

FOR EVERY SPOT APPEARED WHOLLY OCCUPIED BY WHAT ONCE HAD BEEN

a partial adaptation of *BERLIN CHILDHOOD AROUND 1900* by Walter Benjamin

by Karinne Keithley

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created for the Brooklyn College Adaptation festival more evilly known as
Bring a Weasel and a Pint of Your Own Blood

created for performance by Taryn Griggs, Jeff Larson, and Karinne Keithley

"Winter Morning" and "The Reading Box" are direct passages from Benjamin's text.

KARINNE

It looks back in order to find something like an echo of the future, or the preparation of something that will come to be recognized. Like the instant of recognition when you have a déjà vu -- as if the moment that you later relive, in living out its first life, already knew about its second. As if the moment or the thing or whatever already sees you looking back at it.

It searches the past in order to recognize what's coming. But the recognition is never the fruition of something wonderful. It's not like seeds becoming trees. And it's not like a lurking menace either. What happened was just something, just a thing, just something ordinary. Childhood--an apple or an event. These are just things. But in their echo they kind of flash up into this shape that shows the present very plainly. Reveals the shape of the present maybe very bluntly. And the relationship between these two things--these two things in time, past and present--is an index of loss.

What we have now is further from paradise than what we had then.

One thing turns out to be another.

Commonality is formed on the most unexpected line of connection.

Something about fate, or moving forward in time: the minor encapsulation that is an individual destiny. But this destiny isn't discovered with star charts or revelation. More: objects, incidental things that still inhabit the memory. And in going back through that remembered corner, it is as if to say,

JEFF

it was already here.

KARINNE

Nothing in the house is melancholy. We're not in the house.

And memory is not company.

Alternately, think of it as a kind of a personal dream life. As if the early century is dreaming what's to come. And in the dream, everything is innocuous. Maybe nice, maybe not nice, but nothing in the dream has a cost-- there's no real knowledge, just the things to be explored. The lived experience that these things, these objects, seem to hold within them only comes later, much later, as we read them in our memory. Because that experience, that weight of knowledge, will only arise in the gap between then and now.

Only empty space makes room for understanding.

But in the dream, we're in that first position, that first place, dreaming what's to come. So this is like a dreamlike... Like the morning dreamtime of Walter Benjamin or: Berlin Childhood around 1900.

It's already here. We just don't see it.

The room of the idea

Collecting as a form of nearness

Memory as a practice of collecting

*[TARYN dances **elision #1**, a dance created by a procedure that elides the integrity of a fairly straightforward physical mapping in space of aspects of rooms and objects mentioned in the book. The dance speeds and condenses the initial material to the point of non recognition, but is recited internally by TARYN as a catalogue of images: toy doll dollhouse bridge pedestals electric butterflies super bright wings telephone hanging between hamper and gasometer house across the canal memorial garden overhanging banks dead girl horses in fields slimy flagstones great shiny buttons on great bosoms the god of the marketplace pouring goods into the laps of vendors.]*

JEFF

[Possessing a box of transparent images corresponding to the following list, which will be placed on an overhead projector as he reads them off.]

Okay, I've got details about rooms:

Blumeshof 12- that's a street address

the bell

the window: grandmother sitting in an alcove, fairly standard

window overlooking the street, velvet curtains

usually a fruit basket or some chocolate

the furniture "a type that capriciously incorporated styles of ornament from different centuries"- durability as the only consideration

I'm not sure what he means by this

furniture has its place and death has none

in none of these rooms is there anywhere to die

a staircase

a portrait of a relative, Georg, half length life size, in the corridor

other rooms- remote areas of the apartment brought to life by such occurrences as

-visiting daughter in law

-adults taking nap

-seamstresses

long tables used to put presents on at Christmas

fir tree also at Christmas

loggia looking out on courtyard

carpets hanging on balcony rails
sounds
Berlin, not house sounds, Berlin sounds.

[KARINNE performs an object map of the following items while Jeff tries to name them.]

velvet curtains, tied
window (obviously)
through which
you see the street, blumeshof
on the wall a mantle
under the mantle a fire
on the mantle
jar jar jar jar jar
and a vase
with a flower in it
grandma's chair
a chair
someone's chair
an ornamental chair
with details
with details that belong to different centuries
a plant
an large decorative plant
fern

[TARYN performs object map of the following items while JEFF tries to name them.]

alcove
grandma
grandma's chair
French doors
railing
balustrade
overlooking the street- blumeshof
curtains?
velvet curtains?
bookshelf
set of postcards
a postcard of
-the Madonna Di Campiglio
-Brindisi
-Westerland
-Athens
grandma's florid handwriting
visiting daughter in law

couch
folding screen
seamstress
basin
jug
glass of water
moon
moonlight

[TARYN and KARINNE march through the floor plan of a house. At each door they have to turn sideways for one step. They arrive at the bedroom in their floor plan. TARYN lies down as young Walter on the bed. As they march, JEFF draws the floor plan of the bedroom on the overhead projector, including WB in bed, using TARYN as a model, and including the items: closet, sock drawer, moonlight, basin, glass, jug, book.]

[JEFF reads from BERLIN CHILDHOOD AROUND 1900:]

Winter Morning

The fairy in whose presence we are granted a wish is there for each of us. But few of us know how to remember the wish we have made; and so, few of us recognize its fulfillment later in our lives. I know the wish of mine that was fulfilled, and I will not say it was any more clever than the wishes children make in fairy tales. It took shape in me with the approach of the lamp, which, early on a winter morning, at half past six, would cast the shadow of my nursemaid on the covers of my bed. In the stove a fire was lighted. Soon the flame--as though shut up in a drawer that was much too small, where it barely had room to move because of the coal--was peeping out at me. Smaller even than I was, it nevertheless was something mighty that began to establish itself there, at my very elbow--something to which the maid had to stoop down to even lower than to me. When it was ready, she would put an apple in the little oven to bake. Before long, the grating of the burner door was outlined in a red flickering on the floor. And it seemed, to my weariness, that this image was enough for one day. It was always so at this hour; only the voice of my nursemaid disturbed the solemnity with which the winter morning used to give me into the keeping of the things in my room. The shutters were not yet open as I slid aside the bolt of the oven door for the first time, to examine the apple cooking inside. Sometimes, its aroma would scarcely have changed. And then I would wait patiently until I thought I could detect the fine bubbly fragrance that came from a deeper and more secretive cell of the winter's day than even the fragrance of the fir tree on Christmas eve. There lay the apple, the dark, warm fruit that--familiar and yet transformed, like a good friend back from a journey through the dark land of the oven's heat, from which it had extracted the aromas of all the things the day held in store for me. So it was not surprising that, whenever I warmed my hands on its shining cheeks, I would always hesitate to bite in. I sensed that the fugitive knowledge conveyed in its smell could all too easily escape me on the way to my

tongue. That knowledge which sometimes was so heartening that it stayed to comfort me on my trek to school. Of course, no sooner than I had arrived than, at the touch of my bench, all the weariness that at first seemed dispelled returned with a vengeance. And with it this wish: to be able to sleep my fill. I must have made that wish a thousand times, and later it actually came true. But it was a long time before I recognized its fulfillment in the fact that all my cherished hopes for a position and proper livelihood had been in vain.

*[TARYN and KARINNE do **the dance of the mechanics of looking forward and back.***

Which follows these premises as starting points for generating movement:

-it searches the past to find the present

-the past comes forward in a flash

-similarity of shape between past and present

-it looks forward from the past

The dance pushes further and further into space and eventually turns into a house-marking march- the floor plan of corridor-bedroom-telephone-corridor-bedroom-window. It stops at moonlight. Taryn lies down as before. Karinne holds a moon over Taryn's head.]

JEFF

And in doing so the past announces itself as having the future already living inside of it.

TARYN *(from floor)*

she asked me to tell you about this basin and the jug
and the way the moonlight seems to, um. make them different
like it's another room. exactly the same except it has no space for me - for him-
like it's another room, exactly the same room except that in the sovereignty of the
moonlight the earth is
the earth is the satellite, and the moon is the authority
the earth has become the satellite of the moon
and the moonlight makes this room the moon's room
and the basin and the jug and the bed and everything in the room
occupies the same space it did in the old room
but is not the same
this is the fear
that it's not the same.

[JEFF lays on the projector this series of cuttings:]

I was effectively unhoused, for my room seemed willing to accommodate no one besides the moon

it was an unreliable sign, and was waiting, like a false friend, to dupe me at the very moment I least expected it

it all struck my ears as repetition

for every spot on this alternate earth to which I had been transported appeared wholly occupied by what once had been

thus each sound and movement came toward me as a double of itself

*[TARYN does the **elision dance #2**, which follows the same principles as elision #1.*

KARINNE joins in with a moment of doubling in forward pathway

*They stop short and then begin **the moon room dance**, which is just a tone. JEFF places the title "the moon room dance" on the projector, and removes it when they're finished.]*

[JEFF kneels with flag and sword as cover photograph as TARYN reads from BERLIN CHILDHOOD AROUND 1900]

The Reading Box

We can never entirely recover what has been forgotten. And this is perhaps a good thing. The shock of repossession would be so devastating that we would immediately cease to understand our longing. But we do understand it; and the more deeply what has been forgotten lies buried within us, the better we understand this longing. Just as the lost word that was on the tip of our tongue would have triggered flights of eloquence worthy of Demosthenes, so what is forgotten seems to us laden with all the lived life it promises us. It may be that what makes the forgotten so weighty and so pregnant is nothing but the trace of misplaced habits in which we could no longer find ourselves. Perhaps the mingling of the forgotten with the dust of our vanished dwellings is the secret of its survival. However that may be, everyone has encountered certain things which occasioned more lasting habits than other things. Through them, each person developed those capabilities which helped to determine the course of his life. And because--so far as my own life is concerned--it was reading and writing that were decisive, none of the things that surrounded me in my early years arouses greater longing than the reading box. It contained, on little tablets, the various letters of the alphabet inscribed in cursive, which made them seem younger and more virginal than they would have been in the roman style. Those slender figures reposed on their slanting bed, each one perfect, and were unified in their succession through the rule of their order--the word--to which they were wedded like nuns. I marveled at the sight of so much modesty allied to so much splendor. It was a state of grace. Yet my right hand, which sought obediently to reproduce this word, could never find the way. It had to remain on the outside, like a gatekeeper whose job was to admit only the elect. Hence, its commerce with the letters was full of renunciation. The longing which the reading box arouses in me proves how thoroughly bound up it was with my childhood. Indeed, what I seek in it is just that: my entire childhood, as concentrated in the movement by which the hand slid the letters into the groove, where they would be

arranged to form words. My hand can still dream of this movement, but it can no longer awaken so as actually to perform it. By the same token, I can dream of the way I once learned to walk. But that doesn't help. I now know how to walk; there is no more learning to walk.

*KARINNE and TARYN repeat the **dance of the mechanics of looking forward and back** as JEFF speaks*

JEFF

It looks back in order to find something like an echo of the future, or the preparation of something that will come to be recognized. Like the instant of recognition when you have a déjà vu -- as if the moment that you later relive, in living out its first life, already knew about its second. As if the moment or the thing or whatever already sees you looking back at it.

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What we have now is further from paradise than what we had then.

One thing turns out to be another.

Commonality is formed on the most unexpected line of connection.

Or, very simply

perceive the similarity.

Something about fate, or moving forward in time.

The minor encapsulation that is an individual destiny.

Incidental things still inhabit the memory.

It was already here.

Nothing in the house is melancholy. We're not in the house.

And memory is not company.

Alternately, think of it as a kind of a personal dream life.

As if the early century is dreaming what's to come.

And in the dream, everything is innocuous. Maybe nice, maybe not nice, but nothing in the dream has a cost--there's no real knowledge, no intuition either. Simply to see it, to see a thing in front of you and quietly mark it, prepare it, set it aside.

It's already here. We just don't understand it.

The room of the idea.

The minor encapsulation that is an individual destiny.

END