

# TELLING DEMONIC FAIRYTALES:

**An Essay and Sound Piece on Walter Benjamin's  
Radio Works for Children**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Between 1927 and 1933, Walter Benjamin produced eighty-four radio pieces; more than a third of them for children. Because there are no known recordings, scholars have only a partial understanding of these works. Both radio and childhood are under-examined in Benjaminian scholarship. 'Telling Demonic Fairytales' approaches Benjamin from an interdisciplinary perspective. This project—an essay and a sound piece—starts by asking: *What did Benjamin hope to achieve by addressing children over the radio?* The essay focuses on three points. It describes Benjamin's hopes contrasted with actual German state radio; it examines his conception of children and storytelling, and offers a reading of the radio script 'Demonic Berlin' and a related E.T.A. Hoffmann story. Using montage, the sound piece weaves a biographical story of Benjamin with fragments about modern rituals, play, and politics. The sound piece examines large social issues through the common poetry of individual voices telling specific stories.

### **Key Words:**

Benjamin, Walter; Childhood; Radio; Mimesis; Storytelling; Audio Art

### **Subject Terms:**

Benjamin, Walter, 1892-1940 – Criticism and interpretation; Mimesis in Literature; Radio programs for children--Germany--History; Audio Documentary

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**1: ESSAY.**  
**WALTER BENJAMIN ON THE RADIO AND HIS  
REVOLUTIONARY TASKS FOR CHILDHOOD**

## Introduction: An Important yet Subtle Task

“Task of childhood: to bring the new world into symbolic space.”—Walter Benjamin.<sup>1</sup>

To discuss Walter Benjamin’s radio works is to grapple with fragments, sketches, and scripts. Between 1927 and 1933, Benjamin produced eighty-four literary discussions, plays, dialogues and monologues for the radio.<sup>2</sup> Thirty or so of these pieces were written for an audience of children.<sup>3</sup> However, there are no known recordings of Benjamin speaking on the radio.<sup>4</sup> The scripts for these pieces that have survived followed a winding path through history complicated by many chance encounters and close calls. They withstood the many years of global tumult when their producer could not.<sup>5</sup> Jeffery Mehlman describes the scripts in *Walter Benjamin for Children*, the only major study of the subject,

Some thirty of those scripts, on the order of fireside chats, were abandoned in Paris by Benjamin, in 1940, only to be accidentally packed up with the archives of the *Pariser Tageszeitung*, once the Nazis themselves were obliged to flee the city. An act of sabotage by the editor of the German newspaper was all that saved the archives, and Benjamin’s scripts along with them, from the destruction ordered by the Gestapo authorities. Whence the curious fate of these writings for children, which languished fifteen years in Russian obscurity before being returned to Germany, where they were received, around 1960, by the Central Archives of Potsdam. It was not until 1985, however that the scripts were finally published, in Germany, under the title *Aufklärung für Kinder* [Enlightenment for Children].<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately missing from the archival material are recordings of the sonic objects themselves. This gap at the heart of this body of work is of course frustrating, yet is also an oddly appropriate reminder of how radio has functioned for most of its history.



The ephemeral quality of early radio made it more similar to theatrical performances and other live events than to an audio recording or film that can be played again and again. Because many speeches and musical presentations were broadcast live, they demanded the audience be attentive and present next to the radio. Unlike attending a film, a radio listener would have to listen to the show at the time it was scheduled, as there were not unlimited chances to catch it another day. The medium's appeal had much to do with its qualities of simultaneity and ethereality combined with its ability to reach a mass audience. There are many broadcasts from early radio history that are lost forever, because either no recording was made or because the fragile and unique disk, cylinder, or tape, was destroyed. The fact that Benjamin's voice no longer exists for us to hear seems both disappointing and very fitting for this ethereal form.

Sound, by its very nature, appears and disappears to our sensorium. A Listener may grasp a spoken word or the bars of a song in his or her mind, but simultaneously, the sound itself fades away. All that is left is a socially informed trace memory. Even the revolutions in sound recording and transmission of the nineteenth and twentieth century have not truly stilled sound. This ephemerally has made sound, especially that of the radio, difficult to theorize and narrate as either an object or a phenomenon. "As a historical object," writes Douglas Kahn in the introduction to *Wireless Imagination: Sound Radio and the Avant-Garde*, "sound cannot furnish a good story or consistent cast of characters nor can it validate any ersatz notions of progress or generational maturity. The history is scattered, fleeting, and highly mediated—it is as poor an object in any respect as sound itself".<sup>7</sup> In *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Jonathan Stern argues that while the "history of sound is at different moments strangely

silent, strangely gory, strangely visual” it is also “always contextual”.<sup>8</sup> Sound is an artefact of the messy and political human sphere. Benjamin—as a poetic Marxist—would perhaps be pleased at the fragmentary, elusive, and thoroughly social and temporal qualities that define his reflections and experiments on the radio.

There are countless ways one could interpret these radio works, just as there are countless forces that inspired Benjamin to shape them in the ways that he did. Yet, these works have been under-examined in English language works on Walter Benjamin.<sup>9</sup> There is, to date only one extended essay, a section of a chapter, and a few conference papers on his work that appeared on the air.<sup>10</sup> The fact that he created anything for radio is most often mentioned as a footnote if it is mentioned at all. Potentially this has something to do with the relative newness of the translation of *The Arcades Project* and his *Selected Works*.<sup>11</sup> Or maybe there is some other reason. Judging from the wide array of essays examining Benjamin’s theories on everything from films to Judaism, shopping to architecture, Baudelaire to Kafka, dream life to new technology, scholars have been paying him a great deal of attention. So perhaps it is the oddness and the incompleteness of the records of his radio works that has made his writings on other subjects seem more appealing. Or maybe many critics have chosen to take Benjamin at his word when he dismissed his audio works being “of no interest except in financial terms”.<sup>12</sup> Like radio, the subject of childhood in Benjamin’s work has been similarly glossed over in the critical discourse in favour of other themes, although this too seems to be changing. Both sound and childhood are often thought of as experiences we lose just as we grasp their significance. Perhaps this quality of ineffability has let these themes slip away for the most part from the critical gaze.

Whatever the case may be, I have decided to address what seem to be the most essential, and perhaps most basic questions that come out of this body of work because of the dearth of essays on this subject. I have chosen to address two main questions; namely, *why children*, and *why on the radio*? One last question I wish to address is perhaps the combination of these first two: *what did he hope to achieve by addressing children in this form?*

As a way of balancing some divergent, undeniably large subjects, I have divided this essay into three general sections. The first section briefly outlines Benjamin's utopian hopes for radio and contrasts them with the actual social and technological workings of German radio in the 1920s and 1930s. The second section addresses Benjamin's conception of children and the revolutionary task he conceived for them. It delves into his philosophy and influences to come to a better understanding of why children were his intended—and in some sense ideal—audience. The third and final section offers a reading of two intertwined texts. One is a particular 1930 script by Benjamin called "Demonic Berlin" that describes the creative practice of the romantic German horror writer E.T.A. Hoffmann. The other text is Hoffmann short story "The Mine of Falun". These two texts are rich in mimetic imagery. The final section suggests mimesis as the possible link between this time in history, the sensibility of the young, and new technologies. It argues that the ephemeral, degraded, excessive, confused and potentially rich medium of radio cannot be separated from the content Benjamin produced. Throughout I wish to call attention to the concept of mimesis and to suggest that it is an important link between childhood, storytelling and the medium of radio. For Benjamin, the mimetic potential was a large part of what made radio a potentially

restorative modern art that could truly speak to the urban experience. Overall, I want to highlight how these deceptively simple little stories Benjamin told on the air were intended to work like Trojan horses, their real political power hidden within the more innocuous wrapping of children's entertainment.

## A Listening Audience

“Let us hope that from time to time the individual will give a little humanity to the masses, who one day will repay him with compound interest”<sup>13</sup>

By addressing children over the radio, Benjamin was essentially talking to urban, mainly middle class children. This was almost necessarily the case because radio technology at that time had a limited range and most broadcasting antennas were located in and around urban centers.<sup>14</sup> As Karl Christian Führer, points out in his article on German radio, “A Medium of Modernity?” The technical features of radio sets and stations, along with the price of sets and licenses shaped the audience.<sup>15</sup>

The “*Reichspost* [government organization that controlled radio transmission] erected only rather low powered transmitting stations until 1930, broadcasting ground-wave circles were very small: in 1927 they covered only 1.4 percent of the territory of the Reich”.<sup>16</sup> Most listeners therefore had to live in the “immediate vicinity of a radio station” if they were to have consistent, quality reception.<sup>17</sup> It is for this reason that, “Weimar broadcasting can justly be called an urban medium”.<sup>18</sup> Listeners of a particular station would have to live in a particular geographic location. So, despite extravagant pronouncements that new technology would bring the world into your home, German broadcasting was, and still in a sense remains, very much focused on the local and the regional.

In addition to being an urban form of communication—because of technological

limitations and an ideological bias toward urban centers—radio was also a middle class medium. The individuals in charge of regulating and conceptualizing German radio in the 1920s and 30s were focused on promoting and protecting bourgeois notions of traditional good taste. Rather than being seen as just a part of the mass or popular culture the men in charge of radio production saw their medium as an educational balm to counter the stultifying effects of degraded—often foreign—cultural production such as Hollywood films and jazz music. There was a broadcasting monopoly that made this push for tradition possible in a way not possible in the realms of filmmaking, publishing or even recorded music. Führer states,

To produce radio programs in Germany in the 1920s a public concession was needed, while nothing comparable was necessary to print a book, to publish a newspaper, or to produce a motion picture. Private investors who applied for this license . . . had to submit to a wide range of conditions. Foreigners, political parties and people with close political links, as well as companies and private persons engaged in producing radio sets were not wanted as shareholders of radio programs.<sup>19</sup>

The level of control, along with a lack of competing producers, gave the executives of Weimar broadcasting the somewhat unique—in the realm of media—luxury of being able to consider their “listeners less as customers than as objects of educational efforts”.<sup>20</sup>

Hans Bredow, an influential figure referred to by contemporaries as the “creator” of German broadcasting believed that radio should serve the nation and engender “love of the arts, public spirit, and a thirst for knowledge”.<sup>21</sup> In keeping with a thoroughly 19<sup>th</sup> century characterization of the middle class’s self-defined role, creators like Bredow defined themselves as arbiters of knowledge and taste who had the capacity and also the responsibility of cleaning out the psychic dirt produced by modernity.<sup>22</sup> This project was naturally intended to have an “effect both on individuals and on a particular social strata”

namely the working class.<sup>23</sup> What's important to note here is the intention rather than the effect; Fuhrer demonstrates that the broadcaster's grand hope of enlightening the masses did not have the desired effect. Statistics gathered by different radio stations showed that the "high culture" fare preferred by the stations was by and large appreciated by the middle class, and blue-collar workers generally expressed antipathy towards these efforts of enlightenment.

Men like Bredow and Carl Hagemann—the director of one of the largest stations in the country, Berlin Funkstunde—subscribed to the common fear that modern experience had an essentially dehumanizing effect on urban individuals. In a 1928 speech, Hagemann characterized the modern human in the big city as a "working being, above all".<sup>24</sup> According to the director, "Broadcasting relieves him of drudgery, bringing his life back into equilibrium".<sup>25</sup> Hagemann and Bredow's conception of radio was based on hope and belief that the best use of this new technological medium would be to represent older art forms. They believed that broadcasting "cultural" events like concerts, operas, and lectures could in effect release the listeners from the "exhausting restlessness" of modern life.<sup>26</sup>

However, The fact that these men advocated a return to tradition does not mean they were just reactionary anti-modernists, borrowing rhetoric from the National Socialists. This idea that modern individuals and society had lost some "wholeness" was commonly held belief among conservatives in the Weimar republic. Indeed thinkers of all political leanings were intent on addressing the feeling of rupture or brokenness that seemed to be a side effect of modernization that came truly to the forefront after WWI.<sup>27</sup> Benjamin himself addressed this rupture in his essay "The Storyteller" when he wrote, "A

generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky on a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath the clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny fragile human body”.<sup>28</sup> These broadcasters’ believed the radio could help to rebuild a coherent whole. The listeners’ houses could become, “home (Heim), providing shelter not just from the rigors of the climate but also from the psychological perils of modern society, with its tendencies toward superficiality and anonymity”<sup>29</sup>

German broadcasting was just another method of promoting both individual and social stability.<sup>30</sup> How they differ from men like Benjamin is in their belief that this transformation of house to home could be bought about simply by filling the private sphere with the sounds of Strauss waltzes and Beethoven’s *Fidelio*.

In many ways Benjamin’s own meditations on the radio might seem to correspond to the conservative views held by these radio producers in control. Neither wanted to see the radio treat its listeners as consumers and both thought there was some educational potential contained within the form. In one fragment on the medium, Benjamin writes that radio “has a particular duty to take up older cultural products,” which sounds quite similar to the beliefs of broadcasters like Hagemann and Bredow<sup>31</sup>. What Benjamin was willing to address that these men were either blind to, or chose to ignore however was the inherent contradiction of using a radical new medium to promote a return to tradition. In answering *how* and *why* “older cultural products” should be taken up on the radio, these men’s opinions diverged sharply. In fact, in stating his position, Benjamin directly critiques just such men for their oppressive and reactionary practices.

For conservative, bourgeois men like Hagemann and Bredow, this modern-mass



medium appeared to be paradoxically, a “deliverance from the complete mechanization” of everyday experience.<sup>32</sup> What’s more, it should be used to bring the lower classes further in line with the artistic, cultural interests of the middle class. Broadcasters expressed dismay that presentations of classical “high culture” fare were not as effective as they’d hoped in changing tastes<sup>33</sup>. As Führer concisely states, the basic concept of Weimar broadcasting can be characterized as a form of “defensive modernization”, a scheme with a strong tradition in German history of promoting reform and using every available modern political concept, institution, and medium to strive for the stabilization of the status quo. Benjamin, in contrast, was utterly distrustful of a reactionary emphasis on class distinctions and the notion that tradition and middle-class taste could offer a solution to the problems of modernity. When he writes that radio “has a particular duty to take up older cultural products”, he expands from there, arguing that it

will best do this by means of adaptations that not only do justice to modern technology, but also satisfy the expectations of an audience that is contemporary with this technology. Only in this way will the apparatus be freed from the nimbus of a ‘gigantic machine for mass education’ (as Schoen has described it) and reduced to a format that is worthy of human beings.<sup>34</sup>

Here, he is directly attacking the drive for mass education through the radio. The people, he says are not failing the radio; it is the radio that is failing to bring itself in line with the scope and perspective of individual human experiences. Benjamin argues that broadcasters should openly embrace modern technology rather than try to stifle it in the structures of older mediums. Rather than teaching a silent mass, he says, broadcasters should concentrate on giving individuals the tools “that will enable the listener to train himself” and to outgrow the “barbarism” of the blind consumer mentality.<sup>35</sup> It is by way of self-education that listeners will escape the disempowering structures of class and

infantilizing educational programs of Bredow and Hagemann.

Benjamin was not alone in having faith in the potential of radio while at the same time expressing dismay at the actual form it was taking overall. A long list of European avant-garde artists as diverse as Marcel Duchamp, Dziga Vertov, F. T. Marinetti, Bertold Brecht and James Joyce saw in radio huge creative potential.<sup>36</sup> Conversely, there were many even in Benjamin's own circle—most notably his close friend Theodor Adorno—who viewed the medium as an almost unsalvageable form, a perfect tool for political and ideological control. The tension between revolutionary possibility and totalitarian control that seems inherent in the many new mediums of the twentieth century is an extensively explored dialectic that has been scrutinized in many books and essays.<sup>37</sup> According to many, including Benjamin, the danger lay not so much in what people heard or saw in mass media but whether or not audiences could become sensitive to the way the mechanism functioned. If people could see the form for what it was they would recognize it as a construction, and they could come to recognize themselves as agents in the constructions of their society. If people cannot recognize how modern creations can affect them, they will be victims of those forms. As the Futurist artist and sometime journalist, Marinetti stated,

Those who use the telephone today, the telegraph, the phonograph, the train, bicycle or automobile, the ocean liner, dirigible or airplane, the cinema or a great daily newspaper (the synthesis of a day in the whole world) do not dream that these diverse forms of communication, transportation and information exert such a decisive influence upon their psyches.<sup>38</sup>

For Benjamin, there were a number of different techniques a producer could employ that sprung organically from the medium itself. On the one hand, radio is able to contain and transmit an infinite range of voices and perspectives. "A child can see", he

argues in “Reflections on Radio”, “that it is in the spirit of radio to put as many people as possible in front of a microphone on every possible occasion”.<sup>39</sup> In another short piece called “Theater and Radio: The Mutual Control of Their Educational Program”, he states that the form is also free to move between vastly different styles of storytelling much more easily than other performative avenues: “radio and the cinema can create space in their studios for anything ranging from ancient Chinese drama to the latest Surrealist experiments”<sup>40</sup> One important distinction between film and radio is the location where the audience experiences them. “We need only reflect” he writes “that the radio listener, unlike every other kind of audience, welcomes the human voice into his house like a visitor”.<sup>41</sup>

Here Benjamin calls attention to the intimate relationship radio announcers can have with listeners. While people may be distracted and wary in a packed theater, in their own home, a listener is likely to be more relaxed and open—and therefore more able to absorb the meaning of a story they’re hearing over the air. Again and again, in various texts Benjamin highlights certain elements of the radio. It is a profoundly flexible medium able to move between music and speech, disjointed experiment and traditional storytelling. It has immediacy; it slips into the domestic sphere. This intimacy, together with possibilities of broadcasting many different voices gave radio profound educational possibilities, especially in the way it might be able to make sense of modern experience, through the combination of sensitively made content and the technical form itself. It is in this regard that radio could naturally be a new venue for storytelling.

Along with Benjamin’s writings on education and radio the scripts themselves make it clear that he wanted to give his listeners tools to understand the urban world

dialectically. They encourage the listener to use their imaginative and intuitive powers to actively take apart and reassemble their environment. Most of all Benjamin wanted to instruct children on how to read in a way counter to how they were taught.<sup>42</sup>

It is here that we come to one of the often-discussed debates between Benjamin and his friend Adorno. In many studies of the two Benjamin is characterized as the progressive one open to the new communicative possibilities film, radio, and other mass mediums might offer, while Adorno is often discussed as the hard line avant-gardist who was entirely dismissive of those mediums because of their intrinsic relationship with capitalism and top down power structures. And while there is some truth to this characterization there are many more nuances in their positions, which can get lost with the push to simplify, labelling one “for” and the other “against”.

Adorno’s 1938 essay “On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening” is often seen as, “an essay best regarded as a polemic against Benjamin’s ‘Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’”.<sup>43</sup> While there are elements of the essay that can clearly be read as a critique of Benjamin’s work of art essay, it seems also to fit into a larger discussion between the two men. Both men wrote about the radio, but approached it from different angles, Benjamin looking at it from a more literary and theatrical standpoint and Adorno from a more musical and sociological one. Both examined the educational potential of the medium but came to different conclusions at different times. For Benjamin, radio and his work on it were clearly linked to his materialist writings on epic theater, Brecht and on the “author as producer”.<sup>44</sup> For Adorno, this line of thinking was misguided as it failed to fully address the fascistic

elements of the medium. He argued that the constant presentation of “the new” over the air created a “masochistic” listener.<sup>45</sup>

Masochism in hearing is not only defined by self-surrender and pseudo-pleasure through identification with power. Underlying it is the knowledge that the security of shelter under the ruling conditions is a provisional one, that it is only a respite, and that eventually everything must collapse. Even in self-surrender one is not good in his own eyes; in his enjoyment one feels that he is simultaneously betraying the possible and being betrayed by the existent. If one knows that he is basically marking time, the rage is directed primarily against everything which could disavow the modernity of being with-it and up-to-date and reveal how little has in fact changed. From photographs and movies, one knows the effect produced by the modern grows old, an effect originally used by the surrealists to shock and subsequently degraded to the cheap amusement of those whose fetishism fastens on the abstract present. For the regressive listener, this effect is fantastically foreshortened. They would like to ridicule and destroy what yesterday they were intoxicated with, as if in retrospect to revenge themselves for the fact that the ecstasy was not actually such. This effect has been given a name of its own and repeatedly been propagated in press and radio.<sup>46</sup>

In this passage Adorno uses some of Benjamin’s touchstones like surrealism, shock, photographs, movies, to describe and then condemn the regressive radio listener. This masochistic listener is not childlike, as Benjamin would like to think, but infantile. And their interest in deconstructing what they hear is not fueled by a desire to imaginatively remake. Rather than thoughtfully taking apart something they hear or see, this disempowered and angry audience fluctuates between “intoxication” and “ridicule”. Each new song or story they hear is at first greeted with ecstasy only to become trash after its newness wears off. For Adorno, a Brechtian “crude thinking” corrupted Benjamin’s ideas on radio.<sup>47</sup> As Gilloch says, Benjamin’s Brecht-tainted notions, “failed to do justice to the intricacies and negativity of [Adorno’s] own preferred ‘autonomous art’”.<sup>48</sup> In their promotion of radio and film, Gilloch continues, Benjamin and Bertold Brecht “opened up the disquieting possibility that modern mass media might inherently possess some radical

political potential”, and that did not fit well with “Adorno’s critique of mass culture in the 1930s and, of course, his later ‘culture industry’ thesis”.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps some of their disagreements over this point could be a result of the different kinds of work and venues of writing the two men operated in during that time. Benjamin, as is well documented, was repeatedly rejected by the German university system. To support himself after failing to become a professor and researcher he began writing for newspapers, journals and the radio. His close relationships with Brecht and children’s theater director Asia Lakis, along with his financially necessary writings perhaps opened his mind to the possibilities of mass culture. Adorno, on the other hand, worked almost exclusively under the auspices of various educational institutions.<sup>50</sup> It was never really necessary or, apparently, interesting for him to directly address the public. Under these circumstances it is easy to see how Benjamin is frequently painted as more utopian while Adorno gets stuck being characterized as an elite pessimist.

Yet I believe Adorno’s critique should be contextualized as much as possible. On the one hand Adorno always took a firm position on “light” and “serious” music on the radio, even in the 1920s when fascism did not yet have its hold on Germany and Benjamin was working on the air. In the late 1920s and 1930s when Benjamin wrote most about and for the radio, the German political and social landscape was not as locked into the bleak fascist trajectory as it was in 1938. By 1938, when Adorno wrote “On the Fetish Character,” he and Benjamin had both been in exile for many years. Germany had violated the Versailles Treaty; the government had stripped Jews of their citizenship rights; propagandists and capitalists around the world seemed fully in control of popular

media. All this to say that Adorno's opposition to Benjamin's ideas developed during a very bleak time

While it may seem that the two men did not agree on many philosophical points, I do believe they shared interests in the role of repetition and reproduction in modern life, the role of childhood in an individual's experience, and what effect the radio might have on a child's experience. Benjamin was interested in defining a kind of revolutionary potential in mimetic repetition, a way that a listener or viewer could experience something again and again in a way more like a child listening to a parent retell their favourite story night after night than a factory worker hammering out the same metal mechanism day after day.

## Starved for Meaningful Experience

“The education of a child requires its entire life be engaged”—Walter Benjamin<sup>51</sup>

If one is to analyze the sonic aspect of Benjamin’s work, it is also necessary to try to examine how childhood fit into his overall philosophy, and by what logic it was linked to the medium of radio. This, I would argue was not a passive nor apolitical coming together of audience and medium. For Benjamin— indeed for the whole German society—youth was a contested social zone where many different, ideological, artistic, and intellectual factions struggled for dominance.<sup>52</sup> The many early twentieth century youth movements, whether based on religion, sport, academic life, artistic interests, or political beliefs, attest to these struggles. Despite the common characterization of Benjamin as a nonconformist thinker, his early intellectual life was deeply imbedded in intellectual collectives that were part of the wider German youth movement phenomenon.

Benjamin’s own childhood is marked very profoundly by his experience at a country boarding school Landerziehungsheim Haubinda which was “a distinctly progressive institution” run at the time of Benjamin’s attendance by Gustav Wyneken.<sup>53</sup> Wyneken, “differed markedly in his approach as a teacher from the traditional, distant authority of the schoolmaster: he based his pedagogy on a solidarity of youth”.<sup>54</sup> He was undoubtedly an influence when Benjamin was crafting his educational radio pieces. In the contested realm of childhood, diverse groups saw an opportunity to metaphorically win over the future. In the case of the Nazi youth in post-Weimar Germany and the “pioneers” and “Octoberist” children in communist Russia, the aim of winning over future generations



was far from metaphoric.<sup>55</sup>

In this section I wish to lay out some key ideas that Benjamin's writing orbits around. When writing about childhood and for children, Benjamin inevitably ends up grappling with the notion of origins and interiority; this is manifested in his explorations of interior spaces, literary spaces created in books and mimetic relationships. All enter into real and imagined aspects of the radio. As with planets and their moons, there are dark and illuminated sides of Benjamin's thoughts on children. On the one side, he seems to reject the protected sphere of his youth yet he revels in the material detritus of children's past. He devoted many essays and fragments to the concept of childhood, but he was often absent from his own son's life. Rather than putting forward one concise overarching theory about childhood and perception, I believe Benjamin constantly juggled many ideas and influences. His own personal memories from childhood intermingle with generalized "child" figure of the nineteenth century. This archetypal child is in some sense a type- similar to "the flaneur" or "the collector" who meander so freely through the pages of *The Arcades Project*. Because modern children are largely corralled and controlled, put in order at schools and reformatories, in youth groups and playgrounds, Benjamin's child figure only appears fleetingly, and this figure artfully sidesteps tight definitions.

According to many historians and theorists who write on youth and the family, the industrialization and modernization of the nineteenth century constructed childhood as we know it today. In that century, the years of life under the age of 13 took on new meanings and significance in western society. Labor movements, the reorganization of public and private spaces, the standardization and universalization of education,

psychoanalytic and anthropological emphasis on origins and roots, utopian philosophies, along with artistic and literary idealizations of childhood all contributed to a shift in how youth was talked about, imagined, and dealt with. Especially for the bourgeois and upper classes, childhood became a separate time and place, distinct from adulthood. This separation led to one of two outcomes: to fetishizing the young and attributing to them the edenic virtues of innocence, emotionality, spontaneity, and receptivity; or demonizing childhood and characterizing children as raw, uncultured, full of irrational urges. Without a firm guiding hand, children were considered potentially anarchical. Children at the turn of the nineteenth century are at once a beautiful consumptive waif in one of Dickens's novels and Freud's little Hans, seething with incestuous and patricidal desires. They are at once innocents who are spoiled by their exposure to degraded culture, and seen as little savages who must be forcibly moulded into civilized human beings.<sup>56</sup>

Childhood becomes an imagined place and time in the nineteenth century exempted from the concerns of adulthood. In this binary, the post-Enlightenment adult was expected to believe in reason, progress and rationality; children were expected to be irrational and uncultured. This freedom of childhood had collected within it a whole host of associations, which applied also to the realm of the artist. According to the influential psychoanalyst Ernest Schachtel, the nostalgic sentimentality of the bourgeois serious "adult" really concealed a hatred or jealousy of the "child" that extended also to the "artist".

It has often been remarked that Freud's emphasis on the central role of sexuality was his great 'offence' against Victorian morals. But this was not the only point where he clashed with the prevailing culture of his time, even though it aroused the loudest accusations. The Victorian burgher saw himself as a thoroughly rational, dignified adult . . . miles removed from the joys and woes, the zest of discovery, the wonder, the magic hopes and

helpless anger and despairs of childhood . . . A similar condescension is apparent in that period's attitude to the artist as crystallized in the concept of Bohemè. The bohemian world was view by the average burgher with a mixture of amused tolerance, sentimentality, contempt, and repressed envy, as was the world of childhood.<sup>57</sup>

Because childhood was considered a safe time and place for dream worlds and fantasy play it became very attractive to individuals who felt lost or overwhelmed in the rapidly changing, growing cities of industrializing Europe and America. As Carolyn Steedman argues in *Strange Dislocations*, modern notions of childhood were bound up with feelings of loss and nostalgia. In the nineteenth century, the figure of the child came to “express a sense of interiority and historicity within the adult self”.<sup>58</sup> Imagining a time outside of the adult world, a time freed from pressures and structures of adulthood made childhood seem like a refuge. This refuge, by extension, should be protected for the young people who were lucky enough to be living in it in the present.

This bourgeois view of childhood clearly colors Benjamin's own personal history, concerns, and obsessions. His views are further complicated by his interest in and cautious commitment to a mystical Judaism and Marxism. The radio pieces for children are just one facet of his relationship with the subject of childhood. He was a passionate collector of children's toys and books. Many of his short essays and fragments are devoted to subjects such as “A Child's View of Color” and “The Metaphysics of Youth”. Even in many of his longer, better known works are shot through with his thoughts on childhood even when they do not ostensibly deal with the subject. *The Arcades Project*, “One-Way Street”, “The Storyteller”, his *Moscow Diary*, and most obviously the two versions of the autobiography of his youth, “Berlin Chronicle” and “A Berlin Childhood around 1900”, all contain serious meditations on childhood. For Benjamin, that time in

life was a kind of gateway, located in a past where artists and thinkers might find an alternative consciousness, which would make visible a possibly revolutionary future. Far from a unique view, Benjamin's attitude fits with a whole host of prominent figures. William Wordsworth, Friedrich Schiller, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, William Blake, Charles Fourier, Lewis Carroll, J.M. Barrie, Marcel Proust, and Sigmund Freud to name a few, all mined childhood for their own creative and intellectual ends.

In his epic *Arcades Project*, Benjamin grapples with a complicated and nuanced set of relationships between dreams and waking life, the collective and the individual, and the past and present. One of Benjamin's much discussed aims for *The Arcades Project*, was to sound a wake-up call, to rouse people from their dream of a continuous history that existed only in the past. Benjamin's conception of dreams and waking was his own idiosyncratic take on a Marxist view of cycles in history combined with a critique of commodity fetishism. His description designates childhood as the container for an epoch's dream life: "Awakening as a graduated process that goes on in the life of the individual as in the life of generations. Sleep its initial stage. A generation's experience of youth has much in common with the experience of dreams. Its historical configuration is a dream configuration. Every epoch has such a side turned toward dreams, the child's side"<sup>59</sup>. But, says Benjamin, his current time is missing the tools people in had in the past.

Whereas the education of earlier generations explained these dreams for them in terms of tradition, of religious doctrine, present day education simply amounts to the distraction of children. Proust could emerge as an unprecedented phenomenon only in a generation that had lost all bodily and natural aids to remembrance and that, poorer than before, was left to itself to take possession of the worlds of childhood in merely an isolated, scattered, and pathological way.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the isolated ability of people in his time had to explain their dreams, he thought there were still potential to create new “technique[s] of awakening”.<sup>61</sup> *The Arcades Project* itself represented, “An attempt to become aware of the dialectical—the Copernican—turn of remembrance”.<sup>62</sup> He believed this was possible because “The dream waits secretly for the awakening; the sleeper surrenders himself to death only provisionally, waits for the second when he will cunningly wrest himself from its clutches. So, too, the dreaming collective, whose children provide the happy occasion for its own awakening”.<sup>63</sup> For Benjamin children are the impetus for waking and understanding anew what their dreams have meant and made. *The Arcades Project* represented a wake up call for all those who slumbered in the dream world of the nineteenth century. He believed the twentieth century was a time of opportunity because the dream itself contains within itself the seeds for its own awakening. Here we have an excellent example of Benjamin’s own idiosyncratic brand of Marxism blended with the imagery of romantic fantasy. Children provide both the impetus for social transformation and a model for the kind of different kind of work and viewpoint. The two potentially revolutionary qualities children possess are an inclination towards creative production and the ability to mentally and sensually transform themselves into the things they perceive.

According to Benjamin, children’s ability to engage in non-alienated production came not so much from their ability to imitate the world of adults but rather to move imaginatively into the material world and conceive of new possible relationships between things. In “A Child’s View of Color” a fragment written by Benjamin in 1914-15, he observes that the world is full of objects that appeal to childish attention and use.<sup>64</sup>

Children, he writes,

are irresistibly drawn by the detritus generated by building, gardening, housework, tailoring or carpentry. In waste products they recognize the face that the world of things turns directly and solely to them. In using these things they do not so much imitate the world of adults as bring together, in the artefact produced in play, materials of widely differing kinds in a new, intuitive relationship. Children thus produce their own small world of things within the greater one.<sup>65</sup>

By calling attention to children's attraction to non-alienated labor, Benjamin is subtly calling into question that they should be protected from work. Rather than condemning all forms of work for children, Benjamin criticizes repetitive factory work, which is as damaging to adults as it is to children. Benjamin wished rather to turn children's skills towards the holistic project of building a new politicized story of the past, present, and future. According to Maeve Pearson, Benjamin's challenge was deeply influenced by Charles Fourier, who believed, "an ideal social order could be achieved by putting children to work as soon as they could walk".<sup>66</sup> This idea ran very counter to the philosophy of the major social movements of his age. Fourier argued that children have natural interest in constructing and deconstructing, investigating, getting dirty, making noise, organizing and tearing apart. All activities that could be put to use in creating a utopian society. As the result of many overlapping, widespread social changes, children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were increasingly excluded from the holistic labor practices while at the same time prepared by school systems for a life of bureaucratic labor.<sup>67</sup> Despite their attraction to craft and holistic labor practices, children were increasingly barred from this social realm of work.

Because the childish attraction towards holistic physical labor was more and more blocked by the structuring mechanisms of industrialized capitalist society, Benjamin

wished to turn children's skills towards the building of stories, especially the story of history and progress. This new perspective would challenge the assumptions and beliefs in the nineteenth century post-Enlightenment narratives.<sup>68</sup> With the western pressure towards mandatory childhood education, reading and writing increasingly became a kind of work children were expected and encouraged to undertake. For Benjamin, this permission to work with books and acceptance of creative fantasy, offered him an opportunity to destabilize the bourgeois project of enlightenment with his own modern, Marxist project of awakening. In his view, labouring with language could be just as powerful as physical labour, and if children were allowed to work with language when they were barred from many other materials – it would be the most reasonable from a revolutionary perspective to teach children to use the tools they had access to. In his radio pieces, Benjamin concealed his revolutionary goals in deceptively simple talks that fit into a long tradition of storytelling. To the inattentive ear, his tales of disasters and creations might be mistaken for benign curiosities, little sonic toys to distract a child for the short time they were on the radio. However, Benjamin's stated belief in the transformative potential of both childhood education and the underestimated potential of new media, makes it difficult to dismiss the radio pieces as unimportant performance footnotes to his more renowned work as a writer.

“Devouring books”, Benjamin reflects in a 1929 piece called “Children's Literature”, is, “A strange metaphor. One that makes you think. It is true that in the world of art no form is so affected in the course of enjoyment, so deformed and destroyed, as narrative prose”.<sup>69</sup> Here Benjamin asks his audience to consider why we eat and why we read. He asks them to bear in mind,

the reasons we need nourishment and the reasons we eat are not perhaps identical. The older theory of nourishment is perhaps so instructive because eating is its starting point. It claimed that we obtain nourishment by absorbing the spirits of the things we have eaten . . . our reading too involves such a process of absorption . . . We do not read to increase our experiences; we read to increase ourselves. And this applies particularly to children who always read in this way. That is to say, in their reading they absorb; they do not empathize.<sup>70</sup>

In this passage Benjamin makes a subtle but fundamental distinction between absorption and empathy. The empathetic reader may understand and share the feelings of the characters they read about or see, but in their experience, the boundary between self and other remains firm. The reader, who absorbs on the other hand, does not feel for the other but rather becomes the other through a very visceral process akin to eating. Therefore reading itself can be a mimetic experience.

As much as Benjamin believed in children's potential for transformation he knew also that they were not at all outside the culture they came from. In the case of himself and his listeners, this was a "highly industrialized, commercialized world that surrounds him". It radically alienates him from his own image, voice and sense of physical continuity with his surroundings. Thus, children must, like theorists and artists, pull themselves bodily out of their prescribed place in the dominant social structure if they wish to transform it. In an article on his autobiographical writings, Bernd Witte locates a description of hide and seek where "Benjamin traces the relations between revolt, self expression, and the assertion of his identity back through the layers of his earliest experience".<sup>71</sup>

The child stands behind the curtain himself becomes something white and flowing—a ghost. The table under which he has been cowering transforms him into a wooden idol in the temple . . . Under no circumstances may he be found . . . Thus, when someone happened upon me, I let out a loud



shriek, releasing the demon that had transformed me—indeed, I didn't even wait to be found, but anticipated it with a cry of self-liberation.<sup>72</sup>

This child version of Benjamin experiences a blending of self and object, which precipitates a “cry” declaring himself both no longer hidden and—at least momentarily—no longer possessed by the object world. In this excerpt from “A Berlin Childhood”, as well as in the previously discussed characterization of reading as eating, Benjamin's conception of mimesis is extremely significant.<sup>73</sup> In his 1933 essay “On the Mimetic Faculty” Benjamin outlines the concept in this way:

Nature produces similarities; one need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. His gift for seeing similarity is nothing but a rudiment of the once powerful compulsion to become similar and to behave mimetically. There is perhaps not a single one of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role.<sup>74</sup>

This faculty, he is quick to point out, has an ontogenetic history based in play.

“Children's play is everywhere permeated by mimetic modes of behaviour, and its realm is by no means limited to what one person can imitate in another. The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher, but also a windmill and a train.” At this point, rather than continuing an examination of mimesis unconnected from the radio works, I will examine “Demonic Berlin” a particular script which delves into the mimetic function in a number of different ways.

## Demonic Berlin

“The minerals came to life, the fossils stirred, the marvellous iron pyrites and almandine flashed in the gleam of the miner’s lights”—E.T.A. Hoffmann<sup>75</sup>

“In Benjamin’s images, hell names reality directly, and the sin of the living is their own punishment”— Susan Buck-Morss<sup>76</sup>

The radio piece “Demonic Berlin” was delivered on Berliner Rundfunk in February of 1930.<sup>77</sup> Ostensibly, the piece either serves as an introduction to romantic writer E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822), or tries to give the listener a better way of understanding the author if the listener is already familiar with Hoffmann’s eerie tales.<sup>78</sup>

There are a number of elements that make Hoffmann the ideal conduit for Benjamin’s revolutionary project. In addition to being a writer, Hoffmann was a multifaceted artist with an abiding interest in philosophy; he wrote music and drew satirical caricatures and was by profession a legal councillor.<sup>79</sup> His experience in the court system gave him insights into the “criminal psychology” and employed these insights extensively in his stories. He is an extremely influential figure in the German arts, although much of the work he inspired now overshadows the original. Nearly a century after Hoffmann’s death, Freud referred to Hoffmann as a master of the uncanny.<sup>80</sup> Most famously, Hoffman’s tale “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” formed the framework for Tchaikovsky’s now ubiquitous Christmas spectacle. His deeply disturbing novella “The Sandman” inspired *Coppélia*, another classic ballet. There are traces of Hoffmann in the work of composers Jacques Offenbach and Richard Wagner, writers Franz Kafka and Edgar Allen Poe, Sigmund Freud and of course,

Benjamin. To an almost overwhelming degree, Hoffmann's creative works explore all manner of copies, impostors and twins, as well as dolls that become human, humans that become objects and material that transforms and is transformed. Hoffmann's obsession undoubtedly influenced Benjamin's thinking in regard not only to mimesis but also the nature of the copy and the original, explored in the exhaustively discussed "Work of Art" essay.

Throughout this deceptively simple piece Benjamin orchestrates a number of character shifts, which fit beautifully with a discussion of Hoffmann. He is at once a listener, a reader, a writer, and a character. He also applies this kaleidoscope of roles to his subject and his audience. Rather than begin with Hoffmann, Benjamin starts his lecture with a memory of his own youth, when his music teacher August Halm, "a funny little man, with an unforgettable expression in his serious eyes, and the shiniest bald pate I had ever seen" read a Hoffmann story to his class and explained the reason he liked it was because he appreciated "the bizarre, the cranky, the eerie and the inexplicable".<sup>81</sup> Using this technique, Benjamin establishes from the start three different storytellers—himself, his former teacher, and the renowned German writer Hoffmann. Vivid in Benjamin's memory is the sentence his teacher concluded the reading with, "why anyone should tell stories like this is something I shall tell you in the near future".<sup>82</sup> This promise is left unfulfilled by his former and now deceased teacher. And it becomes a jumping off point for Benjamin.

What Benjamin wishes to do for his radio audience is "attempt today to fulfil a promise that was made to me twenty-five years ago".<sup>83</sup> Here Benjamin steps into his teacher's place, and puts his listeners in his place. With this shell game of selves

Benjamin is subtly calling attention to the narrative constructions growing up on all sides of the listener. Further on, he describes Hoffmann's obsession with doppelgangers, Benjamin again reconfigures his position and that of his listeners; both become for a moment Hoffmann himself. "We feel ourselves infected by his character when we read such stories as 'The Deserted House', 'The Deed of Entail', 'The Doubles', or 'The Golden Pot'".<sup>84</sup> Benjamin then returns to his first technique, describing his young self secretly reading Hoffman's stories when his parent's were out, because they had forbidden him to read them. "And as I sat there reading 'The Mines of Falun', all the horrors gradually gather around me at the table edge in the surrounding gloom, like fish with blank expressions, so that my eyes remained fixed to the pages of the book from which all this horror emerged, as if redemption might come from them".<sup>85</sup> This scene he describes brings this listener into Benjamin's own body. The children are asked quite literally to see out of the speaker's eyes and to feel some of the terror he felt as a youth. Here again Benjamin emphasizes how texts construct an environment, in this case a demonic one.

This reference to the demonic will not go unexplored, because it is precisely this unsettled quality that reveals Hoffmann's own dark method. In Hoffmann's tales, it is not the narrators who are frightening; rather they are "always a perceptive, sensitive fellow who detects spirits even in their most subtle disguises."<sup>86</sup> The characters that surround and torment the narrator on the other hand are most often "eerie, spectral figures".<sup>87</sup> Here, in his next point, we come to the heart of Benjamin's story—the casually concealed Marxist core of his seemingly simple radio lecture. "[T]he eerie, spectral figures who appear in Hoffmann's stories are not characters dreamed up by their author in the stillness

of his own little room. Like many other great writers, he found the extraordinary not somehow floating freely in mid-air, but in quite specific people, things, houses, objects, and streets.”<sup>88</sup> It is a seemingly simple observation on Hoffmann, but when taken in context with Benjamin’s work as a whole it takes on a larger significance. This small comment ties back to the Benjamin’s notion of Marxism, and it relates to what Benjamin saw the work of the author.

In her book *Dialectics of Seeing*, Susan Buck-Morss says of the radio pieces, “While entertaining and often humorous, they had a pedagogic purpose, to teach their young audiences to read both the urban landscape and the literary texts generated within it as expressions of social history”.<sup>89</sup> In the nineteenth century arcades, Benjamin found a grotesque modern spectacle. This became the morbid phantasmagoria of twentieth century market capitalism. For him, the capitalist mode of production and consumption was a cyclical “configuration of repetition, novelty, and death”.<sup>90</sup> In Hoffman’s writing he found vivid imagistic tales that seem to poetically encapsulate many of the central problems of modernity.

The only specific tale Benjamin discusses in any length is “The Mines of Falun”. Hoffmann’s retelling of an actual sixteenth century mine tragedy in Falun, the district capital of Dalarna, Sweden.<sup>91</sup> The story is so rich in mimetic imagery and language, so deeply uncanny and so open to a Marxist reading that Benjamin’s use of it might serve as the subject of an entire study.<sup>92</sup> Benjamin was obviously quite interested in this particular historical tale because in his famous essay “The Storyteller” he cites yet another version of the Falun mine story written by Johann Peter Hebel, a contemporary of Hoffmann.<sup>93</sup>

Because an extended study is impossible here, I will outline the most strikingly mimetic and critical features of the story.

This macabre tale recounts the sad fate of a young sailor, Elis, who finds himself at a psychic crossroads at the start of the story. After rejecting the entreaties of his fellow sailors and a pretty girl to celebrate their return to land after a long voyage, Elis exclaims in a fit of despair “if only I lay buried at the very bottom of the sea! There is no one left in this life with whom I can be happy.”<sup>94</sup> An old man begins a conversation with Elis upon hearing this death wish. In his conversation with this old man Elis lays out the reasons for his sadness. Tragically he has just returned from sea to find his mother dead, and without her or any other family he has no desire for the life of a sailor, a life he once loved. The old man advises Elis to abandon the sea and become a miner; he himself works in a mine and has come to love the mysteries contained in minerals and precious gems. At first this suggestion horrifies Elis: “do you want me to leave the beautiful free earth . . . to go down into the fearful depths of hell and like a mole grub around for ore and metal for a miserable pittance?”<sup>95</sup>

From the very start, Elis is drawn into a mimetic relationship with the materials in the mine. Despite his revulsion Elis is compelled by the old man’s descriptions of the mines, and his own uncanny dream of the mine which is filled with glittering waves, flowers, plants all made of metals and crystals. Entwined in these mirages where,

Innumerable, charming female forms who held each other locked in embrace with white, gleaming arms and from their hearts there sprouted forth those roots and flowers and plants: when the maidens smiled, sweet harmony echoed through the dome, and the wondrous metal flowers thrust ever higher and became ever more gay. An indescribable feeling of pain and rapture seized the youth. A world of love, of desire, and of passionate longing expanded within him.<sup>96</sup>

After having this disturbing dream, he finds himself—almost against his will—compelled to trek to the mine, where he immediately finds a job and meets Ulla, a beautiful village girl, with whom he falls deeply in love. Still, he is possessed by strange visions of the queen of the mine whose form he can sometimes see in the rocks and crystals when he works. He is both repelled and seduced by the work, but he continues to work hard in the hopes that he will be able to buy property and win the heart of Ulla. He finally succeeds and becomes engaged. But his work in the mine continues to have a strange effect on him. “When Ulla spoke to him of her love and how they would live together happily, then he began to speak of the splendour of the shaft, of the immeasurable rich treasure which lay concealed there.”<sup>97</sup> Despite this change in his personality, the plans for the marriage go forward. But on his wedding day he is compelled to go into the mine to find a blood red stone, his wedding gift to her. “Ulla begged her beloved with hot tears to desist from this visionary undertaking, since she had a foreboding of the greatest misfortune”.<sup>98</sup> However he insists and disappears into the mine, promising to return. Not surprisingly, the story ends badly. Miners rush in to the wedding party to announce there has been a cave in that destroyed the mine. Elis’s body is not recovered and his broken hearted bride disappears from the village. The story ends after the passage of fifty years, at which time the details of this tragedy fade in the village’s collective consciousness, until some young miners by chance uncover the perfectly preserved corpse of a young man. No one knows who it is until the long lost bride who is now an old woman appears to weep over the body and recount the sad tale. After telling her story to an astounded audience, “The miners stepped forward. They wanted to raise poor Ulla up, but she had breathed out her

life on the body of her petrified bridegroom. They noticed that the corpse of the unfortunate man, which they thought was petrified, was beginning to turn to dust”.<sup>99</sup>

In this story, Elis is again and again drawn towards the realm of material. The rock, crystal and metal become almost living and they seduce him maternally, erotically, economically and spiritually. He is willing to forfeit his vital energy in pursuit of a sparkling phantom. And as the inanimate world of the mine mimics the living natural world, so Elis’ comes to perfectly mimic crystal, then dust. Like an overwhelmed consumer lusting after the newest most dazzling object in the store window, Elis’ own body mingles with what he regards. In the end he is unable to pull away from the game of imitation. And, because Elis is unable to let out a “cry of self-liberation” like Benjamin’s child behind the curtain, he is consumed by the object world.<sup>100</sup>

The phantasmal queen of the cave reaches for him in a smothering embrace. She does not just want to hold him, she wishes to consume him similar to the way children consume books. The male protagonist is drawn to the monstrously female mining cave, that at once offers a womblike and sexual embrace, but this same cavern is also his grave. In the end this female form succeeds in consuming him. But instead of rotting like a regular buried body, his mortal form becomes petrified, preserved as an always-young corpse. His body crumbles to dust when exposed to the breath and touch of a real human woman. Reading this story as a child was a terrifying experience for young Benjamin. The horrors of this story gathered around him, “like fish with blank expressions, so that my eyes remained fixed on the pages of the book from which all the horrors emerged”.<sup>101</sup> In Hoffman’s tale, the pursuit of material wealth is bound up with sexual and romantic love, and the whole journey towards death is precipitated by the death of a real mother



and the phantasmal reappearance of a sensual maternal figure embedded in mineral nature. While the young Benjamin may not have made these connections, I doubt the complicated messages hidden in this story were invisible to the adult Benjamin.

As fantastical and romantic as this story seems, Benjamin asserts throughout “Demonic Berlin” that Hoffman is a writer grounded in the dark reality of his city. Hoffmann was fond of visiting wine bars and cafes, in search of new faces and details that could be woven into his tales.<sup>102</sup> In fact, the wine bars became for Hoffmann “a kind of poetic laboratory, a place for experimentation in which he could try out the complications and effects of his stories every evening on his friends. Hoffmann was not a novelist but a storyteller”.<sup>103</sup>

Here it may be useful to explain what kind of person Benjamin believed the storyteller to be, and what relationship he or she had to “material, human life.”<sup>104</sup> In his essay “The Storyteller” Benjamin asks, “whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman’s relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way.”<sup>105</sup> As in “Demonic Berlin”, Benjamin is playing subtle mimetic tricks here. In his work, someone who has heard and understood well can become a storyteller; someone who is a storyteller becomes a craftsperson. In a final twist in the conclusion of this essay, Benjamin points out that when seen “in this way, the storyteller joins the ranks of the teachers and sages”.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the child listening attentively to Benjamin speaking over the radio becomes both Benjamin and Hoffmann, is both audience of the story and story architect, student and teacher. “The storyteller”, Benjamin

tells the reader in that essay by the same name, “is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself”.<sup>107</sup>

To conclude “Demonic Berlin”, Benjamin returns to the question he began with. For “what purpose did Hoffmann write his stories”, he asks?<sup>108</sup> Hoffmann wrote them, he explains to his young Berlin audience, because of a,

desire to show that this dull, sober, enlightened, commonsensical Berlin was full of things calculated to stimulate a storyteller—things that were to be found lurking not only in its medieval corners, remote streets, and dreary houses, but also in its active citizens of all classes and districts, if only you knew how to track down such things and look for them in the right way.<sup>109</sup>

Notice how he uses direct address in the sentence, putting into the mind of the listener a very personal image of walking the street looking for clues to piece together a story and make sense of the city. By undertaking this task, the listener may be able to get a handle on the horrors of modern life. If they understand them dialectically, they will find that there is something illuminating and transformative hidden within the horror. For a final time, Benjamin reminds his listeners that they have the agency to become a storyteller and make their urban lives readable. He is also reminding them to see themselves in literary texts, because texts are products of the real world. Stories, however magical, do not spring from mid-air.

## Conclusion: Dreamers of the World, Awake

“The imminent awakening is poised, like the wooden horse of the Greeks, in the Troy of dreams.”—Walter Benjamin<sup>110</sup>

In this essay I have tried to pay special attention to the figure of the mimetic child as it appears and develops in Benjamin’s work. Rather than being simple, his radio texts are, as Mehlman argues, “at times as analytically forceful as anything in what one hesitates to call his ‘adult’ writings”.<sup>111</sup> Benjamin had an urgent commitment to creating stories that worked. He wished to supply his listeners with real tools to disassemble and re-envision their current material urban existence. As Buck-Morss maintains, “[t]hese programs affirm the intrinsically progressive, anti-elitist potential of radio as a medium of communication, capable of establishing a new form of folk culture”.<sup>112</sup>

It is worth mentioning the apparent paradox in Benjamin’s hopes for radio; he wanted a new folk culture to arise out of a very urban mass medium. He was clearly aware of this paradox, and his subtle, sometimes conflicted approach reveals his struggle to find a satisfying way of wedding new media to a restorative storytelling practice in step with modern society. Benjamin writes in his essay “The Storyteller”, that after WWI the ability to tell a story became more and more rare in European society.<sup>113</sup> This inability to communicate meaningfully was a response on the part of the people to the brutal shocks of industrialization, mass-warfare, violent economic upheaval and drastically shifting transportation and communication practices. As Benjamin explains, the tradition of storytelling is tied to labor traditions, and a sense of the local immediate environment and society<sup>114</sup>. To absorb a properly told story, listeners need mental space and the

relaxing rhythm of craft activities.<sup>115</sup> This mental room to imagine and dream, along with holistic work practices were degraded during the nineteenth century. Working adults were robbed of their time to absorb stories, among other things. “It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences”.<sup>116</sup> Because childhood had come to be a time where some imaginative free play was allowed and expected, children became—in his mind—a receptive audience.<sup>117</sup> These young listeners might be able to apperceive the new stories of the modern age.

The wisest thing—so the fairy tale taught mankind in olden times, and teaches children to this day—is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits . . . The liberating magic which the fairy tale has at its disposal does not bring nature into play in a mythical way, but points to its complicity with liberated man. A mature man feels this complicity only occasionally, that is, when he is happy; but the child first meets it in fairy tales, and it makes him happy.<sup>118</sup>

From its earliest years, radio—like cinema, television, or any other mass communication technology—has carried with it a substantial freight of mythology. Because the scientific breakthroughs, the industrial innovations, the social, economic, and political structures that facilitated the creation of phonographs, projectors, cameras, and antennas, happened over long periods of time with frequent failures, breakdowns, and missteps, they are not easily understood.<sup>119</sup> The histories of these inventions are full of specialists’ vocabulary and obtuse explanations. In other words, the material development of a medium like radio does not lend itself to conventions of storytelling. Because of this narratives of individual geniuses, flashes of insights and picture perfect “firsts” have emerged to explain how new technologies come to be.<sup>120</sup> One image that appears again and again in these stories is a metaphoric birth, infancy and childhood of a new medium.

Unsurprisingly, the technologies involved in radio seem to have been almost immaculately conceived by a series of brilliant fathers: Nikola Tesla, Lee de Forest, Guglielmo Marconi, Thomas Edison, and Edwin Armstrong, to name just a few<sup>121</sup>.

Historic facts and the metaphors, fancies and dreams of a time have a maddening way of intertwining, overlapping, and influencing, one another. There seem to be few clean lines between them and when looking for a discrete fragment to pull out and examine it is often impossible to tell whether one has a description of what occurred or what the observer, storyteller, or historian wished had occurred. In many histories of recorded sound, we are told the radio was either a socially empowering and unifying device or an industrial age device for deadening both soul and sensorium.<sup>122</sup> Some writers tell us that the birth of radio contributed to the demise of individuals' holistic sense of their bodies and a sense of their place in their immediate world.<sup>123</sup> Voices of the dead, living machines, mass psychosis brought on by radio shows, and the opening of the formerly isolated domestic sphere, are all part of the myth and reality of the medium.

This essay examined ways in which dreams and realities lived side by side in the radio. In the late 1920s and early 1930s German radio was still a new and molten medium. It was open to the possibility of change and reinterpretation. But this also meant it was an ideological battleground. During the 1920s and 1930s the Nazi slogan 'Deutschland Erwache!' (Germany Awaken), entered the public sphere.<sup>124</sup> There is a sad irony in how closely the slogan seems to echo Benjamin's aim for the *Arcades Project*. In these different uses of "awakening" we can see in miniature a much larger struggle over meaning between the left and right. "Awakening" wrote Benjamin, is "a graduated process that goes on in the life of the individual as in the life of generation's . . . [a]

generations experience of youth has most in common with the experience of dreams”.<sup>125</sup> *The Arcades Project*, which he referred to as “theater of all my struggles and all my ideas,” was an attempt to wake people from the dream of the nineteenth century.<sup>126</sup> By 1933—the year Benjamin lost his job creating pieces for the radio because of the Nazi Party’s ascension to power—“Germany awaken!” was a frequently chanted slogan, often followed by a second phrase, “Juda verrecke!” (Perish Juda).<sup>127</sup> Buck-Morss states that for the Nazis “awakening” was —unsurprisingly—vastly different than what Benjamin had in mind. While he wanted individuals to awaken to the historic and material constructions which keep them oppressed and slumbering, the Nazi leaders wished to awaken to a recaptured “past in a pseudo-historical sense,” they wished to awaken to a myth made real and keep the people they ruled stunned sleepwalkers.<sup>128</sup>

In January of 1933, Hitler gave his first national radio address. That same month Benjamin presented his last radio talk for children.<sup>129</sup> The fact that these two men in a sense crossed paths over the radio suggests the shadow of the unrealized passing across the realized, if only for a moment. Large-scale Nazi propaganda programs, and Hitler as a consummate individual showman, “used the mass medium of radio to foster a political culture antithetical to that for which Benjamin was working. Fascism reversed the avant-garde practice of putting reality onto the stage, staging not only political spectacles but historical events, and thereby making ‘reality’ itself theater”.<sup>130</sup>

I end with an account of one of Benjamin’s final radio stories, given on the subject of a flood on the Mississippi that occurred in 1927.<sup>131</sup> This story chronicled one human drama that occurred during “an apparently ‘natural’ disaster that was in fact caused by the state”.<sup>132</sup> In order to spare the main port city of New Orleans, the US

government “assumed emergency, dictatorial power and ordered the destruction of dams protecting miles of shore up stream, an act that lead to an unanticipated degree of devastation of this agricultural region.”<sup>133</sup> Benjamin recounts the fate of two farmer brothers whose whole means of survival were swept away before their eyes.<sup>134</sup> As the water rose around them, “one brother did not wait for death, but jumped into the water to drown. But the other holding on until rescued by a passing boat, lived to tell the story”.<sup>135</sup> According to Buck-Morss, these two men “personified two sides of Benjamin’s own reaction to economic annihilation”.<sup>136</sup> Like the bride and groom in Hoffmann’s tale, one part of Benjamin was tempted by the uncanny appeal of self-annihilation, while another part of him felt compelled to continue. Death in both stories offers the young men a return to a watery or dark womblike embrace of the natural world.<sup>137</sup>

While in the end Benjamin chose to commit suicide in 1940, in 1933 Benjamin chose to continue. In this final radio piece, his last direct address to the youth of Germany he seems to be trying--one final time—to encourage his young audience to shift their perception, becoming for a moment both Benjamin the storyteller, and these brothers faced with a raging flood. It was his final entreaty to his invisible audience to awaken to the new world they were set to inherit. It sad to think that these stories told by such a subtle thinker were too delicate and complex for a listenership growing accustomed to shouting and high drama orders. It seems the brilliance of a single voice is the first thing to be drowned out in the face of world chaos.

## End Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin eds. (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 390.
- <sup>2</sup> Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 165.
- <sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Mehlman, *Walter Benjamin for Children: An Essay on His Radio Years* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 99; Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 34.
- <sup>4</sup> Gilloch, *Critical Constellations*, 166.
- <sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt, "Introduction", *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 1-55; Lisa Fittko, "The Story of Old Benjamin", *The Arcades Project*, 946- 954. These two essays are prime examples of the mythologizing of Benjamin's death.
- <sup>6</sup> Mehlman, *Walter Benjamin*, 1.
- <sup>7</sup> Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, eds. *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1992), 2.
- <sup>8</sup> Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 13.
- <sup>9</sup> Sabine Schiller-Lerg, *Walter Benjamin und der Rundfunk: Progammarbeit Theorie und Praxis* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1984); Susan Buck-Morss, "Verehrte Unsichtbare!: Walter Benjamin Radiovortrage," in *Walter Benjamin und die Kinderliteratur: Aspekte der Kinderkultur in den zwanziger Jahren*, Klaus Doderer ed. (Weinheim: Juventa Verlag, 1988) are both important essays written in German on Benjamin's radio works.
- <sup>10</sup> Mehlman's *Walter Benjamin for Children* is an essay published in book form and Gilloch devotes only about ten pages in *Critical Constellations* to the radio works in the chapter "Benjamin On-Air, Benjamin on Aura".
- <sup>11</sup> *The Arcades Project* was first published in 1999, *Selected Writings Vol. 1* in 1996 and *Vol. 2* in 1999.
- <sup>12</sup> Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 403.
- <sup>13</sup> Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty", *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith, eds. (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 735.
- <sup>14</sup> Karl Christian Führer, "A Medium of Modernity? Broadcasting in Weimar Germany, 1923-1932" *The Journal of Modern History* 69, (December 1997), 737.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 728.
- <sup>21</sup> Bredow quoted in Führer, "A Medium of Modernity?", 729.
- <sup>22</sup> Führer, "A Medium of Modernity?", 730.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> A fixation on fragments is emblematic of many modernists. In art and writing the montage,



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collage, cut up and stream of consciousness styles all in some way refer to fractures in society in part due to industrialization, the break down of different social structures (class struggle, suffrage) and new modes of expression (film, photography, sound recording) T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Guillaume Apollinaire, Gertrude Stein, Tristan Tzara Paul Valery Pablo Picasso, Antoine Artaud, Arnold Schoenberg, The Surrealists, Dadaists and Cubists are just some of the individuals and movements engaged with the concept of a fragmented society.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin "The Storyteller" *Illuminations*, 84.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 731.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin "Theater and Radio", *Selected Writings Vol. 2.*, 585.

<sup>32</sup> Fuhrer 730.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 745

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin "Theater and Radio", *Selected Writings Vol. 2.*, 585.

<sup>35</sup> Benjamin, "Reflections on Radio" *Selected Writings Vol. 2.* 544.

<sup>36</sup> Kahn, "Introduction" *Wireless Imagination*, 1-29. See also Vinen, Richard, *A History in Fragments: Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Campo Press, 2001), 133-137.

<sup>37</sup> Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (Routledge 1999); Susan Buck-Morss *The Dialectics of Seeing*; Douglas Kahn, "Track Organology," *October 55* (Winter 1991); Barbara Stafford and Frances Terpak *Devices of Wonder*, (Getty Research Institute, 2002); and Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past*, (Duke University Press, 2003). All provide excellent extended examinations of the dialectic tension in new media.

<sup>38</sup> F.T. Marinetti, "Destruction of Syntax—Wireless Imagination—Words in Freedom," trans. Richard Pioli. *Stung by Salt and War: Creative Texts of the Italian Avant-Gardist F.T. Marinetti* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 45. Quoted in Kahn, *Wireless*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Benjamin, "Reflections on Radio", *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 543.

<sup>40</sup> Benjamin "Theater and Radio", *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 584.

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin "Reflections on Radio", 544.

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin, "Children's Literature", *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 250-256.

<sup>43</sup> J.M. Bernstein, ed. "Introduction" *Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge 1991), 4.

<sup>44</sup> Gilloch, *Critical Constellations*, 166.

<sup>45</sup> Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" *Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* 49.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Gilloch, 164.

<sup>48</sup> Gilloch, 164.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Over the course of his life Adorno was affiliated with University of Frankfurt, The Institute for Social Research, Oxford University, Princeton University, University of California German Sociological Association and others. By highlighting this list of institutions I do not mean to imply that they were all completely receptive or sympathetic to Adorno. However I think they did offer him a certain amount of protection and support in terms of his intellectual career. Benjamin on the other hand failed to secure the same kind of official backing.

<sup>51</sup> Benjamin, "Program for a Proletarian Children's Theater", *Selected Writings Vol. 2.*, 201.

<sup>52</sup> Vinen, *A History in Fragments: Europe in the twentieth century*, 78-127. Offers a concise discussion of youth movements during this period.

<sup>53</sup> Marcus Bullock, and Michael Jennings, "Chronology" *Selected Writings Vol. 1*, 492.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Benjamin, "Moscow" *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 26.

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- <sup>56</sup> David Archard, *Children: Rights and Childhood* (New York: Routledge 1993) offers an extended analysis of the contradictions of childhood.
- <sup>57</sup> Ernest Schachtel, "Introduction" to *Metamorphosis: on the development of affect, perception, attention, and memory*, (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 4.
- <sup>58</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority* (London: Virago, 1985), 12.
- <sup>59</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 388.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid., 390
- <sup>64</sup> Benjamin, "A Child's View of Color" *Selected Writings Vol.1* Ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 52.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>66</sup> Maeve Pearson, "All their play becomes fruitful: the utopian child of Charles Fourier" (*Radical Philosophy*, 115, Sept/Oct, 2002) 29-39.
- <sup>67</sup> Philippe Aries *Centuries of Childhood*, (New York: Knoph, 1962); Ernest Schachtel, "On Memory and Childhood Amnesia" *Metamorphosis*, 279-322; and Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, all provide an in depth discussion of this concept.
- <sup>68</sup> Pearson, "All their play becomes fruitful", 29-39.
- <sup>69</sup> Benjamin, 'Children's Literature' *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 255.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>71</sup> Bernd Witte, "Paris—Berlin—Paris: Personal, Literary, and Social Experience in Walter Benjamin's Late Works" (*New German Critique*, No 39, Fall, 1986), 51.
- <sup>72</sup> Benjamin "Berlin Chronicle" *Schriften IV*, 253. quoted in Witte, "Paris—Berlin—Paris", 51
- <sup>73</sup> Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity* (New York: Routledge, 1993), has deeply influenced my understanding of mimesis in relation to Benjamin. In his book, Taussig gives proper due to the complexities of Mimesis as it relates to European notions of primitivism, Freud's notion of the uncanny, and mimetic magic in relation to state and cultural forces. I regret I have not been able to go into the subject of mimesis in more depth.
- <sup>74</sup> Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty" *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 721.
- <sup>75</sup> Hoffmann, "The Mines of Falun" *Selected Writings of Hoffmann Vol. 1* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 194.
- <sup>76</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing*, 103.
- <sup>77</sup> Benjamin, "Demonic Berlin" *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 326.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid. At the end of "Demonic Berlin" Benjamin comments on how much Hoffmann's reputation has changed over the years. Towards the end of his life—he died in 1882—Berliners scorned Hoffmann even while his work was making the city famous abroad. By the turn of the century there were available editions of his work, but Benjamin's parents considered Hoffmann inappropriately frightening for their young son, thus he had to read the tales secretly. By the 1920's "all that has changed" writes Benjamin, "There are a host of very affordable editions, and there are even more parents who allow their children to read Hoffmann that there were in my day". So, most of Benjamin's listeners were likely somewhat familiar with Hoffmann, most likely from the already classic "The Nutcracker". What Benjamin may have been trying to do is reassert the significance of the uncanny and satirical in Hoffmann's work over a more sanitized, less specific understanding of the writer.
- <sup>79</sup> Benjamin "Demonic Berlin" 324; "Introduction to E.T.A. Hoffmann" *Little Blue Light* (<http://www.littlebluelight.com/lblphp/intro.php?ikey=9>).

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- <sup>80</sup> John Fletcher, "Freud, Hoffmann and the Death-Work" *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, (London: Routledge Vol. 7, Num. 2, August 2002), 125.
- <sup>81</sup> Benjamin, "Demonic Berlin" *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 322.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid., 323.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid., 324.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>89</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, 34.
- <sup>90</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, 97.
- <sup>91</sup> Hoffmann, "The Mines of Falun" *Selected Writings*, 189.
- <sup>92</sup> Hoffmann, "The Mines of Falun" 189-212; Laurence A Rickels, "Mine" *Terminal*, (1999), (<http://vv.arts.ucla.edu/terminals/rickles/rickles-0.html>); Fletcher, "Freud Hoffmann and the Death Work" *Angelaki*, 125-141. Rickels and Fletcher's texts both offer in-depth discussions of the actual historical account of the mine in Falun.
- <sup>93</sup> Benjamin, "The Storyteller", *Illuminations*, 94.
- <sup>94</sup> Hoffmann, "The Mines of Falun", *Selected Writings*, 191.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid., 193.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid., 195.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid., 209
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid., 210.
- <sup>99</sup> Ibid., 212.
- <sup>100</sup> Benjamin "Berlin Chronicle" *Schriften, IV*, 253. quoted in Witte, "Paris—Berlin—Paris", 51
- <sup>101</sup> Benjamin, "Demonic Berlin", *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 323
- <sup>102</sup> Ibid., 325.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>104</sup> Benjamin, "The Storyteller", *Illuminations*, 108.
- <sup>105</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>107</sup> Benjamin, "The Storyteller", *Illuminations*, 109.
- <sup>108</sup> Benjamin, "Demonic Berlin", *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 326.
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>110</sup> Benjamin, *Arcades*, 392.
- <sup>111</sup> Mehlman, *Benjamin*, 2.
- <sup>112</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, 35.
- <sup>113</sup> Benjamin, "The Storyteller", *Illumination*, 83.
- <sup>114</sup> Ibid., 88.
- <sup>115</sup> Ibid., 91.
- <sup>116</sup> Ibid., 83.
- <sup>117</sup> This was of course more a part of the bourgeois family as working-class children were still often expected to contribute financially. However, by the turn of the century (the time of Benjamin's own childhood as described in "A Berlin Childhood Around 1900" *Selected Writings Vol. 3* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002) the working class child also had more leisure and educational time to reflect. For further discussion see also: Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, and Schachtel, *Metamorphosis*.
- <sup>118</sup> Benjamin, "The Storyteller", *Illuminations*, 102.
- <sup>119</sup> Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 1-49.
- <sup>120</sup> Ibid., 1.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 1, 171. Internet searches, popular and scholarly publications all attest to the still active cult of personality surrounding early inventors like Edison, Marconi and Tesla. All often referred to as “founding fathers” of modern medias such as radio.

<sup>122</sup> Michael Bull, Les Back ed. “Introduction” *Auditory Culture Reader*, (New York: Berg, 2003, 1-18); Jim Drobnick ed. “Introduction” *Aural Cultures*, (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2004, 1-15)

<sup>123</sup> Jacques Attali *Noise: the political economy of music*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Murray Schafer, “Open Ears” in Michael Bull and Les Back ed. *Auditory Culture Reader*, 25-39; and Karin Bijsterveld, “The Diabolical Symphony of the Mechanical Age; technology and symbolism of sound in European and North American noise abatement campaigns 1900-40” in *Auditory Culture Reader*, 165-189. All these texts offer critiques of the effects of sound on the modern individual.

<sup>124</sup> William Gillespie, “Dietrich Eckart - An Introduction For the English-Speaking Student” (Summer 2004, <http://www.vanguardnewsnetwork.com/2004b/GillespieDietrichEckart.htm>).

<sup>125</sup> Benjamin, *Arcades*, 387.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., Trans. forward, x.

<sup>127</sup> Staff writer, “Hitler into Chancellor”, *Time*, Feb. 6, 1933: ([http://www.time.com/time/archive/collections/0,21428,c\\_holocaust,00.shtml](http://www.time.com/time/archive/collections/0,21428,c_holocaust,00.shtml))

<sup>128</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, 36.

<sup>129</sup> Buck-Morss *Dialectics*, 37; “Adolf Hitler’s First Radio Broadcast January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1933”, (Winchester, UK. [http://www.tomahawkfilms.com/page\\_3.html](http://www.tomahawkfilms.com/page_3.html)).

<sup>130</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, 36.

<sup>131</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, 37. This particular script was not translated in Benjamin’s *Selected Writings*. I have therefore relied on the translated sections included in Buck-Morss’ text.

<sup>132</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, 37.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 122.

**2: CD: *SIMILARITIES END***

## Some Method in the Everyday

“Yet I snatch this language that is foreign to me and turn it about in my fashion. I thread together truths that will be reproduced. But on the slate I wrote with a sovereign chalk. It is told which part of me was to prevail. I am a foreigner to myself in my own language and I translate myself by quoting all the others.”—Madeleine Gagnon<sup>1</sup>

The sound piece *Similarities End* is a product of the same research that has gone into the extended essay “Telling Demonic Fairytales”. Both essay and sound piece are explorations of Walter Benjamin’s experiments in the realm of radio for children. Both examine Benjamin’s ideas on childhood, play, mimesis, storytelling and education. The difference between the two is that while ‘Telling Demonic Fairytales’ elucidates these concerns through the logic of academic writing, *Similarities End* enacts them in sound. Benjamin’s own work as a journalist, scholar, autobiographer, and poetic thinker served as a primary inspiration for my work as did the experimental spirit of his time. Documentaries, sound and visual art works, films, and literature also influenced me. Some influences are fairly overt, but others require explanation. Ironically, The mute essay speaks for itself. It is the sound piece—full as it is with many voices—that requires some explanation.

The central narrative thread of the whole sound piece is Benjamin’s radio work and biographical notes about his struggle as a German Jew in the years leading up to WWII. While my narration on Benjamin is rather straight forward, using a single narrator, speaking either alone or with only music, the other tracks in the piece are the more theatrical. They are made from the collaged voices of friends answering questions,

reading and playing roles. These voices interrupt, overlap, question, and contrast with one another. They mingle together more as multicoloured threads than as a whole fabric. In all but, track 1 “This is a Dream”, track 7 “Self Analysis” and track 11 “Bread Breaking”, the words spoken are either quotes or phrases of my own construction. I was continually putting words in other people’s mouths. *Similarities End* is my attempt to filter some of Benjamin’s ideas through a mesh (or mess) of my daily life.

Benjamin’s strong interest in urban landscapes and his fondness for diagramming ideas has led critics to often discuss his oeuvre in terms of maps. The works of Benjamin criticism could be conceived of as a stack of atlases, each focused on a different set of literary, historic, personal and geographic positions.<sup>2</sup> His influential intellectual and artist friends become metropolises and towns. For example, Theodor Adorno, Bertold Brecht and Asia Lacis often come to represent various Marxist points in the Benjamin geography. Simultaneously, actual geographic places like Berlin, Paris, and Port Bou, Spain become mythic destinations in his narrative amble from birth to death. The sound piece lays out too personal, too circuitous a path to be of much use to someone wishing to find a quick way to some vital Benjaminian point. Sounds themselves scatter like a trail of breadcrumbs, destined to disappear into the air, caught in the mouths of birds. *Similarities End* is less like a map than it is a dream of a map, one dreamt after a long day of pouring over books and papers, attending a dinner party full of scattered conversation, drinking one too many glasses of wine and then falling into bed dog-tired.

Each day offers many ritualized moments that can act as theatrical devices and narrative anchors. Waking up is always a proverbial new beginning—*Once upon a time, our hero opened his eyes*. The series of beeps in “Time Signal” stands for the first

entrance of public social structure through media into the realm of the private. The beeping acts as both as interruption to a dream and as punctuation to the story of Benjamin's death. By starting with the contrasting images of death and awakening I am trying to draw the beginning and end of the narrative together, in order to establish a looping structure. Through the piece I ask— *does waking up to death make us appreciate what is before us in life?* Beginning with the question “are you still sleeping?” track 2 is situated between two texts – both of which examine awakening in a globalized world. The first text is a quote from a Žižek essay on the 2005 riots in France, U.S. Hurricane Katrina disaster, and the war on terror<sup>3</sup>. The second is the 1911 poem “Weltende” (Worlds End) by poet Jacob Van Hoddis.<sup>4</sup> While Žižek's text is a complicated theoretical essay and van Hoddis' poem is an almost childlike rhyme, they are very much engaging similar themes. Both texts examine governments, individuals, natural disasters, and violence. Van Hoddis regarded these themes from the vantage point of an avant-garde poet in pre-WWI Germany. Žižek from the stand point of a media obsessed philosopher at the start of a new millennium. For van Hoddis, the coming apocalypse is clearly visible and it seems to suit him just fine. In just eight lines the poet describes a society in turmoil, but with a tone of calm, observant reportage. The common symptoms of a cold “runny nose” and sniffing demand the same attention as a train crash. Žižek on the other hand, writes against a broad sweep of the war on terror, citywide riots and devastating floods. In his sometimes dizzying though often compelling style, Žižek argues that it is not because we are asleep to the lies we are told that we continue to let them accumulate strength in society. According to him neither poet nor critic can simply expose harsh reality and expect it to change our minds. In a sense we are all like van



Hoddis these days, able to regard destruction with an ironic, slightly sad smile. It no longer takes the avant-garde to identify the problem. Ideology is not false consciousness.

As a child, the adults in my life were for the most part politically left: New Mexico desert artists, old utopian hippies, theater professors, and scientists. But my hometown as a whole had more than its fair share of bible thumpers and devotees of the military industrial complex. Our neighbour had a bumper sticker that read, “In case of the Rapture, this car will be unmanned” and she saw nothing funny about it. Although I wasn’t really aware of it at the time, my childhood coincided quite neatly with the public debates about the possibility that we had arrived at the “end of history” as Francis Fukiyama so dramatically dubbed the supposed triumph of Western liberal democracy.<sup>5</sup> So I have grown up wondering what we were supposed to do in this time after the end. How can we be political without succumbing to extremism or cynicism? What is a mode of communication still urgent and accessible? I looked to modernist artists with awe and envy because they are represented as having been capable of belief not so blunted with the cudgel of irony. These days, According to Žižek , it is easier and less shocking for most people, “to imagine ‘the end of the world’ than a far more modest change in the mode of production, as if liberal capitalism is the ‘real’ that will somehow survive even under conditions of a global ecological catastrophe”.<sup>6</sup> He argues that a cynical attitude towards the controlling forces in our society, such as our government and cultural institutions, is a dead end, since it is already accounted for in the workings of these systems. It is our daily actions and not our knowledge that reveals what we truly take seriously.<sup>7</sup> In order to understand, I turn to my grocery basket, the books on the shelf, my radio, the routes thought the city I take and the others I avoid. I study my

neighbourhood's architecture. I scrutinize jokes. Visit my friends and gather the sounds of their voices. I sift through the ephemera of daily routines looking for a big picture because I do not know how else to proceed.

Listening to the morning news, drinking coffee, trying to recall a dream, preparing dinner, and reading a book in bed. All these acts in some way deal with consumption and digestion. And whether the thing being digested is a film or a slice of cake, what we are doing essentially is taking elements of the world and incorporating them into our self. When we have fully digested a thought, an artwork, or a piece of bread, it becomes us. It becomes an energetic force we can then use to act in the world. As I discuss in "Telling Demonic Fairytales" Benjamin was sensitive to these issues of consumption. In the piece "Children's Literature" Benjamin discusses some connections between eating and reading. Both, according to him, offer us complicated forms of nourishment. "We do not read to increase our experiences; we read to increase ourselves".<sup>8</sup> What I wonder is what all this consumption does. I question whether knowing more—increasing the self with words, images and ideas—makes us larger people in a positive way. In the western world there is an abundance of food and information. We can stuff ourselves with a new treat even when our hands are still sticky from the last. I think it is more than most of us can handle and digest.

Track 5 "Central Nervous System", and track 11 "Bread Breaking" address different modes of consumption. The first deals with the popular morning sustenance of coffee and news. The second explores the nourishment of personal relationships as they intermingle with the process of cooking. The tones of the voices in "Central Nervous System" are intentionally formal and cool. They are edited together in such a way as to at

first leave some space for each idea, but as the piece goes on the voices overlap and interrupt making the sonic space progressively more crowded. The collection of statements—a kind of verbal caffeine—produces a jarring and anxious but perhaps familiar mood. The popular stimulants espresso and newspapers both consist of a complex array of ingredients, which fuel and define some spirit of our age.<sup>9</sup> Yet both are difficult for many people to digest. They jar the nervous system, quicken the heart rate, and temporarily alter our perception. “Central Nervous System” is filled with violence and facts. The voices compete with one another more and more as the piece goes on and in the end find only artificial resolution when one character announces apropos of nothing, “Ok, that’s the end”. In contrast, the tone in “Bread Breaking” is quite different despite the fact that it is full of many of the same overlapping voices. In this piece the warmer and more expressive voices do not compete despite their different trajectories. Collectively they describe a meal of many different yet harmonious dishes. There are subtle dramatic arcs, recollections, and specific sensual details contained in their descriptions of food preparation. To me, the information in “Bread Breaking” is much easier to process emotionally than that in “Central Nervous System”. It is a sonic representation of one of the ways people heal themselves and reconnect physically to their bodies and histories after the sometimes jarring shocks of a day in contemporary society.

As a radio producer Benjamin barely mentioned the upheaval happening all around him in Europe, but he always chose topics that seemed to subtly comment on the realities of his time. He focused on small stories rather than relentlessly attacking the largest ideas head on. When addressing the messianic power of governments to wreak

havoc on environments, social structures, and whole populations, Benjamin did so with stories of individual people. Using Benjaminian method, the final piece in *Similarities End*, “Pepin and Breschard”—named for the two men who brought the circus to North America and “built circus theatres from Montreal to New Orleans”—simplifies the experience of a large-scale disaster into personal narrative. The piece was inspired by a 1954 *Time Magazine* “The Midget and the Elephants” article about a travelling German circus that was abandoned in Spain because the performers and organizers ran out of money and found themselves stranded in a foreign land, shunned by hostile locals. While all the others abandoned the circus wagons and tried to make their own way, one old man stayed on the Spanish plain, in order to try to care for the captive animals.<sup>10</sup> The article chronicles this mans losing battle with slow starvation and the starvation of his menagerie in the glib style typical of *Time* during the 1950s. The journalist treats the tale like a curiosity, or fluff piece. In rewriting this actual story as a fiction, I imagined this event to be a kind of personal catastrophe, a mythic end time of one. This old man’s circus ark is sinking on dry land and not many of his animals will survive to repopulate the world. Although I was intrigued and inspired by the *Time* article, it is not important if the listener understands the references. I only wish to transmit a feeling or residue of other stories, which might fall like a mist, coating new dreams.

When studying Benjamin’s 1933 piece on a flood on the Mississippi it is impossible not to hear echoes of Hurricane Katrina. Echoes of Benjamin seem almost completely harmonious with the cacophony of the present. As an American citizen regarding the current political and social situations, I find his technique of oblique yet urgent critique particularly attractive. But at the same time I must ask myself if it an

effective method. The dust billowing from failure and ruins, repeated catastrophes, and wilful destruction sometimes obscures my view and chokes my voice. Perhaps I have been reading too much Benjamin.

*Similarities End* developed along side “Telling Demonic Fairytales” like a twin sibling. They share the same genetic material despite belonging to different spheres and senses. Although this piece is inextricably linked to my experience in Vancouver, British Columbia and Banff, Alberta in 2006, this project had its genesis in Montreal in the fall of 2001. In 2001 I was a student finishing my undergraduate degree in creative writing and newly enamoured with radio. During that time my self-directed study of sound and radio art overlapped with academic poetry workshops and visual studies theory, urban planning classes and modern dance practice. It mingled with the brand new global war on terror all over the news and the rock shows I regularly attended. Walking around the Mile End neighbourhood, among the Hasidic families and hipsters, past Italian cafés and junk shops, the sound art in my Walkman became inextricably linked with the very personal experience of crisp air and meandering thoughts along with a new and confused sense of myself as a political individual in a globalized world. Sometime around then I used some allotted textbook money to buy instead *The Arcades Project*. I remember liking its mystery and the sensuality of so many obscure Parisian references even without really understanding the overall intention of the book. Almost as a whim, Benjamin became my favourite writer. I curated my own collection of quotes, and felt my own cinematic shocks. Ever since then, I have had a desire I could almost articulate to make a piece that addresses the mingling of the personal, public, imagined and enacted. *Similarities End* is thus far the closest I have gotten.

While working on this essay I came across a picture of an artwork by Alfredo Jarr. The piece was a billboard installed in Toronto consisting only of a quotation from American poet William Carlos Williams.<sup>11</sup> “It is difficult to get the news from poems yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there”. In seeing that I felt the pleasure of recognition because finding this quote in that context sums up perfectly a feeling I have been grasping for clumsily for many years. To my mind, “Telling Demonic Fairytales” is news tinged with poetry while *Similarities End* is poetry tinged with news. It feels right to end a discussion of *Similarities End* with a deferral to a modernist poet filtered through a contemporary artist, to defer to an image of a quote from the page of a book reinvigorated by transference to a new space on a huge billboard in a major city. I believe Benjamin would approve of this serious yet playful act. This art works sums up my unambiguous belief that stories and poetry are better food right now than the news. As a student I have committed myself to the essay form and I have gained much from writing “Telling Demonic Fairytales”. But I believe that *Similarities End*—a drifting sound piece filled with open-ended poetry—has a better chance of communicating feelings and ideas that might nourish people so that they might better face the day.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Madeleine Gagnon, “Body, I”, *New French Feminism: An Anthology*, Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron Eds. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 179.

<sup>2</sup> Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*; Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations*; Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht *Mapping Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Digital Age*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). All these authors use the metaphor of mapping to describe Benjamin’s work.

<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Some Politically Incorrect Reflections on Violence in France & Related Matters” (*Lacan.com*, 2005. <http://www.lacan.com/zizfrance4.htm>).

<sup>4</sup> Jacob van Hoddis, Richard John Ascárate trans., (Berkeley: University of California, Department of German web site. <http://german.berkeley.edu/poetry/weltende.php>).

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<sup>5</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History" *The National Interest*, 1989. ([http://www.marion.ohio.state.edu/fac/vsteffel/web597/Fukuyama\\_history.pdf](http://www.marion.ohio.state.edu/fac/vsteffel/web597/Fukuyama_history.pdf)).

<sup>6</sup> Žižek, *The Žižek Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 1999), 55.

<sup>7</sup> Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 36.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin, "Children's Literature" *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 255.

<sup>9</sup> Coffee is hugely complex both chemically and economically. It contains hundreds of chemicals and its full effects on the human organism are multifaceted and difficult to predict. It is one of the most valuable primary products in global trade. For more on the substance see: Tom *A History of the World in 6 Glasses* (New York: Walker & Co., 2005).

<sup>10</sup> 'The Midget and the Elephants' *Time* New York: Time Warner, Monday, Dec. 20, 1954 (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,821020,00.html>).

<sup>11</sup> Alfredo Jarr, *The Fire This Time: Public Interventions 1979-2005* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2005), 74.

## Production Notes

**Arranged, written**

**and produced by:** Joanie Murphy-Blevins

**Technical Assistance:** Miguel Hernandez Montero

**Voices:** Marna Bunnell  
Manon De Pauw  
Joey Dubuc  
Simon Glass  
Ernie Kroeger  
Nate Larson  
Laurie Ljbojevic  
Billy Mavreas  
Laurel McMillan  
Joanie Murphy-Blevins  
Adriana Riquer Turner  
Ken Singer  
Tom Wolseley  
Jessica Wyman

**Music:** Moritz, Moszkowski, Performed by Elizabeth Wolff.  
“3 Op. 7 - Tranquillo e semplice”, *Moments Musicaux*  
(2004). Used with permission from Maganatune Records  
(maganatune.com).  
&  
Jordan McKenzie and Emi Honda, “The Journey” on *The  
Spiral Ship* (2005) and Jordan McKenzie, “The Story of  
Mr. Grasshopper”, *Hunting Season* (2004). Permission  
from *Sound Stories*.

**Recorded and Mixed at:** *The Banff Centre, Banff, A.B. and 532 Prior Street,  
Vancouver, B.C.*

\* With the exception of Ernie Kroeger’s discussion of reading the news in Track 4:  
“Central Nervous System”, Ken Singer’s dream commentary in Track 6 “Self Analysis”,  
the descriptions of food in Track 8 “Bread Breaking” and the cited quotations, all text is  
written by Joanie Murphy-Blevins.



## **Track 1: Time Signal**

### **Voices:**

Joey Dubuc  
Billy Mavreas  
Joanie Murphy-Blevins

### **Music:**

Moritz Moszkowski – “3 Op. 7 - Tranquillo e semplice”  
From *Moments Musicaux*, Performed by Elizabeth Wolff. Used with permission from  
Magnatune Records (maganatune.com).

### **Script:**

**BILLY:** I tend to be ashamed that I’m not better at recalling my dreams. I feel that I’m wasting half my life. Its like I could have that much more experience. You know?

**JOEY:** And now, the National Research Council time signal. The beginning of the long dash following ten seconds of silence indicates exactly 10 o’clock.

### **JOANIE (NARRATION):**

When you recount the facts in a certain way—they can sound like fairy tales. If told another way they become news items, poems or an example in a philosophical essay. In the hands of a storyteller the random messiness of life can be molded, and shaped into an illuminating and even useful object. As an experiment I’d like to try it for you now, but honestly I’m not sure how it will work. This is what happened, or so we are told. Old Benjamin arrived in French border village with a group of travellers looking for a guide. It was wartime, the army was around, it was very dangerous. He knocked on the door of a house and a woman answered.

This woman agreed to guide him and the others over a mountain path to a Spanish town where they would escape the whole war torn land for the safety of a country far away over the sea. And so they set out at dawn on the next day, careful to conceal their intentions from guards and officials in the village. As the hours passed they trekked along the old smuggler's path through fields and vineyards. The steep hills were very difficult for the old man. Finally, after the long and tiring hike they arrived in the port town. The woman who guided them turned around to return home. For a week she thought that her task had been completed. But, it was not the case. Old Benjamin was dead. He had taken his own life. When they'd arrived, the Spanish government clerks blocked their passage. They were told to return to France because the rules had just changed. They did not have the correct stamps on the correct papers. So, Benjamin—exhausted and desperate—took a lethal dose of morphine pills. The day after he died the officials changed their minds, and the other travellers were allowed to continue their journey.<sup>1</sup>

## Track 2: World's End

### Voices:

Joey Dubuc  
Laurie Ljbojevic  
Billy Mavreas  
Joanie Murphy-Blevins  
Adriana Riquer Turner  
Jessica Wyman

### Music:

Moritz Moszkowski – “3 Op. 7 - Tranquillo e semplice” From *Moments Musicaux*,  
Performed by Elizabeth Wolff. Used with permission from Magnatune Records  
(maganatune.com).

### Script:

**JOEY:** Dear invisible listeners. Are you still sleeping? Are you still in bed?  
  
Comfortable and luxurious? Are you gonna stay in bed all day?  
  
“We find ourselves constantly in the position of having to decide about  
matters that will fatefully affect our lives, but without a proper foundation  
in knowledge . . . I am held accountable for decisions which I was forced  
to make without proper knowledge of the situation . . .”<sup>2</sup>  
  
Who are your teachers?

**ADRIANA:** “End of the World”.<sup>3</sup>

**JESSICA &  
JOEY:** “Worlds End”.<sup>4</sup>

**LAURIE:** Again? Ok, “End of the World.”

**JESSICA:** . . . And do you want me to say it's the van Hoddis poem or . . .

**JOEY:** “Whisked from the bourgeois' pointy head hat flies,”. . .<sup>5</sup>

**ADRIANA &  
LAURIE:** “The hat flies off the bourgeois' pointed head,”<sup>6</sup>

**JOEY:** . . . “Throughout the heavens,” . . . <sup>7</sup>

**JESSICA:** “There's an echo of screams and shouts in the air. Reverberating screams” .<sup>8</sup>

**LAURIE:** “Roofers are crashing,” . . . <sup>9</sup>

**JOEY &  
JESSICA:** . . . “Down tumble roofers, shattered 'cross roof beams” . . . <sup>10</sup>

**ADRIANA:** “Along the coast,” . . . <sup>11</sup>

**JOEY:** . . . “And on the coast, one reads, floodwaters rise” .<sup>12</sup>

**ADRIANA:** . . . “The papers say,” . . . <sup>13</sup>

**LAURIE:** . . . “the flood is rising,”<sup>14</sup>

**JOEY &  
ADRIANA:** . . . “The storm is here,” . . . <sup>15</sup>

**JESSICA:** “The storm is here, wild oceans are hopping ashore,”<sup>16</sup>

**JOEY:** . . . “Rough seas come merrily skipping,” . . . <sup>17</sup>

**JESSICA:** . . . “to crush big fat embankments,”<sup>18</sup>  
. . . “Thick dams to rudely crush,” . . . <sup>19</sup>

**LAURIE &  
ADRIANA:** “Most people have a runny nose and snuffle,”<sup>20</sup>

**JESSICA:** “. . . and trains are falling off the bridges.”<sup>21</sup>

**ADRIANA:** . . . Jakob van Hoddis, 19, 19 (laughter).

## Track 4: Age of New Directives

Voice:

Joanie Murphy-Blevins

Script:

JOANIE (NARRATION):

So that's what happened. It's really simple and harsh. And this kind of story happens all the time through Unknown soldiers, refugees, prisoners, random people in the wrong place at the wrong time, get caught up in events beyond them. In fiction, protagonists often find a way out of impossible situations. They make it against all odds. So when the desperate traveler is confronted with a barrier we come to expect that he can answer their questions and the gatekeeper will let him pass. So even though, consciously, I know there's no reason Benjamin's life should work like a fiction. When I'm reading about it it's hard not to wish that things had turned out differently.

I'm not the only one to think this way. The writing about Benjamin is filled with "what ifs". *What if he had arrived in Spain just a day or two earlier? What if he'd waited a bit longer?*

What we learn about him and that time is that a person needed guile and luck to survive, and Benjamin was notoriously unlucky. In a way he was so unlucky you might suspect he wanted to fail. Lisa Fittko, the woman who led Benjamin over the mountains described it as the "Age of New Directives".<sup>22</sup>

“Every governmental office in every country of Europe seemed to devote its full time to decreeing, revoking, enacting, and then lifting orders and regulations. You just had to learn to slip through holes, to turn, to wind, and to wriggle your way out of this ever-changing maze, if you wanted to survive. But,” she said, “Benjamin was not a wriggler...”<sup>23</sup>

## Track 5: Central Nervous System

### Voices:

Marna Bunnell  
Manon De Pauw  
Joey Dubuc  
Simon Glass  
Ernie Kroeger  
Nate Larson  
Ken Singer  
Tom Wolsely

### Script:

**ERNIE:** Well I suppose it could be seen like a ritual couldn't it? If you do the same thing everyday.

**JOEY:** "The day began as special officers followed a man who emerged from a house they had been watching" . . . <sup>24</sup>

**ERNIE:** roll out on the same side of the bed. . .

**JOEY:** . . . "They chased him as he entered a tube station and boarded . . ." <sup>25</sup>

**ERNIE:** . . . have a glass of water.

**JOEY:** . . . Geeze.

**ERNIE:** Set against itself.

*The Herald.* <sup>26</sup>

**TOM:** *The New Vision.*

**ERNIE:** Have a coffee . . .

**TOM:** *The Freeman.*

**ERNIE:** . . . And read the newspaper.

**TOM:** *International Herald Tribune.*

**ERNIE:** *The Globe and Mail* in fact.

**TOM:** There was the hurricane and the flood.

**ERNIE:** The coffee and the newspaper definitely go together.

**MARNA:** 55 killed in bombing.

**TOM:** There was the hurricane and the flood.

**ERNIE:** The officials were away from their desks. An automated message said they would return soon.

**SIMON:** Did you read this?

**ERNIE:** A great many people died, bike bells signalled survivors.

**TOM:** "In Liberia during the 1989 civil war, every animal in the national zoo was devoured but a one-eyed lion". . .<sup>27</sup>

**ERNIE:** You read the news. You're turning the pages and then you read some and then you have a sip of coffee.

**KEN:** "Its unity is purely formal: there is no narrative line to order the disconnected elements—*Newswire, Tribune*— column by column, — *Pravda*—weighted without account of importance—*Morgenpost*—the heroic and the trivial repose side by side"<sup>28</sup>

**JOEY:** "The day began as special officers followed a man who emerged from a house they had been watching. They chased him as he entered a tube station and boarded an underground train, cleared passengers out of the way as he fell to the floor and then fired five shots into his head in front of stunned passengers, killing him."<sup>29</sup>



**MARNA:** *The Monitor.*

**ERNIE:** *The Sun.*

**MARNA:** *Guardian.*

**ERNIE:** *The Mirror.*

**MARNA:** *The Focus.*

**ERNIE:** *The Telegraph.*

**MARNA:** *Independent.*

**MARNA:** "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that 'the state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule".<sup>30</sup>

**SIMON:** All I'm saying is all I'm able.

**JOEY:** *Examiner.*

**NATE:** *The Manifesto.*

**NATE:** Censorship comes from within.

**MANON:** *Daily News.*

**MARNA:** "Welcome to the desert of the real"<sup>31</sup>

**TOM:** Who are these censors?

**ERNIE:** What's in the black box?

**NATE:** Everyone has a complex these days

**MARNA:** Let's hear it for the sharp teeth of the predators!

**TOM:** Who does all the crying for the rest of us?

**SIMON:** The rest of us never cry.

**SIMON:** *Statesmen.*

**SIMON:** The news of today.

**SIMON:** *Daily Mail.*

**MARNA:** All that's fit to print

**MANON:** The feverish babble of constant digression.

**SIMON:** *Daily Star.*

**SIMON:** *O Dia.*

**ERNIE:** . . . So that became part of the morning reading.

**NATE:** When we look back we may remember today as historic or infamous.

**ERNIE:** I think if I read it in the morning it affects me more strongly. Emotional perhaps when I read a terrible or sad story. Or that kind of thing. Umm . . .

**TOM:** . . . Ok that's the end.

## **Track 5: Kafka and Benjamin**

### **Voice:**

Joanie Murphy-Blevins

### **Music :**

Jordan McKenzie, “The Story of Mr. Grasshopper”, *Hunting Season* (2004).  
Permission from Sound Stories.

### **Script:**

#### **JOANIE (NARRATION):**

Benjamin loved the writer Franz Kafka. He thought they were similar in spirit. Certainly they had similar backgrounds: both grew up in middle-class, secular Jewish households run by stern fathers. Both were well educated, both had dark and somewhat mystical philosophies. Both, above all else, were committed to the task of writing.

Something you can see with both men, is a palpable frustration towards the huge bureaucracies which rule over peoples lives: churches, schools, empires, and industries.

In lots of Kafka's stories, characters are punished for mysterious reasons. They are accused—but no one tells them what their crime is. Often, they never get their day in court, they never even meet their judges, and yet they're punished. Sometimes it seems that just being alive makes them guilty.

When he was held up in the Spanish town of Port-Bou Benjamin must have felt he'd entered into one of Kafka novels. His life and death had

been reduced to documents and official directives. The Nazis had decided that millions of people were guilty, just by virtue of their existence, and some impassive Spanish clerk was just doing his job.

## **Track 6: Self Analysis**

**Voice:**

Ken Singer

**Script:**

**KEN:** Well I know I've been having them. Um-hum. But remember them is something else. It's true. I know I've been sleeping extremely deeply. Uh. And I know . . . Something wild and uh . . . Animals, Babies. More primal. In varying degrees of distress. The animals. It's that strange feeling when you know you've had incredibly . . . umm . . . intimate and uh powerful . . . but you're at a loss so its an odd and uh especially using words . . . sort of . . . something wild . . . to explain or reconstruct . . . I'm not quite sure what that's about . . . what you've experienced . . . um . . . so its an odd sort of space . . . um hum . . . to find yourself . . . umm . . . at a loss for words. Yeah that's . . . umm . . . true. . .

## Track 7: Empathy<sup>32</sup>

### Voices:

Laurel McMillan  
Joanie Murphy-Blevins

### Script:

#### Joanie (Narration):

In 1927—when Benjamin was just a failed academic trying to support himself—he was hired to make radio programs for children in Berlin and Frankfurt. Off and on until 1933 Benjamin was on the air telling stories about anything that captured his attention. Over the years he talked about natural disasters, the feeling of wandering through a department store, and old stories of trickery and magic.

Although people often say Benjamin is a difficult writer, and it might seem odd to hire a philosopher to write for children, Benjamin's radio pieces are light and clear. They unfold like small packages wrapped in fine paper, revealing unexpected treasures. No recordings of his voice have survived, and this is a great shame because I imagine that his voice, scratched by the technical limits of old radio would have a power, above and beyond the words he spoke.

When we are children, pretending is easy. And books are one of the most basic sources of imaginative material we have.

One thing Benjamin tried to do in his radio pieces was encourage his listeners to move through stories into the place of another. In other words

to empathize.

If you can empathize through stories then maybe—Benjamin thought—you'll do the same thing when faced with a real person who's radically different from yourself.

**LAUREL:** “The only animal which has remained lingering in my memory is the raccoon. I watched it for a long time as it sat beside a little stream with a serious expression on its face, washing the same piece of apple over and over again, as if it hoped that all this washing, which went far beyond any reasonable thoroughness, would help it to escape the unreal world in which it had arrived, so to speak, through no fault of its own”.<sup>33</sup>

**JOANIE (NARRATION):**

In the 20's and early 30's Germany was famously chaotic: unemployment was high; politics were divisively split between the poor and the wealthy, left and right. The Nazis were transforming themselves from an underground group into an increasingly influential political party. Anti-Semitism, anti-intellectualism, anti-modernism and nationalism were rising parts of the popular consciousness.

In this atmosphere of uncertainty and manic energy, when your country and arguably the whole world is still stinging from one war and sliding towards a future one, it is utopian, inspiring and possibly quite dangerous to ask anyone to empathize. But that's what he did. Benjamin thought people were in a dream state, and he thought that recognizing the dream would be one step along the path towards realizing a new kind of world.

His radio talks worked like reverse bedtime fairytales. Instead of lulling the listener into unconsciousness they were meant to pull them into a state of heightened awareness. And this act he tried to accomplish using only the sound of his own voice.

## **Track 8: Bread Breaking**

### **Voices:**

Manon De Pauw  
Simon Glass  
Nate Larson  
Ken Singer  
Tom Wolsely

### **Script:**

**TOM:** So is everyone starving yet?

**KEN:** Well I suppose what I thought of . . .

**MANON:** Well I make this amazing . .

**KEN:** . . . Was my mother making Bareck.

**MANON:** . . . It's actually pretty good . . .

**NATE:** Are we trying to complete a meal?

**MANON:** . . . It's very simple to make. .

**KEN:** It comes from Turkey and it's enjoyed all throughout the Levant . . .

**NATE:** You asked about a salad . . .

**MANON:** . . . and it just makes you feel great . . .

**KEN:** . . . and we'd always have them before dinner with a little drink.

**NATE:** . . . I could do a salad.

**MANON:** Carrot ginger cashew soup.



**TOM:** The dish I will talk about is Puttanesca. Its translation is whore's sauce.

**MANON:** . . . Because it has all these well especially lots of ginger and lots of garlic and onion so already if you have a cold it's the best soup for you.

**SIMON:** Yeah, I like curried chicken.

**KEN:** My mother makes a version called Beracikis. Which is a Sephardic Jewish variation on the Boreck. Very beautiful pastries, savoury pastries with cheese . . .

**TOM:** It is made out of . . .

**NATE:** My favourite is shiitake mushrooms and green beans and snow peas . . .

**TOM:** . . . anchovies . . .

**MANON:** Carrots and cashews and all different spices like fennel, and what else?  
Cinnamon...

**TOM:** . . . Olives . . .

**NATE:** . . . and then you add feta cheese and diced tomatoes on top of that . . .

**TOM:** . . . Capers . . .

**NATE:** . . . a couple green olives on top of that . . .

**TOM:** . . . Garlic . . .

**NATE:** . . . and then a balsamic vinaigrette on top . . .

**TOM:** . . . Tomatoes . . .

**NATE:** . . . and it's heaven. So . . .

**MANON:** You just put everything in the blender and the fennel gives it a quite sweet taste but at the end you add some lemon juice, which makes it a bit tart.

**TOM:** It's very simple to cook.

**SIMON:** . . . Then comes the chicken.

**MANON:** . . . and then at the end if you want you add some buttermilk or yogurt just to make it a bit more creamy.

**KEN:** I first had them from my grandmother who made them from an old family recipe, of course memorized. After she died there were a few years of transition as my mother experimented and tried to mimic this recipe that was only remembered, never written. So as a family we had to endure several years of trial and error which were of course accompanied by rigorous critique of my mother's creations, Friday night creations. I'm not sure if it's due to a fading of the memory of my grandmother's borecks but after a number of years my mother seemed to get it right.

**MANON:** Very nice and very soothing and very tasty.

**KEN:** . . . Boreck . . . Burecks . . . Burekickis . . .

**TOM:** . . . Just pasta . . .

**KEN:** Burekas. I suppose that's one of the, that's one of my very fond memories of dinnertime rituals. Was the arrival of the Borecks.

**JESSICA:** Let's have another toast.

**ALL:** . . . Cheers . . .

**BILLY:** Cheers. All the best, guys.

## Track 9: Pepin and Breschard

### Voices:

Joanie Murphy-Blevins  
Tom Wolsley

### Music:

Jordan McKenzie and Emi Honda, "The Journey" on *The Spiral Ship* (2005). Permission from Sound Stories.

### Script:

#### JOANIE (NARRATION):

The question was, the question still is, *why do we tell each other stories?*

Does listening to a voice connect us to other bodies, other places and times? Do we, as Benjamin thought, "welcome the human voice into our house like a visitor"?

For many in Benjamin's time, the radio was just another new technology that would take people further away from reality, isolating everyone in a bubble of canned love songs, sound bites, and controlled political speeches. But for him, there was this possibility, too important to ignore, that solitary people might feel empowered by the sounds of many voices, telling many stories. And maybe the radio could create a space and time for collective dialogue. But this was a fragile possibility. After all, fragile feelings of empathy are easily numbed by the shouts of those with the biggest bullhorns.

"Every morning brings us news from all over the world," Benjamin wrote

in one of his essays, “Yet we are poor in remarkable stories”.<sup>34</sup>

When we sit down to read a novel or a newspaper are we expanding our understanding or are we pulling back into our own singular perspective?

In January of 1933, Hitler gave his first national radio address. That same month Benjamin presented his last radio talk. In a sense, these two men crossed paths on the airwaves. Looking back, this is the kind of rising and falling History books reveal. It seems too tragic and poetically apt to be true.

But what is the significance of this bit of information? Should it exist in our minds as historical trivia, a sad and ironic biographical footnote? Or can we excavate it from that time and examine it like a fossil that makes clear something of our present situation?

**JOANIE:** “In these books there were stormy goings on”.<sup>35</sup>

A dreamlike setting. Imagine a pinkish orange sky an atmosphere with no oxygen an ocean without fish. “Where the yellowish flickering of the gas is wedded to the lunar frigidity of electric light”.<sup>36</sup>

“To open one would have landed me in the lap of the storm, the very womb. Where a brooding and changeable text, a text pregnant with colors formed a cloud”.<sup>37</sup>

“The child is sick. His mother puts him to bed and sits down beside him. And then she begins to tell him stories. How are we to understand this?”<sup>38</sup>

**TOM:** Camped at the edge of a great plain.<sup>39</sup> Windmills in sight just beyond a small rise in the grassy expanse. There is a cold wind that has already torn

the old banners, tattered the chicken's feathers; I take a sip off the bottle. A dog and I huddle down together in the crook of the wagon steps and door. Smoke from town chimney curls up to die in the clouds. The people who lit those fires are as alien to me as fish. When, then, I walked through their streets, their eyes seemed to me the same cold glassy orbs, my pains are not theirs. It seemed to me too that when they looked at me it was the in the same way that they regarded the dog. My dog ate a dead fish this morning, it was mouldering on the side of the road tossed off or accidentally dropped by one of the fishermen who trek that path to and from the coast. He ate it and I did not stop him and now he seems ill. Every now and then giving a dry heave over the edge of the wagon steps. It is either that or the wine I keep giving him. It is pounding in my eyeballs and my knuckles, that's certain. Nobody wanted the circus it seemed. The towns were full of bony hard kicking kids and tight-faced mothers who made shoe leather soup. Kirk drank a bottle of the cheapest wine and then went round the town trying to sell the monkeys as pets. One family bought one for their boy, but it scratched his cheek and bit a chunk from his earlobe so the father shot the monkey and hunted down Kirk in the bar. At that time all the animals were still alive . . .

**JOANIE:** "Mouse," . . . <sup>40</sup>

**TOM:** . . . The eagles were in good spirits . . .

**JOANIE:** . . . "Hat," . . . <sup>41</sup>

**TOM:** . . . The performing poodles did dances for their own amusement inside their cage . . .

**JOANIE:** . . . “House,” . . .<sup>42</sup>

**TOM:** . . . and the elephant still patted my head with its trunk when I passed.

**JOANIE:** . . . “Twig, bear, ice,” . . .<sup>43</sup>

**TOM:** . . . It was before things got ugly . . .

**JOANIE:** . . . “and egg fill the arena” . . .<sup>44</sup>

**TOM:** One night the temperature dropped to 15 . . .

**JOANIE:** . . . We cannot feel the movement of our bodies in the air . . .

**TOM:** . . . and six monkeys died . . .

**JOANIE:** . . . “A pale, glacial audience” . . .<sup>45</sup>

**TOM:** In February a ravenous elephant ate the roof of his pen and died of wood splinters in his stomach . . .

**JOANIE:** That is not a ghost, you say. That is a car alarm . . .<sup>46</sup>

**TOM:** . . . I buried the corpse and sold the tusks . . .

**JOANIE:** . . . You say the viper security system is the love song of our generation.

**TOM:** . . . By winter’s end the last of the lions had eaten the carcass of the last of the horses and the performing dogs had turned cannibal . . .

**JOANIE:** . . . “They watch their dangerous tricks” .<sup>47</sup>

**TOM:** I cannot see straight anymore and I take this as a blessing.

**JOANIE:** Space and time cut by the streetlights humming on  
“The birds flew up in showers”<sup>48</sup>

Cut by the second-hand memory of smoke streaming from airplanes and sounds that fall between a word and a cry.

“I followed them with my eyes and saw how high they soared in one breath, till I felt not that they were rising but that I was falling, and holding fast to the ropes began to swing more strongly as the air blew colder and instead of soaring birds trembling stars appeared”.<sup>49</sup>

Night’s falling finally and finally it’s fall.

**(NARRATION):**

In January of 1933, Hitler gave his first national radio address. That same month Benjamin presented his last radio talk. In a sense, these two men crossed paths on the airwaves, the shadow of the unrealized passing across the realized. Looking back this is the kind of rising and falling History books reveal. It seems too tragic and poetically apt to seem true.

But what is the significance of this bit of information?

Should it exist in our minds as historical trivia, a sad and ironic biographical footnote? Or can we excavate it from that time and examine it like a fossil that makes clear something of our present situation?

The final story Benjamin told was about a great flood of the Mississippi river that devastated the south in 1927.<sup>50</sup> In order to spare the city of New Orleans, the US government declare a state of emergency and ordered the destruction of dams protecting miles of shore up stream, an act that lead to an massive devastation of the whole agricultural region.”<sup>51</sup> This was an apparently ‘natural’ disaster that in fact was caused by the state.

Benjamin focuses his story on two brothers whose whole means of survival were swept away before their eyes.<sup>52</sup> After fighting unsuccessfully to save their farm they climbed onto the roof of their family home trying to escape the rising currents. The two stood together with nothing but uncertainty and destruction before them. As the water rose, Benjamin writes, “one brother did not wait for death, but jumped into the water to drown”. But the other brother, faced with the same bleak possibilities chose to hold on, and he was by chance rescued by a passing boat and “lived to tell the story”.<sup>53</sup>

By reducing a large disaster into this single image, Benjamin brings us to an edge. Benjamin asks us to imagine we stand between these two men. It’s a position anyone who faces disaster is forced into. Whether it is the sweep of history or the rush of floodwater, we all must choose between the uncertainty of holding on or the dark unknown of the jump.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Fittko, “The Story of Old Benjamin” in *The Arcades Project*, 946. Michael Taussig “Walter Benjamin’s Grave” *Walter Benjamin’s Grave* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006) Hannah Arendt “Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940” *Illuminations* all provided accounts of Benjamin’s death.

<sup>2</sup> Slavoj Žižek, ‘Some Politically Incorrect Reflections on Violence in France and Related Matters’ (*Lacan.com*, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> In this section the readers are performing two translations of a poem by German poet Jacob Van Hoddiss titled “End of the World” or “Worlds End”. I have included the complete translations and their sources below.

“End of the World

The hat flies off the burgher’s pointed head. / There’s an echo of screams and shouts in the air. / Roofers are crashing and breaking in two. / Along the coast, the papers say, the flood is rising. /



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The storm is here, wild oceans are hopping ashore / to crush big fat embankments. / Most people have a runny nose and snuffle, / and trains are falling off the bridges.”

Trans. Johannes Beilharz, <http://www.jbeilharz.de/expr/hoddis-e.html>

“World’s End

Whisked from the Bourgeois’ pointy head hat flies/ Throughout the heavens, reverberating screams/ Down tumble roofers, shattered ‘cross roof beams/ And on the coast – one reads – floodwaters rise/ The storm is here, rough seas come merrily skipping/ Upon the land, thick dams to rudely crush. / Most people suffer colds, their noses dripping/ while railroad trains from bridges headlong rush.”

Trans. Richard John Ascárate (Berkeley: University of California: Berkeley, Department of German web site) (<http://german.berkeley.edu/poetry/weltende.php>).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ascárate trans.

<sup>6</sup> Beiharz trans.

<sup>7</sup> Ascárate trans.

<sup>8</sup> Beiharz trans.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Beiharz trans.

<sup>12</sup> Ascárate trans.

<sup>13</sup> Beiharz trans.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Beiharz trans.

<sup>17</sup> Ascárate trans.

<sup>18</sup> Beiharz trans.

<sup>19</sup> Ascárate trans.

<sup>20</sup> Beiharz trans.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Lisa Fittko, “The Story of Old Benjamin” *The Arcades Project*, 953.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Doug Saunders, “Londoners live on knife-edge” *The Globe and Mail*, July 23, 2005, National Edition.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The title of mentioned thought this piece are a partial list of the most popular newspapers from around the world.

<sup>27</sup> Donald G. McNeil Jr., “Staving Off Starvation: When Real Food Isn’t an Option”, *The New York Times*, May 23 2004, Late Edition. Final, Section 4, Page 1, Column 1

<sup>28</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) 40.

<sup>29</sup> Saunders, “Londoners” *The Globe and Mail*.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ *Illuminations*, 257.

<sup>31</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11* (London: Verso, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> I chose to use the word empathize here in the sound piece rather than using an image of mimesis or absorption for two reasons. The nature of sound is such that to be fair to the audience I would need to pause and explain this specific interpretation of empathy as opposed to absorption. I did not wish to do this as I felt it would disrupt the narrative flow. I also used the word “empathize” because the common understanding of the word is close to the feeling I am trying to discuss. This makes the piece more accessible to a non-specialist audience.

<sup>33</sup> W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, (New York: Random House, 2001), 4.

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- <sup>34</sup> Benjamin, 'Little Tricks of the Trade' *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 729
- <sup>35</sup> Benjamin, 'Berlin Childhood around 1900', *Selected Writings Vol. 3*, 356.
- <sup>36</sup> George Montorgueil, *Paris au hazard* quoted in *The Arcades Project*, 562.
- <sup>37</sup> Benjamin, "Berlin Childhood Around 1900" *Selected Vol. 3*, 356.
- <sup>38</sup> Benjamin "Thought Figures" *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 724.
- <sup>39</sup> The story told by Tom Wolsley here is inspired by an event in Spain in chronicled in "The Midget and the Elephants" *Time Magazine* New York, December 20, 1954 (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,821020,00.html>).
- <sup>40</sup> Benjamin, "Notes (II)" *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 285. The whole quote is: "The writing child is suspended in the scaffolding of the lines like an athlete in the giddy making wall bars of the arena (or of the theater-flies). Mouse, hat, house, twig, bear, ice, and egg fill the arena—a pale, glacial audience. They watch their dangerous tricks".
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> This line was inspired by a comment made by Josh Carr of New York, NY, 2002.
- <sup>47</sup> Benjamin, "Notes (II)" *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 285.
- <sup>48</sup> Franz Kafka, "Children on a Country Road" *The Penal Colony: Stories and Short Pieces* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961) 21.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Susan Buck-Morss *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 37. This particular script on the flood in New Orleans was not translated in Benjamin's *Selected Writings*. I have therefore relied on the translated sections included in Buck-Morss' text.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.

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## **Discography**

McKenzie, Jordan. "The Story of Mr. Grasshopper", *Hunting Season*. Montreal: Sound Stories, 2004.

McKenzie, Jordan & Honda, Emi. "The Journey", *The Spiral Ship*. Montreal: Sound Stories, 2005

Moszkowski, Moritz, performed by Elizabeth Wolff. "3 Op. 7 - Tranquillo e semplice", *Moments Musicaux*. Berkeley: Magnatune Records (maganatune.com), 2004

**CD: Similarities End**

Time Signal	2:54
World's End	1:55
Age of New Directives	1:44
Central Nervous System	2:26
Kafka and Benjamin	1:49
Self Analysis	0:58
Empathy	3:13
Bread Breaking	3:29
Pepin and Breschard	8:48

Total Time: 27:16