

Thinking with my LLM* v.1 - Benjamin, Sloterdijk, and Harman

*apologies to Gerhard Richter who I stole this from. His work [Thinking with Adorno](#) is quite close to a form of analysis that I practice. An un-coercive gaze that builds on, among others, Walter Benjamin, Bruno Latour and Graham Harman.

Drawing connections between Walter Benjamin's notions of looking and seeing in "The Arcades Project" and Graham Harman's aesthetics of art, while incorporating elements of Peter Sloterdijk's concept of spheres, can yield an intriguing perspective on the relationship between perception, aesthetics, and the formation of social and cultural spheres.

In "The Arcades Project," Benjamin explores the phenomenon of flânerie, the act of strolling and observing the cityscape, particularly the 19th-century Parisian arcades. Benjamin emphasizes the significance of attentive looking and seeing, as the flâneur engages with the urban environment and becomes attuned to the hidden meanings and historical layers embedded within it. This mode of perceptive engagement, for Benjamin, unveils the dialectical interplay between past and present, as well as the social and cultural forces shaping the urban experience.

*On voit un chiffonnier qui vient, hochant la tête,
Butant, et se cognant aux murs comme un poète,
Et, sans prendre souci des mouchards, ses sujets,
Epanche tout son coeur en glorieux projets.**

*Charles Baudelaire: 'Le Vin de Chiffonniers' ('The Ragpicker's Wine'). As an aside, Philip Guston's artwork post-Marlborough is deeply connected to Benjamin's visual thinking, especially in the forms and stories of the suicide of his father, a "ragpicker".

Benjamin, extending the Freudian imperative through the aesthetics of the gaze, implicates visualization as a form of "empathy with the exchange value itself", absorbing an underlying dynamic tension between various notational modes of perspective, i.e. spherical and linear ontologies. Baudelaire's flâneur demands a visual space later filled by, amongst other things, cubism.

Harman's aesthetics of art, rooted in his object-oriented ontology, introduces a perspective where artworks possess their own withdrawn essence or allure. According to Harman, art objects, such as paintings or sculptures, have a hidden depth that eludes full comprehension or immediate access. Aesthetic encounters with art involve a form of sensual engagement where the viewer and the object enter into a unique relationship, unveiling new perspectives and opening up possibilities for understanding.

By linking Benjamin's notion of attentive looking and seeing with Harman's aesthetics of art, we can perceive a parallel in their emphasis on a nuanced engagement with the world, where the act of perception becomes a transformative encounter. Just as Benjamin's flâneur scrutinizes the urban landscape, the viewer of art becomes an active participant in the aesthetic experience, probing the depths of the artwork and engaging in a dialogue that extends beyond the immediate perceptual realm.

In this context, Sloterdijk's concept of spheres becomes relevant. Spheres, as conceptualized by Sloterdijk, represent enclosed spaces that shape human existence and foster particular social and cultural dynamics.

Artistic encounters, influenced by Benjamin's attentive looking and Harman's aesthetics, can be seen as moments of sphere formation. The viewer, the artwork, and the surrounding context coalesce to create a temporary sphere, an experiential space where new meanings emerge, and shared interpretations are forged.

This Sloterdijkian sphere of artistic encounter allows for a collective engagement with art, where individuals come together within a shared sphere of perception and interpretation. It is within these aesthetic spheres that cultural and social values, ideas, and identities are negotiated, challenged, and constructed.

By linking Benjamin's notions of looking and seeing, Harman's aesthetics of art, and Sloterdijk's concept of spheres, we can explore the interplay between perception, aesthetic experience, and the formation of social and cultural spheres. These connections highlight the transformative potential of art and the profound impact it can have on the formation of collective

meaning and understanding.

Source: <https://www.idonthaveacoolname.com/thinking-with-my-llm-v-1-benjamin-sloterdijk-and-harman/>