/14.766666. Whose Tropics, Whose Fale?' in T. McMinn, J. Stephens, and S. Basson (eds) *Sahanz 2006 Contested Terrains* (Fremantle, Society of Architectural Historians, Australia New Zealand, 2006), pp. 119-126).
- 12 Benjamin, *Arcades*, I1a, 4.
- 13 C3,6. Benjamin distinguished threshold from boundary. “A *Schwelle* is a zone. Transformation, passage, wave action are in the word *schwellen*, swell, and etymology ought not to overlook these senses.” Equally important are, however, “the immediate tectonic and ceremonial context which has brought the word to its current meaning.” (Benjamin, *Arcades*, O2a,1).
- 14 W. Benjamin, 'Surrealism' in Demetz, *Walter Benjamin*, p. 181. Benjamin's later work was concerned with a “fluid multiplicity of ephemeral mythologemes”, in which spatial figures contain utopian potential (Menninghaus, *Schwelkenkunde*, 111). His interest in the immediate experience of the every day, and his materialist aesthetics, expanded the symbolic space of the worlds of objects (see also G. Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis. Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1996), p. 13).
- 15 Benjamin, 'One-Way-Street', p. 62, and 'Surrealism', pp. 178f. See Menninghaus, *Schwelkenkunde*, pp. 52, 107-8.

16 See Benjamin's (technically incorrect) etymological conjunction of *Schwelle* (threshold)  
and *schwellen* (to swell) above.

17 S. Banze, *Weltniveau in Brandenburg* [Online Journal] (Welt am Sonntag, 12. Dezember  
2004, 2004 [cited 5 June 2006]); available from  
<http://www.wams.de/data/2004/12/12/373674.html>.

18 In 2007, Colin Au's assumption that Berliners would be attracted by the exotic shows  
seems unfounded: the psychological threshold between Berlin and the resort remains  
strong. According to the current marketing manager (pers. comm., January 2007), Au did  
not understand the Berliners' partiality for their metropolis' own cultural scene.

19 W. Benjamin, *Berliner Chronik* (Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 25.

20 Compare this to the giant locomotives guarding the *Hall des Machines* at the 1855 Paris  
Exhibition, creating an expectation of wonders to come (Benjamin, *Arcades*, G8a,2).  
21 C3,4. See also the "fallen household deities" that flank the entrance to the bourgeois inter-  
rior (Benjamin, *Arcades*, I1a,4).

22 A "hen that lays the golden praline-eggs", a "mechanical fortuneteller" and "slot machines"  
(Benjamin, *Arcades*, I1a,4).

23 *The Bali Split Gate* (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2007 [cited 3 March 2007]);  
available from <http://www.my-tropical-islands.com/village/bali-tor-e.htm>.

24 See Benjamin, "One-Way-Street," pp. 75-6.

25 *My Day in Paradise (2007)* (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2007 [cited 5 March  
2007]); available from <http://www.my-tropical-islands.com/paradies-e.htm>.

26 Benjamin, *Arcades*, D8a,2.

27 For €225, visitors can spend "an absolutely 'royal' day at the Tropical Islands! During 24  
hours you will enjoy all the privileges normally reserved to an island's maharajah." (*My Day  
in Paradise (2005)* (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2005 [cited 15 September 2005]);  
available from <http://www.my-tropical-islands.com/paradies-e.htm>).

28 H. Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity. A Critique* (Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 1999),  
pp. 3, 76.

Modern jets almost extinguish the globetrotter, "the extreme form of the nineteenth-century  
flâneur", for, while enabling travellers "to traverse the world more rapidly" than ever before,  
they do not increase their "harvest of experience; in fact, the reverse is true" (P. Missac,  
*Walter Benjamin's Passages*, trans. S. Weber Nicholson (Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press,  
1995), p. 193). The modern tourist "is not really interested in the place he holidays in. He  
buys a certain aspect – of the whole country he expects only one thing for a week: that the  
trains work, as well as the hotel and the weather. Basically, he creates a 3D realm of illu-  
sion in a synthetic country. He is already in virtual space. The fact that he has to fly his  
body there only reinforces the illusion" (K. Thimm and J. Scriba, 'Sadomaso in Reinform.  
Spiegel Gespräch mit Peter Weibel' in *Der Spiegel*, no. 27 (2000), p. 138).

29 *The Great Evening Show* (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2005 [cited 12 November  
2005]); available from <http://www.my-tropical-islands.com/show/index-e.htm>. Other shows  
included: "Call of the South Sea", 2005; "Yussara Caribbean Show", 2005; "Alma Latina –  
Salsa Cubana", 2006; "Yussara Arja Barong", 2006.

30 Benjamin noted an intermingling and confusion of day and night rhythms (Menninghaus,  
*Schwellenkunde*, p. 41). Whereas during the 1855 construction of the Hôtel du Louvre,  
"entrepreneurs used electric light on the site, in order to double the day's labor" (Benjamin,  
*Arcades*, F7,2), the light is used here to proliferate entertainment in a 24/7 environment of  
fun.

31 Eames, *Welcome*.

32 A poster in the entrance area shows a couple watching the show. The man is so fasci-  
nated that he keeps pouring wine into an already overflowing glass.

33 Benjamin's fluid *Bildraum* exceeds narrative in its immediacy, uniting "experience and  
imagination, memory and dreams" and combining "restorative and utopian moments" (see  
E. Curthoys, 'Benjamin's Imaginary. Review of Kia Lindroos, Now-Time/Image-Space:  
Temporalization of Politics in Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of History and Art' in *Theory &  
Event* 3, no. 2 (1999), §6).

34 Half of the €60-million for the CargoHangar, plus €15-million for the *Tropical Island Resort*,  
were fronted by tax payers.

35 Benjamin, *Arcades*, G6 and G6a,1.

36 A. Hall, *It's an Idea to Warm to as a Tropical Forest Takes Root Just Outside* (Evening  
Standard (London), 2004, June 24 [cited 21 September 2005]); available from  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4153/is\\_20040624/ai\\_n12087761](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4153/is_20040624/ai_n12087761).

37 Because "they hardly have to leave home" to be in the tropics (K. Connolly, *Germans Get  
Taste of Tropics an Hour's Drive from Berlin* (TravelVideo.TV, 2004, 21.12. [cited 1 May  
2006]); available from [http://travelvideo.tv/news/more.php?id=A3758\\_0\\_1\\_0\\_M.](http://travelvideo.tv/news/more.php?id=A3758_0_1_0_M.)

38 In 1924, a German writer associated a longing for sun, deep in the Germanic soul, with  
Germanic power, which would ultimately lead to German dominance over the world and its  
tropical islands (see K. DiPaola, 'Samoa – "Perle" der Deutschen Kolonien? "Bilder" des  
exotischen Anderen in Geschichte(n) des 20. Jahrhunderts' (Doctor of Philosophy, Univer-  
sity of Maryland, 2004), p. 252).

39 A. Benjamin, 'Tradition and Experience: Walter Benjamin's "On Some Motifs in Baude-  
40 laire"' in A. Benjamin (ed), *The Problems of Modernity* (London, Routledge, 1991), p. 123.  
41 Gilloch, *Myth*, p. 126.  
42 M. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*,  
43 trans. W. McNeill and N. Walker (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press,  
44 1995), p. 93.  
45 Benjamin, *Arcades*, D2a,1.  
46 However, the weather increases chances to get bored (see D1,3 and D1a,9).  
47 N2a,1.  
48 p. 834. Despite their vastly different proportions, there is also a phenomenological corre-  
49 spondence between the shape and construction of the CargoLifter hangar and the Sa-  
50 moan *Fale*.  
51 Gilloch, *Myth*, pp. 10, 103.  
52 CargoLifter AG, *Premiere: Freie Fahrt für großvolumige Fracht* (epilog Magazin, 1997  
53 [cited 12 March 2006]); available from  
54 [http://www.epilog.de/GeT/Luftfahrt/T1/CargoLifter\\_Logistik\\_971100.htm](http://www.epilog.de/GeT/Luftfahrt/T1/CargoLifter_Logistik_971100.htm).  
55 M. Steere, *The Baron's Big Balloon. A German Aristocrat-Businessman Is Relaunching the*  
56 *Age of the Airship, Armed with Millions in the Bank and a Team of Crack Engineers. Can*  
57 *Superblimps Rise Again?* (On Newsstands Now. Issue 8.08 | Aug, 2000 [cited 13 May  
58 2006]); available from <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.08/airships.html>.  
59 Ironically, the scheme may have been a response to a Thai economist's claim "that Europe  
60 was incapable of innovation and doomed to decay" (Steere, *Balloon*).  
61 Steere, *Balloon*.  
62 Eames, *Welcome*. In its functional versatility, the 1851 Crystal Palace prefigured *Tropical*  
63 *Islands'* constellation. The Crystal Palace could be used for almost anything, so that one  
64 proposal for its use after relocation, following the end of the world exhibition, was to turn it  
65 into a bathing establishment (Benjamin, *Arcades*, F5a,1). Part of its formal impact was due  
66 to its vaulted central hall integrating existing elms trees on the site (F4,2). While *Tropical*  
67 *Islands'* exterior makes no references to nature or culture, its interior is rife with them and  
68 offers pleasures "strangely akin to a nightmare" (Benjamin, *Arcades*, G9a,4).  
69 *Building a Tropical Resort in Northern Germany* (gizmag, 2005, February 10 [cited 4 June  
70 2005]); available from <http://www.gizmag.com.au/go/3677/>. "The hangar's aerodynamic  
71 outline represents the clearance required for two airships moored side by side. ... The cy-  
72 lindrical central section is divided into four bays supported by five trussed tubular steel  
73 arches at 35m centres springing off concrete plinths that also act as covered entrances.  
74 ..." (Slessor, 'Super Blimp').  
75 See Menninghaus, *Schwellenkunde*, p. 27. One of the promotional images of the Car-  
76 goLifter shows it hovering over mountains and a jungle topped by palms (CargoLifter AG,  
77 *Luftschiff-Werft in Brandenburg. CargoLifter baut eine der weltweit größten freitragenden*  
78 *Hallen* (epilog Magazin, 1997 [cited 12 March 2006]); available from  
79 [http://www.epilog.de/GeT/Luftfahrt/T1/CargoLifter\\_Werft\\_Fundament\\_990810.htm](http://www.epilog.de/GeT/Luftfahrt/T1/CargoLifter_Werft_Fundament_990810.htm).  
80 Slessor, 'Super Blimp'.  
81 The "massive hangar" is one of several gigantomanic economic failures in Brandenburg  
82 (Eames, *Welcome*).  
83 Gilloch, *Myth*, p. 104.  
84 J. Steffen-Schrade, 'Exkurs: Samoaner Im Frankfurter Zoo' in G. Kroeber-Wolf and P.  
85 Mesenhöller (eds) *Talofa! Samoa, Südsee - Ansichten Und Einsichten* (Frankfurt, Museum  
86 für Völkerkunde, 1998), pp. 376, 81. The same troupe also gave performances in Berlin.  
87 p. 379.  
88 Benjamin, *Arcades*, pp. 189-90.  
89 T. Mitchell, 'Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order' in N. Mirzoeff (ed) *The Visual Culture*  
90 *Reader* (London, Routledge, 2002), p. 497. One wonders what the scholars would have  
91 made of the "chronometric turk" at the 1844 Paris exhibition, "who marked the hours by the  
92 numbers of his somersaults" (Benjamin, *Arcades*, G9a,4). Compare this with the potential  
93 of the theatrical stage as a visual field, or image-space (*Blickraum*), capable of altering  
94 perspectives and rescuing the world from reification and fragmentation, as discussed by D.  
95 Thomä ('Benjamin, Wittgenstein. Schwierigkeiten beim Philosophieren gegen den  
96 Fortschritt' in K. Garber and L. Rehm (eds) *Global Benjamin* (München, W. Fink, 1999),  
97 pp. 1232-5). A fundamentally different relationship between actors and audience from that  
98 at the resort shelters and saves harassed dramatic figures, allows them to "draw breath,  
99 bathes them in a new air" (Benjamin, 'One-Way-Street', p. 91).  
100 See Benjamin, *Arcades*, I1a,4, G5a,1 and G8,4.  
101 G16,6.  
102 "Falling asleep is perhaps the only such experience that remains to us. (But together with  
103 this, there is also waking up.)" (O2a,1). Benjamin quotes Aragon about how "mankind  
104 loves to remain transfixed at the very doors of the imagination!" And while thresholds are  
105 immanent in transformation, passage, and action, their immediate and ceremonial context  
106 remains important.  
107 D9a,4.



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64 D3,7.  
65 W. Benjamin, 'The Storyteller. Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov' in H. Arendt (ed) *Illuminations* (New York, Schocken, 1969), p. 91. Boredom is also "the threshold to great deeds" (Benjamin, *Arcades*, p. 855). Instead of juxtaposing the grey of boredom with colour, boredom can be seen, as can grey, as a site of potentiality, as a threshold that holds possibilities in suspense (A. Benjamin, 'Boredom and Distraction: The Moods of Modernity' in A. Benjamin (ed) *Walter Benjamin and History* (New York, Continuum, 2005), p. 165). The "individual becomes a site of conflicting forces", and boredom, or its overcoming, is no longer simply about an opposition between a grey and its coloured inside (p. 163).  
66 Benjamin, *Arcades*, D2a,1 and D3,4.  
67 G°, 26. The mediated experience of dialectical images relies on force fields of conflicting time registers and different perspectives on history (see S. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge (Mass.), The MIT Press, 1989).  
68 Benjamin, *Arcades*, N1a,4.  
Moments of such sudden flashes are easily missed. When I passed at the *Tropical Village* stage during a break, I noticed a bizarre display: two life-size golliwog dolls were decorated onto chairs; as soft toys without rigidity, they looked newly dead bodies. Backstage, a group of Cuban dancers rehearsed their performance. As I stealthily framed a snapshot of the golliwogs, two woman dancers came out and moved into the frame. When I asked for permission to take a photo, to my surprise they did not move away but spontaneously posed in front of the camera. They seemed interested in a chat but, taken by surprise, I was unresponsive. Picture taken, we exchanged greetings and parted.  
69 R. Sieburth, 'Benjamin the Scrivener', *Assemblage* 6, no. June (1988), p. 9.  
70 See G. Hartoonian, 'Looking Backward, Looking Forward: Delightful Delays', *Architectural Theory Review* 10, no. 1 (2005), p. 23.  
71 Benjamin, 'Boredom', p. 163.  
72 Sieburth, "Benjamin the Scrivener," p. 9. In Menninghaus' view, this aesthetics of social life worlds is the most innovative and powerful aspect of Benjamin's critique of myth (Menninghaus, *Schwellenkunde*, p. 113).  
73 Benjamin, *Arcades*, M16a,4. As opposed to aura as an appearance of distance.  
74 Hartoonian, 'Looking Backward, Looking Forward: Delightful Delays'.  
75 See Benjamin, *Arcades*, pp. 963-4.  
76 Gilloch, *Myth*, p. 11. Modernity's promise of progress, abundance and freedom from necessity and fate, was already distorted "in the architecture, fashion and commodities of the nineteenth century" (105) – albeit differently in different parts of the world.  
77 See Benjamin, *Arcades*, p. 923. "Being past, being no more, is passionately at work in things. To this the historian trusts for his subject matter. He depends on this force, and knows things as they are at the moment of their ceasing to be" (D°,4). Truth, Benjamin believed, is revealed in an object's obsolescence and afterlife, where one can "recognize today's life, today's forms" in the "apparently lost secondary forms" of an epoch (Benjamin, *Arcades*, N1,11. See also Gilloch, *Myth*, p. 110).  
78 See N. Leach, 'Mimesis', *Architectural Theory Review* 10, no. 1 (2005), p. 94.  
79 Leach, 'Mimesis', p. 97.