

## *There is nothing behind this book.*

*I often wonder why I surround myself with images, why they interest me so instinctively? Those flat things for coolly looking at, they're visible without reading, they speak into the presence and in that immediacy the absence/presence contradiction is resolved, which isn't true of writing.*

*One looks at a painting, one cannot look at a book. When one has read the book, what remains of it resembles what spoke in the immediacy of the object, but it's the object that questions reality. We tend to think that the visible and the real coincide . . . are the same. Now, it's obvious, though from evidence one must discover, that the visible and the real aren't identical. The visible is the real in representation, an instance of signification.*

*Bernard Noël*

You have arrived in the room in which this story takes place. You pick up this book and it describes the room in which you are standing.

Holiday reading, like holiday romance, is an extension of fiction: the circumstances of the encounter are already inscribed in the situation you are about to experience.

You have arrived in this room, bags shed, distrustful of contrivance, both mechanical and strategic. This whole situation is booby-trapped, wound tight. You're suspicious of literature, of course, precisely because it arrives so appallingly on time! How *convenient* it is! How generic: how blindingly legible.

You're suspicious of everything, everyone. That the machinery of literature so intimately resembles that of criminal process makes suspects of us all; renders this book accessory. The Police Procedural is the exemplary literary genre: it is as close as we'll get to a timetable or a legend at the bottom of that literary map. –Or an inventory of all the cogs and gears, the rigging, the prostheses, accents, weapons, greasepaint, wigs; protagonists, dotted about the landscape like vacated avatars.

A perverse hospitality is performed here on Stromboli. Your reclusive host, after all, is a man with a tattoo on his face which is an exact reproduction of his features. The implicit idea, you well understand, is *not* to unearth or exhume some expository cadaver, but to submit to that duplicitous resemblance composed on pages of hot, sun-kissed, sand-studded skin: forensic autopsy, you are reminded, is a convenient lie performed in legal and academic theatres. It has no place on Stromboli, in the shadow of this volcano. Do not disturb the sulphurous sand; leave the desiccated corpse of your friend buried and out of sight.

*(Why are there more windows visible on the outside than you can find on the inside? Beyond, the sea is an idea of scalding sheet metal and the town is sketched crudely, inhabitants blurred, disinterested. Beyond, everything is heat-hazed into uncertainty, backdrop flapping in the sea breeze)*

HERE (\*), you are under the ascendant dictate of the image; the images dictate to you what you must say. Yes, the vision demands that you say all that it offers you and all that you find in it. You may close your eyes or leave them open, but if you close them you see something completely different from what actually happens: you see that of which you speak. It's precisely when you close your eyes to this room, to the visible Stromboli beyond, that literature pauses and waits – breath held in the dark beyond the shoreline – for your eyes to reopen and, with a start, begin reading and writing the spectacle again.

The key to the following texts is **trompe l'oeil** – is a *trompe l'oeil* key. And there is nothing behind this book.

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