CONSTELLATIONS
Walter Benjamin’s Allegories and Montage, and the Contingent Assemblies of Fragments in Art Practice

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“Shousetsu: Heaven’s essence rises, earth’s essence sinks/ North wind, freezing rain”,
The Autumn Almanac of Tokyo, 1 December 2008.
<http://www.photonicsmedia.net/autumn/613>.
ABSTRACT

This project investigates philosophical and artistic strategies that render the world and our experiences within it palpable. As a response to the political milieu of the twenty-first century, this study asks what tactics can art employ in this environment? As Walter Benjamin theorised, art is a technical organisation of experience that bears the imprints of the material world transcribed through technological means. I explore how Benjamin's methodologies can mobilise materials, fragments, and objects into constellations that make palpable the invisible, the ephemeral, but nonetheless real experiences of our world. By emphasising the experimental and radical aspects of Benjamin's approach, this study recognises several un-actualised possibilities in his philosophical enquiry. Specifically, this thesis extends his works beyond Hegelian and Marxist materialisms to a materialist aesthetics and a materialist art practice. Speculations on the latent possibilities and critical engagement with practice and philosophical thoughts in these methodologies articulate interstitial approaches that inform my own art practice. In this way the problem of an un-disciplinary approach is analogised within Benjamin’s philosophy of fragmentation, and explored through an engagement with art, history, and philosophy.

Building on the scholarship of Susan Buck-Morss, Howard Caygill, Rolf Tiedemann, and Esther Leslie, I extended Benjamin’s materialism through the works of Manuel De Landa and Jane Bennett. This strategy draws out the non-Kantian aspect of Benjamin’s philosophy by referencing the analytical methods of Gilles Deleuze, David Hume’s critique of causality, and the Humian notion of experience. Benjamin's speculative critique and his call for the transformation of apparatus in the production of art is explored as a transformational strategy that remains relevant. Framed by a concept of incompleteness, my exploration highlights the materiality of objects in the construction of allegories, and montage as contingent assemblies to articulate a materialist art practice that can function as a meta-framework for the creation, experience, and theorisation of art. This approach in turn folds back into my own art practice to produce a praxis—a theoretical and action oriented engagement with contemporary experience.
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