

B I B L I O P O L I S

Many Walls.

Having as yet virtually no access to my dream life, I missed the main point of the movement [surrealism], and became fascinated instead with the simple idea that one could combine inside the frame elements not normally found together to produce illogical and startling effects. What I had to learn later on was the necessity of managing this procedure with some degree of care and skill: any old combination of details will not do (“Introduction” 20).

Daily we use unmeasured energies as if in our sleep. What we do and think is filled with the being of our fathers and ancestors. An uncomprehended symbolism enslaves us without ceremony.—Sometimes, on awakening, we recall a dream. In this way rare shafts of insight illuminate the ruins of our energies that time has passed by (“Metaphysics” 6).

“NOTHING / FUNNY / ABOUT IT,” proclaims a matchbox abandoned on the street near my basement **room** in which it does not seem natural to go to bed and which is obviously intended for **toil** (*Correspondence* 246). Nothing funny about what? *fire?* from which the moth comes and to which it goes? But the inscription refers to an image—a nitro-funnycar glossed onto the opposite face. *Nothing funny about it* is the answer, but chance makes it the question. Inverting the dialectical flow, I shift from text to image, and **thinking** suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with **tensions** (“Theses” 262). But the matchbox is empty.

Like Benjamin, I toil
against my belatedness.

The collector’s drive for completeness, which condemns all collecting to remain **fragmentary**, is clearly annotated, as is his affinity with the student and the allegorist, whose “profundity” is capable of justifying the attribution of any kind of meaning to any kind of object (Witte 196). For inside him there are spirits, or at least little genii, which have seen to it that for a collector—and I mean a real collector, a collector as he ought to be—ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them. So I have erected one of his dwellings, with books as the building stones, before you, and now he is going to disappear inside, as is only fitting (“Unpacking” 67).

It could be that the continuity of tradition is only an appearance. But if this is the case, then it is precisely the persistence of this appearance of permanence that establishes community (N 19,1).

Mondo 2000.

For we are faced with the fact...that the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate astonishing quantities of revolutionary themes, indeed, can propagate them without calling its own existence, and the existence of the class that owns it, seriously into question (“Author” 229).

And some in the avant-garde of computer interface design are developing “agents,” programmed anthropomorphic functions that help the user manage information space. As computer interfaces become more robust, the Mac’s desktop “metaphor” may open like some sigil-encrusted gateway onto a huge realm of allegory (Davis 37).

In this dream, he was all alone, as usual. Walking on a street at night where there was nothing but his own field of vision alive. [...]

To Profane, alone on the street, it would always seem maybe he was looking for something too to make the fact of his own disassembly plausible as that of any machine. [...]

This was all there was to dream; all there ever was: the Street (V. 39-40).

Surrealist constructions are merely analogous to dreams, not more. They suspend the customary logic and the rules of the game of empirical evidence but in doing so respect the individual objects that have been forcibly removed from their context and bring their contents, especially their human contents, closer to the form of the object. There is a shattering and regrouping, but no dissolution (“Looking Back” 87).

Firm handshake.

...that the bourgeois individual who thinks becomes problematic to the core, yet without the existence of anything supra-individual in which the isolated subject could gain spiritual transcendence without being oppressed; it is this that he expressed in defining himself as one who left his class without, however, belonging to another (“Schriften” 14).

Architexture of the Screen

*Let me tell you who my favorite band is.
Let me tell you, so you'll know who I am.
Cuz I know all about sex and death. I
could talk for hours.*

—Treepeople, “No Doubt” *

Some years ago an entrepreneur opened a book store in Portland, Oregon for readers. This multileveled shop fills a city block and houses an elevated parking lot. Whether the inhabitants anticipated its success is of no consequence. It now functions as a civic and cultural institution that seems always already to have been there, as if the town and Powell’s Books had mutually birthed each other. In the City of Roses, the petals take the form of pages: one can buy tee-shirts bearing the Powell’s logo and a declaration bereft of irony—“Portland Reads.” Should reading disappear from the face of the earth, its last foothold would perhaps be not San Francisco, but Portland.

* “No Doubt” can be found on the LP *Guilt Regret Embarrassment* (Musical Tragedies/Toxic Shock, 1991).

The crystal palace of literacy, or better, literacity on Burnside, Nevsky of Portland: the coffee-room inside the southwest corner of Powell’s Books, and anyone waiting for the westbound 20 at this intersection knows exactly the desire to avert the glance.[†] For in plain sight and facing outward at the traffic are The Readers seated with their hot beverages and baked goods, their intimate relationship to thought-as-writing displayed in a series of enormous rectilinear frames, so that passing on the way to the bus stop, one views a sequence: elderly man with hunting magazines and black coffee; group with grimaces and a geometry text; ill-dressed intellectual perusing Marx. Et cetera. While in your peripheral vision another wavers across the windows alongside, transporting under arm a copy of *Le Système des objets*.

The customers of Powell’s coffee-room serve as images on the screen advertising the consumption of signs, of discourse, indeed, advertising the reading lifestyle of the

[†] “Literacity”: cf. Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” *Image—Music—Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (1964; New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 35.

very consumer. That they may not be reading is unimportant.

This array heralds the end of spatial dialectics in architecture. Now we are *faced* with the architecture of the screen. No longer does the exterior cover, present, or introduce the interior, nor does it reflect the interior. Instead, reflective space disappears as the exterior draws the interior into its own plane, in sight; what was latent in architecture has become the facade, *spaces* in general collapsing into cosmetics. Hence stepping into Powell's is not a stepping-into as such, but an entering that amounts to being absorbed across the glistening skin of the building. Each Reader in the coffee-room becomes a one-dimensional hieroglyph affixed to the storefront, a hieroglyph at once legible and effective, which is not the same thing as being transparent, that duplicates and replaces the storefront. In other words, we instantly recognize them as Readers, not because they are

reading, but because they are (di)splayed on this architectural screen.*

(At the same time, the accuracy of this observation is played out in its inversion, the depthlessness of the book, for “inside” are simply more screens. The transformation of written material into a commodity is not in the least a recent development, but it has reached a point of saturation and chiasmus—the commodity of the text, the text of the commodity. The same transformation can in fact be witnessed in the context of all sign systems; if the nineteenth-century redaction of capitalism focused its energies in the production of wares, the twentieth-century version has shifted its focus toward semiological production, the buying and selling of (the) code.† A reification of content accompanies this transformation of the book into a

* In the same way, the increasing isolation of the intellectual makes it possible, in a flash, to be one without “intellectualizing” at all. We talk to one another less and less, consuming in silence, yet we are, more and more, exhibited—not as a community, but as individuals and celebrities, i.e., images.

† A crude example, often overlooked, is the fierce competition between computer software companies. One also thinks of the current climate in academe, “publish or perish,” in which the *what* of scholarship becomes secondary to the *how much* or *how many*.

commodity. Old clichés are invalidated, and it is now possible to judge a book by its cover.

The ~~interior~~ of Powell's is coated with an endless array of covers that function as brand names.* To enter the store is more than to search for a book; it is to stage one's selves (*yes, yes, I see you...I am a Reader too*) in terms of a mutual and multiple interpellation.† The Readers are the books with which they are seen.)

This end of interiority, however, the efflorescence of the screen, does not necessarily follow from windows per se. In diametric opposition to the Powell's coffee-room, one is confronted by the opacity of the Ozone—bastard offspring of the Ooze and Outer Limits, which were music stores as different as Barnes & Noble (Outer Limits) and the Strand (Ooze).‡ Their

* Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, "Bibliographical Musings," *Notes to Literature* [III], Vol. 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, *European Perspectives* (New York: Columbia UP, 1992) passim, in particular: "Books that refuse to play by the rules of mass communication suffer the curse of becoming arts and crafts" (23).

† "Interpellation": cf. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 1971) 170-77.

‡ Fortunately for Portland, the relocation, amalgamation, and homogenization of the Ooze and Outer Limits did not threaten the

forces combined, these two occupy the corner that faces the coffee-room, the four-lane field of Burnside a borderland of automobiles and buses. The customers and employees of the Ozone dig in: the windows are covered by images, yet we need not see *through* or *into* the collage of rock posters that occludes vision. This collage of signs is the ~~interior~~. The Ozone is, after all, "not just a record store" and sells the commodities for the negotiation of a rock lifestyle: incense, hair dye, jewelry, clothing, zines, posters, patches, bumper stickers; you can buy your concert tickets there, after you've had your body pierced, in plain view of the other shoppers who repeatedly interrupt their browsing to watch music videos and live performances on one of several television screens suspended from the ceiling.

Complement to, converse and eversion of the hieroglyphy of the Powell's coffee-room, the legible opacity of the Ozone's architectural surface prohibits use of the concept *transparency*, dispenses with it. There is no need for transparency when the architectural scene turns inside

diversity and uniqueness of the city's record shops; in fact it precipitated the success of a handful of smaller outlets, where records are still records and are pedaled as pieces of careful craftsmanship.

out, eliding the possibility of both an inside and an out, staging itself as a screen.

And ultimately the architecture of the screen finds its analogue in the postmodern subject, that is, the subject of postmodernity. The disappearance of spatial dialectics in architecture is made possible by and attends just such a disappearance vis-à-vis the subject, which promotes itself as a package, a matrix of operations where the components of a lifestyle—fashion, ideology, dialect, income, etc.—become applications on the desktop, coordinated like an integrated software package: multitasking made easy through an endless catalogue of immediately legible icons. (Relating my plan to wear a tee-shirt bearing “www.moi,” I jest with a friend; the serious rejoinder: a man has been seen on Forty-Second Street sporting a baseball cap indexing the location of his website.) The subject of the subject simulates itself everywhere on the physical and linguistic body, consumed in an economy of signs, and the

psychological is brought out as facade.* The conventional conception of the *individual*, which drew its charm from the potentiality of an inner space, withers.

The postmodern subject/the architecture of the screen, a network of signs on the surface draws attention to an interior that no longer exists as such. Perfect immanence. My deepest secrets, the intimate details and desires of my life—now merely *lifestyles*—(re)produced as signs played across my screen and *consumed*. “Consumer culture,” the millennium unbending, is a pleonasm.

* The postmodern *physiologie*. In Walter Benjamin’s reading of nineteenth-century Paris, the *physiologie* as genre relieves the city-dweller of anxiety about his/her fellow citizens by domesticating deep psychology, transforming it into an index of harmless oddball types. Now we face the nexus of the *physiologie* and *physionomie* in a legible alloy that relieves by dissolving the threat of deception while transforming the code *miscreant* into a system manipulable by capital.

Journal 2: *Zentralpark?*

Why do people live in New York? There is no relationship between them. Except for an inner electricity which results from the simple fact of their being crowded together. A magical sensation of contiguity and attraction for an artificial centrality. This is what makes it a self-attracting universe, which there is no reason to leave. There is no human reason to be here, except for the sheer ecstasy of being crowded together.

—Jean Baudrillard, *America*

The New York Yankees won the World Series. Went downstairs to observe the activity in Times Square, total exaltation, was immediately stupefied by the sheer number of people and policemen, who were wearing riot gear and were torn between being surly and being jubilant. Citizens and cops. And Cameras. Stood there, near the corner of Forty-fourth Street and Broadway, stuck in the mob, literally stuck, trapped so that I could not get home. Not as a fan, *but as a fan of the fans*, something clicked. About half of this mass held video cameras. They were filming the scene, other people filming the scene; they were filming themselves, the media filming the scene, other people filming them, the media filming other people filming themselves...all the possible circuits and configurations, but of what? the gaze? filmic desire? reproducibility? All the networks were in play, more or less. The media is no longer an instrument by which the masses are manipulated, *pace* Baudrillard. Instead, it is their tool-qua-mirror? These Yankee fans were fans of their own ability to fan, their own fan-ness. The spokes spin so quickly in this formulation, this situation, this scene that they seem indeed to slow and begin in the other direction. As the rotating neon trim of the signs in Times Square, advertising “adult entertainment.”

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[The naiveté of the student who finds difficult and formidable things good enough for him has more wisdom in it than a grown-up pedantry that shakes its finger at thought, warning it that it should understand the simple things before it tackles the complex ones, which, however, are the only ones that tempt it (“Essay” 14-15).]

Journal 1: transfers available...

At the bar, cable television regales the viewer in the small hours with an abundance of infomercials. One in particular, peddling the how-to book *Trade Your Way to Riches*. The tanned author, bespectacled, his hair tied in a tiny tail, confesses to his interlocutors (overheard: the viewer is addressed directly only in the repetitions of the hard-sell pitch segment, which is spaced by the staged interview) that in his sphere of business one feels, at least at first, as if one is doing something illegal. ‘Making so much money should not be this easy; it *should* be immoral!’ This theme can be discerned in most how-to-get-rich infomercials: the guilt produced by such a simple and effortless—anyone with the urge can do it!—method of money-making is *actually* misplaced, dissolved by the legitimating forces of capitalism. The question as to the legitimacy or morality of these forces in and of themselves cannot be posed in this context, for surely the economic laws of a capitalist society are indissociable from the ethical.

‘Sometimes up to 90% accurate,’ *Trade Your Way to Riches* contains all of the data and hermeneutic strategies, the calculus with which to become a successful *futures trader*. A forward-looking speculation wherein the cyclic needs and demands of the market, *les prix*, are tooled in the service of a private utopia. Flashing at the bottom of the screen: “results will vary.”

“Bob Dole, pen in hand, attempts to stand on the Republican party platform.”

What we require of the photographer is the ability to give his picture the caption that wrenches it from modish commerce and gives it a revolutionary useful value. But we shall make this demand most emphatically when we—the writers—take up photography (“Author” 230).

All language communicates itself *in* itself (“On Language” 316). **Language** is the speaker and not what can be **spoken**. Language never gives *mere* signs (“On Language” 324).

The fetishist or dreamy aesthete is also a political theorist, an avant-garde militant, unassimilable on either side, rejected everywhere, with no place on the map of the European ideologies, a Marxist accused of not being the dialectician he always wanted to be, a political thinker reproached for his messianicism, his mysticism, his talmudism.

Poorly received in his country and his milieu, almost unknown in the land of exile—France first of all and still today—where he spent his life and killed himself. A critical man in a critical position, on the limits, a frontier man (“+ R” 177). But, primarily, the caesura makes meaning emerge. It does not do so alone, of course; but without interruption—between letters, words, sentences, books—no signification could be awakened. *Assuming* that Nature refuses the *leap*, one can understand why Scripture will never be Nature. It proceeds by leaps alone. Which makes it perilous. Death strolls between letters. To write, what is called writing, assumes an access to the mind through having the courage to lose one’s life, to die away from nature (“Jabès” 71).

Killing oneself: the fact that his suicide (a more enigmatic sequence than is often allowed and whose dreadful simulacrum is perhaps better described in *Il gioco del suicidio*) should belong to a Franco-Spanish frontier scene should give rise not to symbolist reveries but to the analysis of an implacable historico-political apparatus (“+ R” 177).

What peace there had been was over. He had come back to the surface, the dream-street (V. 151). The para again. Who haunted this week (V. 30). For the forced isolation of thinking people seems to be spreading rapaciously, and it is hardest to endure in large cities where it is necessarily quite involuntary (*Correspondence* 225-26).

And no face is surrealistic in the same degree as the true face of a city (“Surrealism” 176).