

Urban Visions

- Key themes
- Postcolonial City
- Urban Text
- City as Palimpsest
- City of Signs



The Palimpsest

The City as Urban Palimpsest



2



Cities in Motion



Reading and Writing Paris: Baudelaire, Benjamin, Surrealism



- a. Cultural Critic
- b. Historian of Paris
- c. Baudelaire
- d. Bataille
- e. the Surrealists
- f. Post-Modernist?



- Benjamin's Style:
- Susan Sontag once remarked that, in Benjamin's texts, sentences do not seem to generate in the ordinary way; they do not lead gently into one another, and do not create an obvious line of reasoning. Instead, it is as if each sentence "had to say everything, before the inward gaze of total concentration dissolved the subject before his eyes", a style of writing and thinking Sontag calls "freeze-frame baroque."
- Through his writings Benjamin identifies himself as a modernist for whom the philosophical merges with the literary: logic-based philosophical reasoning cannot account for all experience, and especially not for self-representation through artistic mediums.

Key Ideas



- 1. Aura : The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction",
- Benjamin used the word "aura" to refer to the sense of awe and reverence one presumably experienced in the presence of unique works of art. According to Benjamin, this aura inheres not in the object itself but rather in external attributes such as its known line of ownership, its restricted exhibition, its publicized authenticity, or its cultural value. Aura is thus indicative of art's traditional association with primitive, feudal, or bourgeois structures of power and its further association with magic and (religious or secular) ritual. With the advent of art's mechanical reproducibility, and the development of forms of art (such as film) in which there is no actual original, the experience of art could be freed from place and ritual and instead brought under the gaze and control of a mass audience, leading to a shattering of the aura. "For the first time in world history," Benjamin wrote, "mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual."

Urban Visions: Writing the City

- Key themes:
- The Postcolonial City
- The City as Text
- The City as Palimpsest
- City of Signs

Key Ideas 2 Dialectical Image

The Dialectics of seeing

In the *Passagen-Werk* Benjamin was committed to a graphic, concrete representation of truth, in which historical images made visible the philosophical ideas"; he believed that "[i]n fragmentary images the essences appear concretely" (Buck-Morss 1991: 65, 77).

Benjamin called such images 'dialectical'.



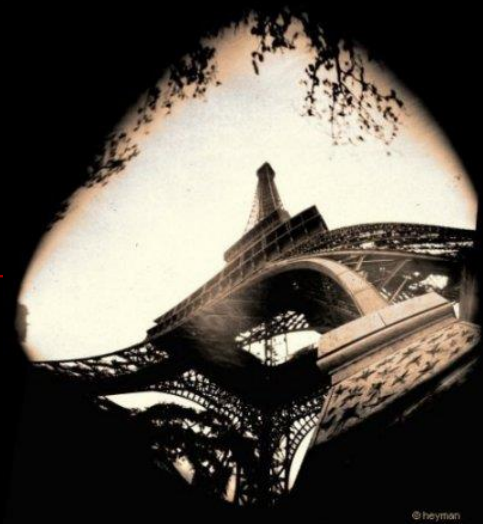
Buck-Morss, Susan (1991) *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* [1989]. Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press.

Reading Paris/ Writing History

- What Benjamin did in the drafts of the
- Passagenwerk was to juxtapose,
- and connect
- with each other, a great number of illustrations,
- quotations, thoughts and commentaries about
- what he considered important for the social and cultural history of 19th century Paris: arcades, salesmen, catacombs, boredom, barricade fighting, iron construction, advertising, the collector, anthropological nihilism, the flâneur, theory of progress, prostitution, Art Nouveau, railroads, Marx, photography, the stock market, the Seine etc. (see Benjamin 1991). Benjamin's passion was collecting (Arendt 1992: 46–50).
- Arendt, Hannah (1992) Walter Benjamin: 1892–1940 [1970]. In: Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, pp. 7–58. Edited by H. Arendt. London: Fontana Press



History as Flanerie



- How are we to understand the
- 'dialectical image' as a form of
- philosophical representation?
- Was 'dust' such an image? fashion?
- the prostitute? expositions? commodities? the arcades themselves? Yes, surely—not, however, as these referents are empirically given, nor even as they are critically interpreted as emblematic of commodity society, but as they are dialectically 'constructed', as 'historical objects', politically charged monads, 'blasted' out of history's continuum and made 'actual' in the present. This construction of historical objects clearly involved the mediation of the author's imagination." (Buck-Morss 1991: 221)

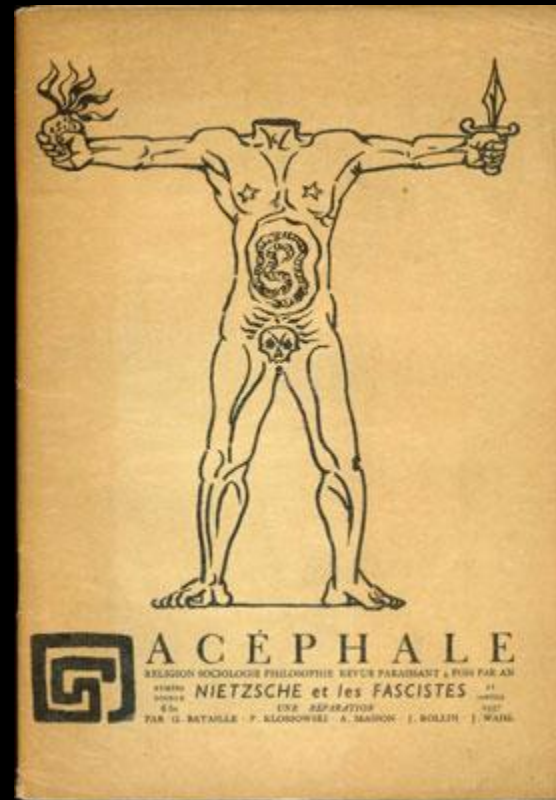
Benjamin, Bataille and the Surrealists

- 1. Contre-Attaque –
- Acéphale and Collège
- du Sociologie
- 2. The Quest for Myth in Modernity
- 3. Le Surréal and le bas Matérialisme of Bataille
- 4. History as Vision?



Acéphale

- Les yeux de Georges Bataille



The Image in History



Atmosphères : Reading 'Hotel du Nord'

- *Atmosphère ? Atmosphère ? Est-ce que*
- *j'ai une gueule*
- *d'atmosphère ? (Arletty/Raymonde)*

- *Il faut que le cinéma descende dans*
- *la rue (Marcel Carné)*

- *Hôtel du Nord has been underrated. . . . It is a beautiful film in a minor key. The early scene, where Aumont and Annabella discuss their suicide in the hotel bedroom, the suggestion that he is privately unwilling, his nerve may fail him, is conveyed with exquisite subtlety and indirectness. . . . The backgrounds are as poetic as they are real. The small, bare interiors, the prison sequences with the faces of Aumont and Annabella seen from either side of the grill, criss-crossed by its shadow, and the little banlieue that springs to life a canal with a tow-path, high bridge and lock, a cobbled street with tall, shuttered houses." (Gavin Lambert, Sequence, Spring, 1948.)*



From Text to Film: From Dabit to Carné



- *In spite of its density and incomparable*
- *atmosphere, it must loyally be*
- *recognised that the book offered very difficult material for a film because it was too fragmentary. The tone of the work, besides, was rather discouraging, since it presented a théâtre libre or roman populiste aspect which did not entirely please me. One had to find a central situation, a dramatic knot, a line, a progression, which, while preserving the strange canal atmosphere, would introduce a popular and sentimental interest. (Marcel Carné, 1938)*

Filming Paris : Poetic Realism

- Jean Renoir, Jean Vigo,
- Julien Duvivier,
- and Marcel Carné. Jean Gabin,
- Simone Signoret.
- Themes : marginalized characters
- who get a last chance at love,
- but are ultimately disappointed.
- A tone of nostalgia and bitterness.
- They are "poetic" because of a heightened aestheticism that sometimes draws attention to the representational aspects of the films. Italian neorealism (and the French New Wave).



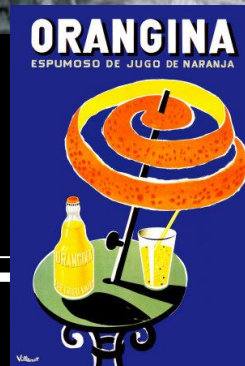
Politics of 'Poetic Realism'



- Hotel du Nord was released in 1938 in a France caught between on the one hand its humanity (the Popular Front, the adoption of Spanish orphans) and the disillusion and cynicism that was an accurate foretaste of what was to come.
- The film was rather quickly forgotten - banned during the war, it was afterwards something of a period piece; Arletty's own reputation was sullied by her behaviour during the occupation. She excused herself later with the memorable line: « J'ai le coeur aussi Français que le votre, mon cul, lui, est international! »
- Politics of 'seeing' the Parisian street :

Popular Front and Art

■ Revolution of Everyday Life



Benjamin on Cinema

- Here is the question:
- How does the cameraman compare
- with the painter?
- To answer this we take recourse to an analogy with a surgical operation. The surgeon represents the polar opposite of the magician. The magician heals a sick person by the laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient's body. The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself; though he reduces it very slightly by the laying on of hands, he greatly increases it by virtue of his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse; he greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient's body, and increases it but little by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs. In short, in contrast to the magician - who is still hidden in the medical practitioner - the surgeon at the decisive moment abstains from facing the patient man to man; rather, it is through the operation that he penetrates into him.



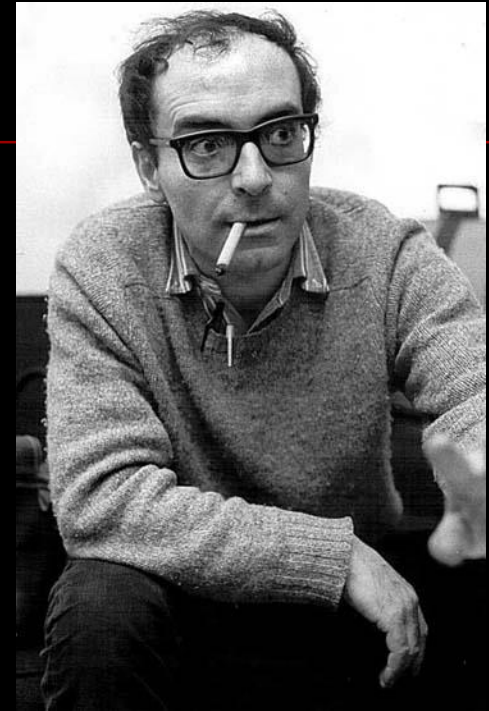
The 'Atmosphère' of Paris on Film

- Magician and surgeon compare to painter
- and cameraman. The painter maintains
- in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law. Thus, for contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment. And that is what one is entitled to ask from a work of art.



Reading Godard's Paris: Inside and Outside

- 'Le plus con des suisses?': Key facts –
- unambiguously political
- a fervent knowledge of film history
- a comprehensive understanding of existential
- and Marxist philosophy



Nouvelle Vague/ New Wave?

- Cahiers du cinéma. Chabrol,
 - Rohmer, Rivette –
 - an attack on the classic 'literary'
 - style of French Cinema – cinéma du papa
-
- French New Wave was “in style” roughly between 1958 and 1964. The movement has its roots in rebellion against the reliance on past forms (often adapted from traditional novelistic structures), criticizing in particular the way these forms could force the audience to submit to a dictatorial plot-line. New Wave critics and directors studied the work of these and other classics. They did not reject them, but rather found a new outlet for the same creative energies.



Techniques

- Lightweight cameras, lights, and sound
- equipment allowed the New Wave directors
- to shoot in the streets, rather than in studios.
- This fluid camera motion became a trademark of the movement, with shots often following characters down Paris streets.
- Many of the French New Wave films were produced on small budgets, often shot in a friend's apartment, using the director's friends as the cast and crew. Directors were also forced to improvise with equipment (for example, using a shopping cart for tracking shots).
- The cost of film was also a major concern; thus, efforts to save film turned into stylistic innovations: for example, in Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle*, several scenes feature jump cuts, as they were filmed in one long take: parts that didn't work were simply cut right from the middle of the take, a purposeful stylistic decision.
- The cinematic stylings of French New Wave brought a fresh look to cinema with improvised dialogue, rapid changes of scene, and shots that go beyond the common 180° axis.



A Postmodern Avant-Garde?



- A bout de souffle makes numerous references to films.
- Bogart ; Michel's constant lip-rubbing; a poster of whom
- Michel gazes at in one scene and says, "Bogie« ;
- when Patricia hides from a detective in the movie theatre:
- audio from The Maltese Falcon can be heard in the background. Patricia comments on Michel's similarity to Bogart when she tells him that he is only an image and should say more about himself.
- The film includes additional references to many other films. In one scene, "Bob Montagne" is mentioned, an apparent reference to the proto-New Wave film Bob le Flambeur (1955), the title character of which shares the same name.
- A few American film posters are seen in the streets, including Humphrey Bogart's The Harder They Fall and Ten Seconds to Hell with Jack Palance (Michel and Patricia also attend a screening of Budd Boetticher's Westbound).
- The film also makes reference to Godard's work as a critic for Cahiers du Cinéma: a woman (uncredited) attempts to sell a copy of *Cahiers* to Michel on the street, saying "Monsieur, do you support youth?"
- He angrily refuses, saying "No, I prefer the old."
- This wealth of references was unusual at the time and was a precursor to postmodern cinema such as Pulp Fiction.

Politics and Philosophy

- The influence of Existentialism
- The Individual and the search for meaning:
- Existence precedes
- Essence
- The Influence of
- Marxism



The Inner Experience of Godard and The Streets of Paris

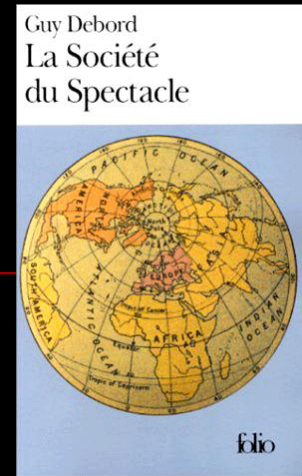
- *Reality, for Godard, is a mystery which is first encountered by experience and which activity sets out to solve. The main mystery for the early Godard is the human person, particularly when embodied in a woman. There is a repeated trope in his films where a woman asks a man if he loves a certain part of her body, and when he says 'yes' she names another part and then another, until finally she says to him, 'So, you love me totally.' (The most spectacular enactment of this is in *Le Mépris*, where the questioner is Brigitte Bardot lying naked on a bed.) In *Vivre sa vie* Paul tells the story of one of his pupils who wrote an essay on the chicken: 'The chicken has an outside and an inside and inside that is the soul.' Also in *Vivre sa vie* Godard quotes a phrase from the song in Ophüls' *Lola Montès*, apropos of Nana's decision to become a prostitute: 'Elle donne son corps, mais elle garde son âme.' ('She yields her body, but keeps her soul.')*
- Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Sight and Sound*, 2007, pp,31

Reading/Filming the Streets



Society of the Spectacle : 1945 to the Present

- Social and Cultural History:
- 1950s - Rebuilding France: Les Trente Glorieuses
- 1960s - Riots, Revolution, Reform. May 68
- 1970s - The Modern Look
- 1980s - Great Projects



What is Situationism?

How to walk and Talk like a Situationist

- Qu'est-ce que c'est le 'Situationnisme'?
- L'Internationale situationniste (IS) était une organisation révolutionnaire désireuse d'en finir avec la société de classes en tant que système oppressif et de combattre le système idéologique de la civilisation occidentale : la domination capitaliste.

a&

Qu'est-ce que c'est le 'Situationnisme'?

&

L'IS était, au niveau des idées développées, issue de différents mouvements révolutionnaires apparus depuis le XIXe siècle ainsi que du communisme de conseils et d'une critique des mouvements d'avant-garde du XXe siècle : le surréalisme¹, le lettrisme² et de Socialisme ou barbarie.



DEAR BOSS
YOU HAVE BEEN SENTENCED
TO DEATH BY THE REVOLUTIONARY
TRIBUNAL FOR CRIMES OF OPPRESSION
AGAINST MANY WHO ARE OPPOSED TO
THE CAPITALIST REGIME WHICH YOU
KEEP IN POWER.
THE EXECUTIONER HAS BEEN SEVERELY
REPRIMANDED FOR FAILING. HE WILL
MAKE NO FURTHER MISTAKES.
BUTCH CASSIDY
THE SUNDANCE KID T.P. THE TRIBUNAL



Enragés
and Situationists
in the Occupation
Movement,
France, May '68

René Viénet



Snobs, Rebels and Revolutionaries: From the French Intifada to the Gilets Jaunes

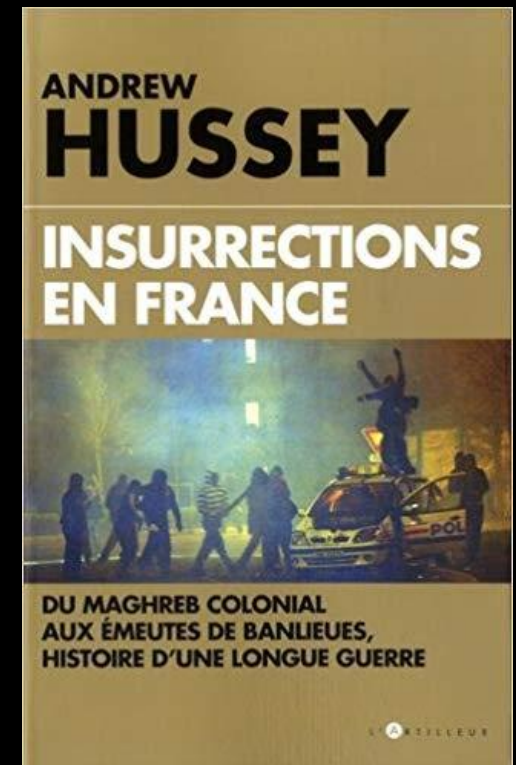
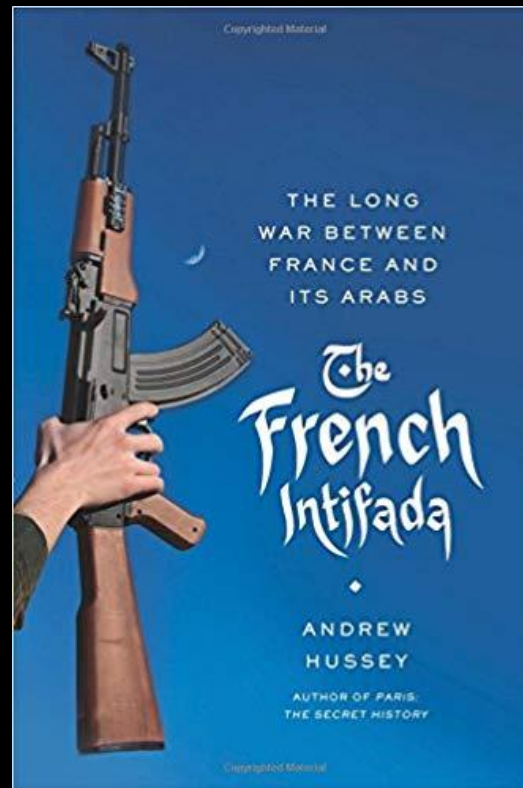
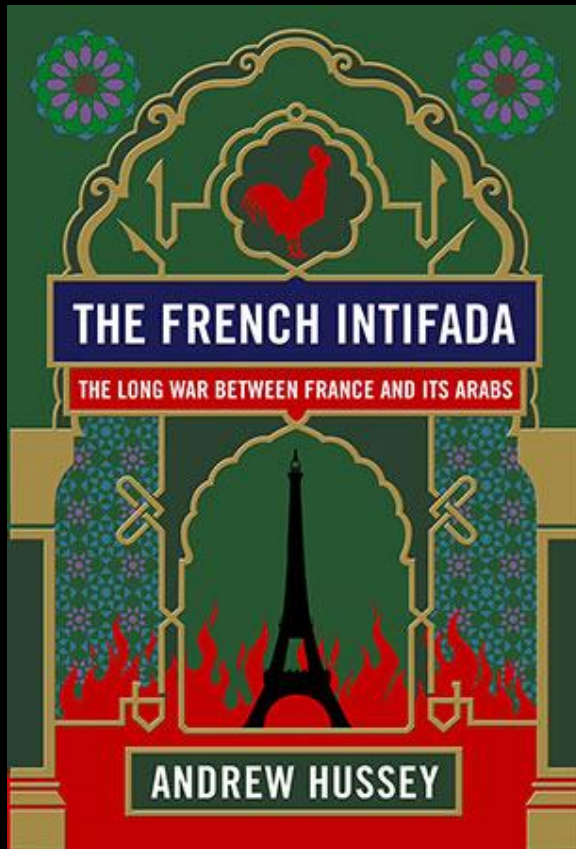


The French Intifada

- The Gare du Nord
- 2007



The French Intifada



The 'New Citadels' and La France Périphérique

Voilà un livre que toute la gauche doit lire d'urgence, si ce n'est déjà fait. Non pas pour en épouser forcément les thèses politiques, parfois gênantes. Mais pour se colleter sans œillères ni préjugés bien-pensants avec cette réalité

d'évidence : le peuple, le plus souvent, n'est plus avec la gauche. Le peuple ? Une grande partie, en tout cas, des ouvriers et des employés, de plus en plus attirés par le vote-coup de balai que propose le Front national. Bien sûr les thèses de Christophe Guilluy sont contestées par d'autres géographes ou par des sociologues spécialistes des mêmes sujets. Ce n'est pas parce qu'on est iconoclaste qu'on a toujours raison. Mais le sentiment d'abandon ressenti par la « France périphérique » décrite par le géographe est indiscutable. Il s'agit d'économie, de social, mais aussi de symboles. Les bobos accablent avec faveur les signes culturels – mélangés, cosmopolites, métissés – liés à la mondialisation. La France périphérique beaucoup moins bien. Faut-il tenir pour négligeable, néfaste ou risible l'héritage national, alors même qu'on célèbre, au même moment, ces héros – patriotes, justement –

A Surgères, en Charente-Maritime (à gauche) et au Bosc, dans l'Hérault. Extraits de « La France » de Raymond Depardon.



Avec « la France périphérique », le géographe Christophe Guilluy dénonce le désintérêt du PS pour une frange entière de la société, éloignée des centres urbains et tentée par l'extrême droite.

La gauche a-t-elle oublié la France populaire ?

‘The Politics of Atmosphere’



‘Derided Humanity has already known surges of power. These chaotic but implacable power surges dominate History and are known as Revolutions...What drives crowds to the street is the emotion aroused by striking events in the atmosphere of a storm, it is the contagious emotion that, from house to house, from suburb to suburb, suddenly turns a hesitating man into a frenzied being.’ Georges Bataille, ‘The Popular Front in the Street’, 1935