

Sophie Calle. Suite
vénitienne. Jean Baudrillard.
Please follow me.





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Translated by Dany Barash and Danny Hatfield.

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Suite vénitienne.
Sophie Calle.

For Dick Bel-ami

For months I followed strangers on the street. For the pleasure of following them, not because they particularly interested me. I photographed them without their knowledge, took note of their movements, then finally lost sight of them and forgot them.

At the end of January 1980, on the streets of Paris, I followed a man whom I lost sight of a few minutes later in the crowd. That very evening, quite by chance, he was introduced to me at an opening. During the course of our conversation, he told me he was planning an imminent trip to Venice.



Monday. February 11, 1980.

10:00 P.M. Gare de Lyon. Platform H. Venice boarding area. My father accompanies me to the platform. He waves his hand.

In my suitcase: a make-up kit so I can disguise myself; a blond, bobbed wig; hats; veils; gloves; sunglasses; a Leica and a Squintar (a lens attachment equipped with a set of mirrors so I can take photos without aiming at the subject).

I photograph the occupants of the other berths and then go to sleep.

Tomorrow I will see Venice for the first time.



Tuesday. February 12, 1980.

12:52 P.M. Arrival at the Venice train station. The pensione recommended to me is the Locanda Montin near the Accademia. I go there.

I didn't bother to put on my wig, I'm not made up. I don't have a strong enough feeling that Henri B. is in this city.

1:35 P.M. I am given room number one.

3:00 P.M. I walk the streets randomly. In the course of our conversation about Venice, Henri B. had alluded to a pensione: the San Bernardino. On the list of hotels that I obtained en route, I don't find a San Bernardino.

That doesn't surprise me. There is a San Giorgio, a San Stefano.

I arrive at Piazza San Marco and sit against a column. I watch.

I see myself at the labyrinth's gate, ready to get lost in the city and in this story.
Submissive.

8:00 P.M. I return to the Locanda Montin and dine alone at the restaurant on the ground floor. Then I go to bed.



Wednesday. February 13, 1980.

11:00 A.M. I wear a beige raincoat, a scarf, and dark glasses.

I go to the Questura, the main police station. After a series of corridors, I enter the office where the hotel registration forms are kept. I explain to the clerk that I've lost the name and address of the hotel where a friend of mine is staying. I confess my helplessness. The clerk says he can't help me: it's against policy to supply such information to the public. He advises me to go to the reservation desk at the train station. *Why don't I have the audacity to bribe him?*

12:30 P.M. The train station. The same refusal. I am directed again to the Questura.

1:30 P.M. Piazza San Marco. I wait for hours, sitting on a bench at Palazzo Ducale, hidden by a column. I watch for *his* silhouette. A young man accompanied by a dog notices me and speaks to me. His name is Pino; hers is Cioccolata. Pino is Venetian; he draws caricatures to sell to tourists. Last year he sat perched for two days on the edge of the bell tower of Piazza San Marco.

We go for a walk. He waves to all of the policemen we meet. He states that he knows the police chief's daughter intimately.

I tell him I've lost track of a friend. He says he'll help me find him. Touched by my apparent shyness and the innumerable blunders that I commit in his language, Pino agrees to call certain hotels for me to see if Henri B. by chance is registered at one. From my list I choose the hotel names most like San Bernardino.

There is no Henri B. at the San Giorgio or at the San Stefano. The San Bartolomeo is closed.

I know neither Henri B.'s tastes nor his means; I'll call the hotels of Venice, one-by-one, without exception.

I thank Pino. We may see each other again tomorrow. I go back to the Locanda Montin and dine alone.

9:00 P.M. This evening is my first night out as a blonde. A man follows me for about ten minutes but doesn't dare to approach me.

I slip through the streets. A dread is taking hold of me: He recognized me, he's following me, he knows.

I go to Harry's Bar. I drink a whiskey and at 11:00 P.M. I return to the pensione.

Thursday. February 14, 1980.

Noon. Lunch with Anna Lisa G. and Luciana C., Venetians a mutual friend suggested I contact. I confide in them the purpose of my trip. They're willing to help and place their telephone at my disposal.

3:00 P.M. I leave them. I put on the wig; from now on I won't go out without wearing it. I continue my search for Henri B. on the streets. *I wonder if he's rich.* I go into the luxury hotels: "Do you have a guest named Henri B.?" At the Savoia, the Cavaletto, the Londra, the Danieli, the San Marco, the answer is no.

I know so little about him, except that he had rain and fog the first days, that he now has sun, that he is never where I search. He is consuming me.

Four hours pass. I give up.

8:00 P.M. Dinner with Luciana C. at the restaurant Le Milion. For practice, while aiming at my friend, I photograph three men on my right with the Squintar.

The day Henri B. is there in front of me, will I be able to photograph him, as well, while looking elsewhere? I doubt it.

Midnight. I reach the pensione. I've been reciting his name since the Ponte dell'Accademia. I remove my wig.

Today, for the first time in my life, someone called me a good-looking blond.



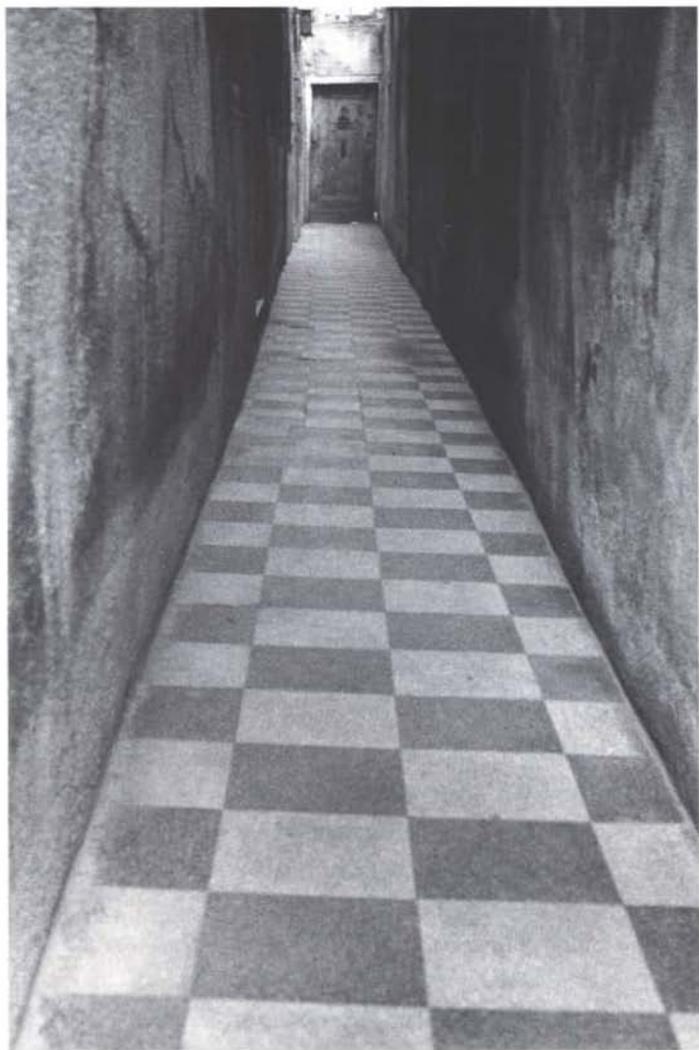
Friday. February 15, 1980.

10:00 A.M. I leave the Locanda Montin as a brunette and don my wig in a tiny alleyway nearby. *I'll do it this way every day. I don't want to baffle the proprietors. They are already calling me Sophie.*

I inquire about Henri B. in all the hotels having a first name for a name: Da Bruno, the Leonardo, the San Moise, the Alex . . . at lunch time, I look through restaurant windows. *I always see the same faces, never his. I've come to find some consolation in knowing he's not where I am looking for him. I know where Henri B. is not.*

For a few moments, I take a different tack and absent-mindedly follow a flower delivery boy—as if he might lead me to *him*.

2:00 P.M. I settle down in front of the telephone at Anna Lisa G.'s place. The Venice hotel list, not including the Lido, comprises one hundred and eighty-one names divided into several categories: deluxe, first, second, third, and fourth classes; first-, second-, and third-class pensiones; and inns. I will call them all in their respective order.



Thus I dial the numbers for the hotels Bauer Grünwald, Cipriani, Gritti, Carlton Executive, Europa & Britannia, Gabrielli, Londra, Luna, Metro-pole, Monaco & Grand Canal, Park Hotel, Regina & Di Roma, Saturnia & International, Ala, All'Angelo, Al Sole Palace, Austria, Bel Sitio, Bisanzio, Bonvecchiati, Boston, Capri, Carpaccio, Casanova, Cavaletto, Concordia, Continental, Corso, De L'Alboro, Do Pozzi, Flora, Giorgione, La Fenice, Montecarlo, Patria & tre Rose, Principe, Residence Palace, San Marco, Terminus, Torino, Union, Universo, Adriatico, Alla Fava, Antico Panada, Astoria, Ateneo, Atlantide, Basilea, Canal, Caprera, Casa Igea, Castello, Centauro, Citta di Milano, Diana, Dolomiti, Firenze, Florida, Gallini, Gardena, Gorizia-a la valigia, Grasso di Ua, Kette, Lisbona, Lux, Malibrán, Marconi, Mignon, Nazionale, Noemi, Olimpia, Paganelli, Pausania-San Barnaba, Pellegrino & commercio, Piazzale Roma, Rialto, San Fantin, San Gallo, San Maurizio, Santa Chiara, Scandinavia, Serenissima, Spagna, Stella-Alpina, Trovatore, Walter, Zechini, Al Gobbo, Atlantico, Basilea, Brooklyn, Caneva, Casa Boccassini, Da Nino, Falier, Guerrato, Guerrini, Hesperia, Ida, Iris, Marin, Marte, Mercurio, Minerva & Nettuno, Moderno, Orion, Rio, San Cassiano, San Geremia, San Lio, Santa Lucia, Tivoli, Villa Rosa, Locanda Cipriani, Accademia, Ca d'Oro, La Calcina, Seguso, Agli Alboretti, Al Gazzettino, Alla Salute Da Cici, Bucintoro, Campiello.

At 6:45 P.M., I dial the number for the Casa de Stefani, a third-class pensione and ask for the one hundred and twenty-fifth time to speak with Mr. Henri B. They tell me that he's out for the day.

The voice adds, "They leave early in the morning and come back late in the evening." I thank him and hang up.

The Casa de Stefani is located at 2786 Calle del Traghetto, or, approximately, one hundred meters from the pensione where I am staying.



7:15 P.M. In the company of Luciana C., I take the vaporetto. We get off at the Ca'Rezzonico. Ahead of us, the narrow, somber Calle del Traghetto leads to the Campo San Barnaba. Halfway down the street, on the left, is the Casa de Stefani. I scarcely dare to glance at the closed door and pass by without slowing down. *My investigation was proceeding without him. Finding him may throw everything into confusion, may precipitate the end. I'm afraid.*

As we agreed upon in advance, Luciana C., keeping several meters behind me, goes to ring the bell at the pensione. She's supposed to ask the price of the rooms and describe the place to me. I plan to have my friend stay at the Casa de Stefani. Soon she rejoins me. It is a woman who opened the door. The entryway is spacious, dark. The price for a single room is seven thousand lire per day, fourteen thousand lire for a double. The pensione is full until Sunday.

We cover the short distance back to the Locanda Montin. The closeness doesn't surprise me. Along the way I take off my wig.

We go for dinner.

At 10:00 P.M., and again at midnight, I pass by the front of his pensione alone. Furtively.

· PENSIONE ·

CASA de STEFANI

LETTURE

· L · J ·

Saturday. February 16, 1980.

8:00 A.M. Calle del Traghetto. I am waiting for him. The street is closed-in, narrow, about a hundred meters in length, running from Campo San Barnaba to the dock. It's used only by its inhabitants and vaporetto passengers. Every five minutes, when a boat arrives, a wave of people streams over the deserted street.

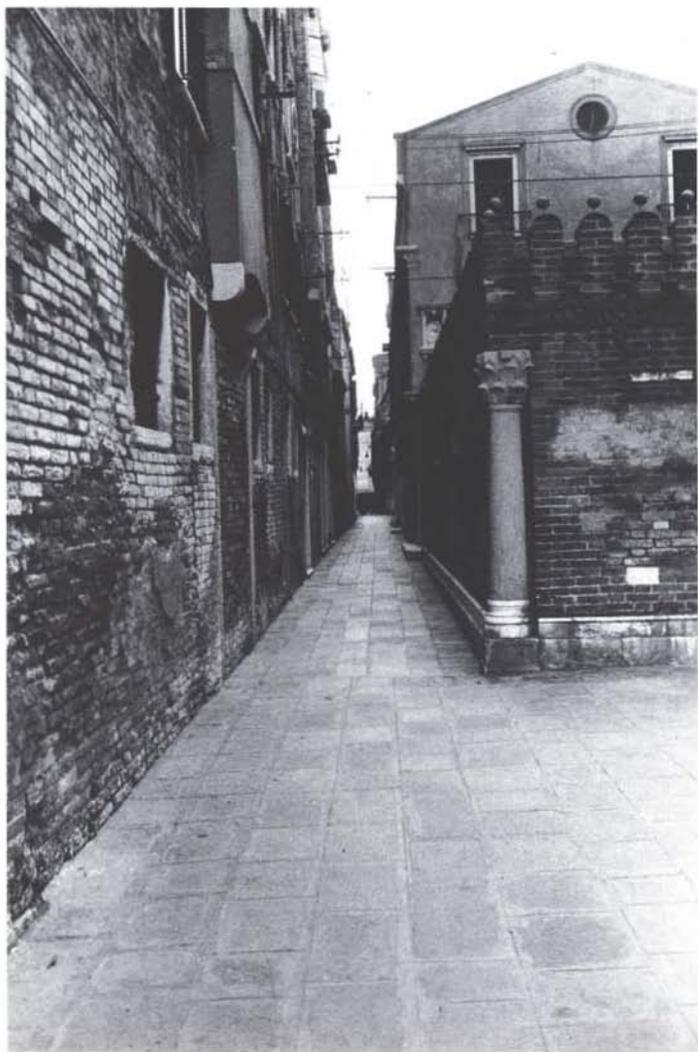
If Henri B. leaves the pensione when the street is empty, he won't escape me. But if he goes out at a crowded moment, I run the risk of missing him.

One of two things may happen: Either he turns left to continue on foot or he goes right to board the boat. Given these alternatives, the only solution is to survey the street ceaselessly, without relaxing my attention. *If he should see me. . . .*

11:10 A.M. After three hours of continuous comings and goings, I think I catch a glimpse of him. I start. It's not him.

11:30 A.M. The door to his pensione opens at the precise moment I pass by. A woman exits. I can make out a dark hallway, a kneeling silhouette washing the floor.

11:40 A.M. I sit for a moment on a step. I'm wearing my dark glasses and a hat; my face is hidden by a newspaper that I pretend to scan.



11:50 A.M. To disguise my intentions, I wait in front of 2788 Calle del Traghetto, as if the door were going to open for me.

11:55 A.M. I am losing patience. *I refuse to think about my being in this place. I must not think about it. I must stop pondering possible outcomes, wondering where this story is leading me. I will follow it to the end.*

A couple, about thirty years old, leaves the house across the street from the Casa de Stefani. If they would let me use a window looking out onto the street, my wait would be a bit more comfortable. I follow them and take the vaporetto with them. We get off at the San Marco stop. I don't dare approach them. I let them go.

12:30 P.M. I take a walk along the beach of the Lido.

I think about him and that phrase by Proust: "To think that I've wasted years of my life, that I wanted to die and that I had my greatest love, for a woman whom I did not care for, who was not my type."

I must not forget that I don't have any amorous feelings toward Henri B. The impatience with which I await his arrival, the fear of that encounter, these symptoms aren't really a part of me.

4:00 P.M. I settle in on my bench at Piazza San Marco. Venice is preparing for the carnival. Children are already in costume. I watch at length a little boy with a feathered headdress who's tirelessly chasing pigeons with a knife. *I would like to see him kill one.*

8:00 P.M. *He's not coming.* I get up from my bench. I have a date with Luciana C. at the masquerade ball at the Arsenal. I photograph the mayor of Venice, who smiles at me.

10:00 P.M. I go back to my pensione. On the way I take off my wig. I meet the man who had followed me as a blond. He doesn't pay any attention to me now.



Sunday. February 17, 1980.

8:00 A.M. Calle del Traghetto. I wait as I did yesterday. It's Sunday; there are fewer people. It's cold. I resume my comings and goings.

10:00 A.M. I take a break for a cup of coffee at the Bar Artisti, at the corner of his street and Campo San Barnaba. The arrival of the owner of Locanda Montin takes me by surprise. Would he recognize me beneath my wig? I lower my head, hand a bill to the waiter, and leave quickly. From now on I'll pay for my meals when I order.

I return to Calle del Traghetto. I seek out a certain profile. I am blind to all else.

Noon. I give up. I go to Piazza San Marco. I have a drink at the Café Florian, where I meet Jean, the barman. He explains to me why Europe is the most beautiful of continents, Italy the most beautiful country in Europe, Venice the most beautiful city in Italy, San Marco the most beautiful piazza in Venice, the Florian the most beautiful café on Piazza San Marco, and that *he*, Jean, is *the* barman at the Florian. He invites me to lunch and I accept.

2:00 P.M. We go to the La Madonna restaurant. I tell Jean that I am looking for a friend vacationing in Venice, that I'd like to surprise him. I show him a photograph of Henri B. that I took on the streets of Paris.

Jean promises to let me know if he notices this man; he will call me if necessary. We part.

3:30 P.M. I decide to go back to Casa de Stefani. *At this time of the day he's surely not there.*

3:40 P.M. I ring. A young man invites me in, then asks me to wait. He leaves. The lobby is deep and dark. On the left a wide stairway leads to the rooms. The place is gloomy. A woman, about forty years old, approaches me. I inquire as to the price of the rooms, then ask if there are certain hours to respect. She answers that guests have a key to the front door so that they can come and go as they please. I thank her.

4:00 P.M. Back at Locanda Montín, it appears to me that G., the owner, is staring at me curiously; would he have recognized me this morning? I decide to talk to him; I need allies.

I address him like this: "I'm looking for a man. I want to know what he's doing in Venice, and I don't want him to know I'm in the city. His name is Henri B. and he's staying at Casa de Stefani. Could you help me?"

G. says that he has a friend working at that pensione and offers to call him right away. I accept. *G. didn't ask me anything. Not a single detail.* He dials the telephone number and, after identifying himself, asks his friend if there might be a guest at Casa de Stefani by the name of Henri B. The answer seems to be positive. G. asks his friend to tell him about Henri B. The man complies willingly: "Henri B. is a charming person. He arrived in the company of a young boy, who left after several days. Then his wife joined him. Recently they traveled out of Venice. They're now back. (The man specifies neither their destination nor how long they were gone.) He photographed the pensione, the owners. He goes out in the morning around 10:00 or 10:30 and doesn't come back until late in the evening. His room is reserved until next week."

Fear seizes me once again at such a specific depiction of Henri B.'s habits. I'm afraid of meeting up with him: I'm afraid that the encounter might be commonplace. I don't want to be disappointed. There is such a gap between his thoughts and mine. I'm the only one dreaming. Henri B.'s feelings do not belong in my story.

G. hangs up. He thinks his friend was not surprised by the request, and he implicitly promised to keep silent. *Their kindness touches me.*

I thank G. *This morning he had not recognized me.*

In the evening I mechanically return to the front of his pensione. On the second floor a window is lit. I press myself momentarily against the door.



Monday. February 18, 1980.

8:00 A.M. Calle del Traghetto. It's freezing out. I patiently resume my comings and goings.

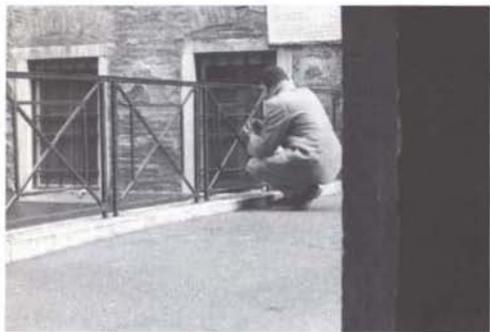
10:05 A.M. At last, it's him. I was pretending to be waiting for someone else at the entryway of a house located between his pensione and the canal. The door of Casa de Stefani opened. He appeared.

He heads toward Campo San Barnaba. He's wearing a wool-lined sheepskin coat and has a camera slung over his shoulder. I find him changed. His hair is longer. A woman is holding on to his arm, her head covered by a print shawl.

I follow them from a short distance. They take the following route: Calle del Traghetto, Campo San Barnaba, Ponte dei Pugni, Rio Terra Canal—he asks directions from a passerby—Campo Santa Margherita, Ponte San Pantalon, Campiello Mosco, Salizzada San Pantalon, Rio del Gaffaro, Fondamenta dei Tolentini, Calle de Camai, Calle del Chiovere, Campo San Rocco, Calle Larga—they glance into the window of the Fox Photo Shop—Calle Traghetto, Campo San Tomà, Ponte San Tomà, Calle dei Nomboli, Rio Terra dei Nomboli, Calle dei Saoneri, Ponte San Polo—Salizzada San Polo, Campo San Polo—he points to the church, takes a picture of the piazza. I imitate him—Sottoportego de la Madonnetta, Calle de la Madonnetta, Ponte de la Madonnetta—he crouches







to snap a shot of the canal, or perhaps of that passing boat? After several seconds, I imitate him, trying my best to take the same picture—Campiello dei Meloni—they seem interested by a poster advertising photocopiers—Calle de Mezzo, Campo San Aponal—she enters a bookstore and comes out again immediately, empty-handed—Calle de la Rughetta—he buys a paper, talking briefly with the vendor—Ruga Vecchia San Giovanni—they stop for a few seconds in front of the Banco di Roma and unfold a map which they consult; it's crowded.

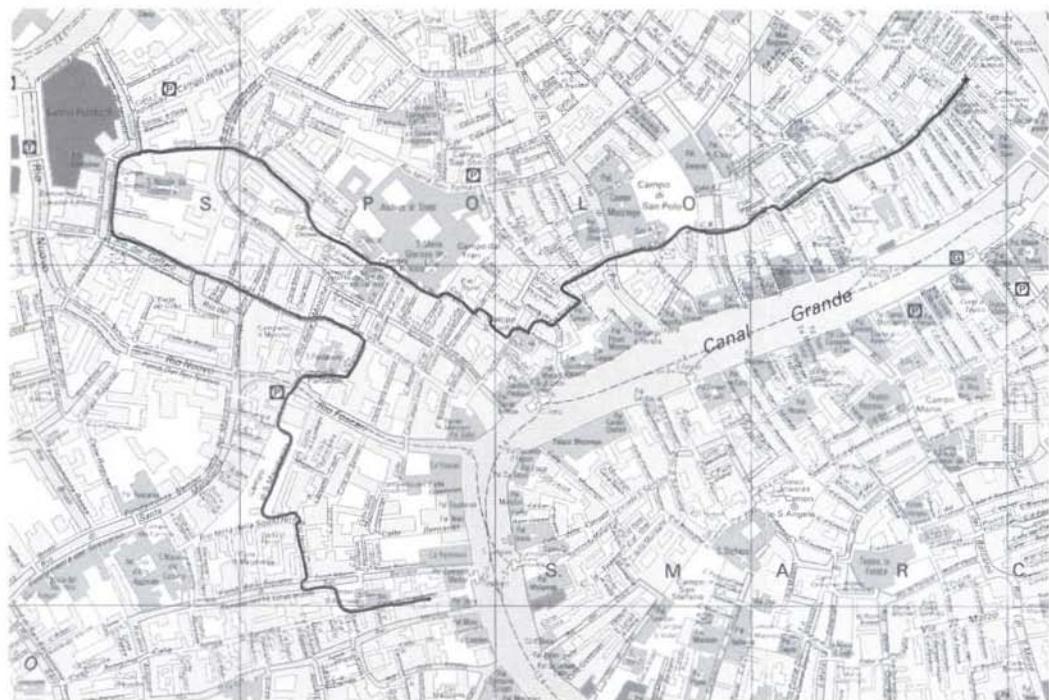
11:05 A.M. The woman goes inside the Banco di Roma. I guess that he went in before her. To see him, I approach the front windows of the bank. I can just make out the woman on the other side of the glass. I back away.

11:15 A.M. She leaves and heads toward the Ponte di Rialto. She's alone. I rush into the bank. He's not there. I run after the woman. She's disappeared. For the next few minutes, I search for them in all directions in vain.

11:25 A.M. I give up. I lean up against the facade of the Banco di Roma.
I caught a glimpse of one hour in Henri B.'s life.

On our first meeting, Henri B. had told me that he liked cemeteries. It is the only thing I had learned about him. In the afternoon I go to the old Jewish cemetery of the Lido. To open its gate, one first must get the key from the caretaker of the main cemetery. Having completed this step, I close the cemetery gate after me.

This is where he should have been. I have high expectations of him.







5:30 P.M. I wait for Luciana C. under the clock in Piazza San Marco. Her pace quickens when she sees me. She says she noticed a man at the Café Florian. She thought he matched my description of Henri B. The man was accompanied by a woman. Luciana C. passed close to them. The man looked at her. She's certain it was him.

Night falls. I near the lighted windows at the Florian. I pick out Henri B. seated in a nook. I photograph the woman sitting next to him, her back to the window. Outside, I wait for him.

6:00 P.M. He gets up, disappears for two minutes, returns, and pays. They leave the café. Night has fallen. My shadowing continues: Piazza San Marco—they glance at the shop Pauly and C., Venetian glassware—Calle seconda de l'ascension—they look for a while longer at the knickknacks in Bertoli's, then they stop for about three minutes in front of the window at Vogini, shoe and handbag merchant. I turn my back to them and observe their motions through the reflection in the store window on the other side of the street—Calle della Frezzeria, Piscina di Frezzeria—an obscure, deserted alley that widens into a small piazza. *We are alone, I'm close to him, he doesn't frighten me.*

At 6:15 P.M. they go into an antique shop, Luigi bottella d'arte, 1656 Piscina di Frezzeria. They go up a stairway and escape my watchful eye.

There is a tiny blind alley in front of the shop. I decide to take up watch on the corner of the alley where it meets the piazza. When they come down the steps, I'll see their legs as they appear and will back up into the darkness.

Once again, I wait.

7:00 P.M. A stranger passes several times in front of me. I turn my eyes away from him and stare fixedly at the ground. The man enters La Colomba restaurant.

7:30 P.M. It's freezing out. I approach the antique shop. One must ring to enter. Above the door a sign reads "Show me your home, and I'll tell you who you are."





8:00 P.M. They are still inside; I am outside. I cast aside all caution. I lean against the door. *The absurd length of this visit. It's as if he were telling me, "You can wait for me, I won't come."*

8:10 P.M. The man who had stared at me for a long time leaves La Colomba. He stops and speaks to me; he's surprised to find me in the same spot, in this cold. He wants to know if he can be of some help.

I tell him I'm in love with a man—*only love seems admissible*—and this man has been in Luigi's antique shop since 6:15 in the company of a woman.

I ask him to go join them, alone, and to tell me what he has seen when he comes back. He agrees to do it.

8:15 P.M. He rings the bell at the antique shop. The door opens. He enters, climbing the steps.

8:20 P.M. I'm impatient. The stranger must have spoken to them.

8:25 P.M. He comes out. He gives me this account: "The main part of the shop is located on the second floor. The antique dealer, a man, and a woman are seated in comfortable armchairs, a glass of whiskey in hand. It's quite warm in the room. I do not know what they were saying because Luigi, a charming gentleman, interrupted their conversation to wait on me." After a silence, he adds: "It seems they plan on staying there for a while." He asks me if I still wish to wait. I answer yes. I thank him for his help. He seems surprised, but he leaves.

I'm cold; the thought that they are warm irritates me. I could leave—in an hour maybe, they will go to La Colomba and then return to their room—but I stay. I don't want to have to imagine, to guess.



8:45 P.M. Their legs appear on the top steps. I crouch into my hiding place. They go, turning to their left. I wait a few seconds. At the very moment I leave the alley to follow them, they turn around. *She was the first to turn back. She scares me more than he does.* I quickly fall back. They pass by me without turning their heads, tranquil, silent, and heading in the opposite direction along the path taken three hours before. The streets are empty. I follow them from a distance: Calle della Frezzeria, Calle seconda de l'ascension, then Calle Vallaresso, which leads to vaporetto stop number 15, the San Marco station. They wait for the boat. I pretend to window shop. Ten minutes go by. The vaporetto docks. I rush to board just in time. They go into the cabin and sit down; I remain on deck. *So close to him, as if sharing an island, encircled by the waters of the lagoon. I feel determined.*

As we approach the Accademia stop, they get up and join me outside. I hide my face behind a newspaper, *Il Gazzettino*. They get off the boat, I do the same. They go around the church of Santa Maria de la Carita and take the first street on the left. After covering about one hundred meters, they disappear through a door. I approach; it's the Trattoria ai Cugnai, 857 calle Nuova San Agnese. Through the window I watch them sit down at a table. He gets up almost immediately, crosses the room, and pushes open a door in the back (probably one leading to the toilets).

That's enough for tonight. I go back to my pensione. It's 9:30 P.M.



Tuesday. February 19, 1980.

10:00 A.M. From the Bar Artisti I watch, turned toward Campo Santa Barnaba, waiting, without conviction, for him to pass. *I don't make much of an effort, I give myself a break—I have seen him. And the woman who accompanies him disturbs me; last night I had a nightmare: He comes toward me and says, "Listen, that's enough!" Later in the dream, this woman orders him not to go out on the street in order to thwart my investigation. She runs after me, trips, and falls into the Grand Canal. I jump into the dirty water and pull her to dry land. I disappear. She wonders who that blond woman was who saved her from drowning and then fled without a trace.*

11:00 A.M. He's not coming. I give up.

11:30 A.M. I ring the bell at Luigi's, the door opens, I climb the steps. In the main room on the second floor, the antique dealer greets me and then leaves almost at once for another customer. While waiting, I look at the objects on display. Ten minutes pass, Luigi returns. I introduce myself and pretend that one of my friends, a certain Henri B., had recommended I pay him a visit. Luigi suggests that I come back next Friday about six o'clock: the boutique will be closed, and we will be able to chat at our leisure.

*Perhaps he'll invite me to sit down in his armchair, a glass of whiskey in hand.
I will be warm.*

I thank him. I will return.

Noon. I have an appointment at the Café Florian with Mr. S., a Venetian. We have a mutual friend in Paris.

A man sits alone at the bar. We nod to each other. Mr. S. is in his fifties and has a handsome face; he smiles. Without hesitation I confide in him. I tell him about my trip, explain the reason for our meeting. I feel alone, I need help, but I don't know what form it might take. He listens to me carefully. He would like to help me, but he doesn't know how.

He tells me about the most popular tourist spots and marks them on my map of Venice. I ask him if he knows anyone on Calle del Traghetto who has a window overlooking the street. Mr. S. knows that a certain Dr. Z. lives on that street, but he doesn't know him personally.

At 1:00 P.M. we part. He asks me to keep in touch with him.

1:30 P.M. In front of the architecture school I meet with Mr. C., whose address was given to me by a friend in Paris. He's about 35 years old, stylish, and at ease. He's accompanied by two other professors. The three men take me to lunch at a restaurant close to the school. The conversation is sophisticated, lively. Venice is a small city; I ask C. if he knows a Dr. Z. who lives on Calle del Traghetto. "We are good, longtime friends," he says.

I express my wish to meet him. C. gives me his address and telephone number. He promises to talk to him about me this evening and to tell him I will call.

At 3:00 P.M. we part company.

I walk randomly through the city's streets looking for Henri B.

This method is basic, easy, and relaxing, even if it has proven less than efficient.

3:20 P.M. I see him right in the middle of Campo San Angelo. He turns his back to me and photographs a group of children playing. Quickly, I do the same.

Then I notice the woman, who's waiting for him off to the side. He joins her.

Our journey begins: Campo San Angelo, Calle del Spezier, Ponte de la Cortesia—he points towards the canal as if to show something to the woman. I take a picture in the same direction—Campo Manin—their paths separate suddenly: she turns to the left, he to the right—Campo San Luca, Calle delle Balanze, Calle dei Fabri, Calle del Teatro o de la Comedia, Campo San Salvador—he hesitates in front of the Credito Italiano, glances toward the canal, then takes off again—Calle Mazziareta due Aprile, Campo San Bartolomeo, Salizzata San Grisostomo—he enters the central post office. I follow him. Hidden behind a column, I observe and photograph him in front of the general delivery counter. An employee hands him his mail, it looks like two letters. He goes out—Ponte de l'Olio, Calle del Teatro o de l'Opera—the neighborhood is deserted, his pace slackens, about fifteen meters separate us—Corte seconda del Miliòn, Sottoportego del Miliòn—a dark and nauseating archway that serves as a garbage dump—Ponte del Teatro o Marco Polo—at the bridge, he stops, photographs the canal or perhaps Marco Polo's house. I stay beneath the archway in semiobscurity.

He's there, motionless, staring fixedly at the water. He's slung his camera back over his shoulder. He leans with his elbows upon the bridge wall, daydreaming.

I'm afraid he'll turn abruptly and see me crouching in the garbage. I decide to pass silently behind him and wait a little farther along. Quickly, with head lowered, I cross the bridge. Henri B. doesn't move. *I could touch him.*







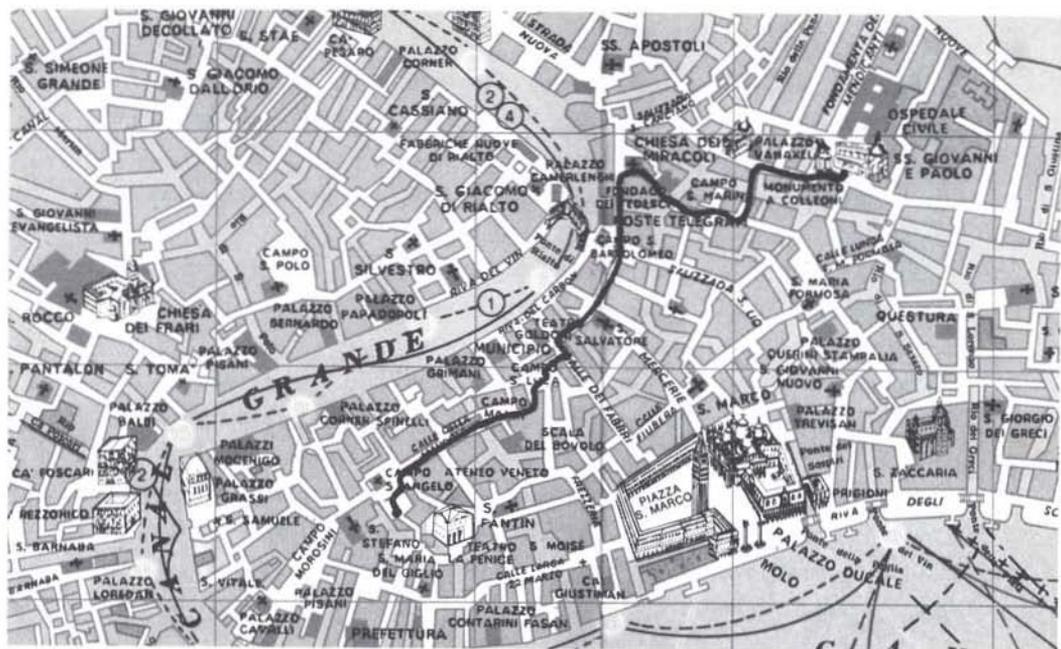
The only street facing the bridge is Calle Scaletta, long and extremely narrow. About twenty meters from the bridge, I slip into a large entryway and wait for him to pass. Five very long minutes go by. Perhaps he's retraced his steps? I regret my impatience. I leave my hiding place and go back.

He's there, in the same place. At the very moment I pass over the bridge, he straightens up. He doesn't seem to have noticed me.

After photographing the canal, the house, places he was staring at, I continue my pursuit. *He's alone, I'm getting too close to him. I am becoming careless.* Calle Scaletta, Campo San Marina, Calle del Cristo, Ponte del Cristo, Fondamenta Van Axel—he approaches a man who is wearing a mask and asks him to pose in front of Palazzo Van Axel. He adjusts the position of the man's arm then takes a photograph. He thanks him and goes on his way—Calle delle Erbe, Ponte Rosso—we end up in a vast piazza, more crowded with people than the empty streets we've just passed through. My fear subsides—Campo di S.S. Giovanni e Paolo. In the center, an equestrian monument, at the far side the public hospital. He heads towards the hospital, passing through the front gate.

Several seconds later, I enter an immense hall, empty and silent. Steps resonate. Suddenly, I find myself facing him; he's already heading for the exit. He crosses my path, brushes by me, stares at me, and leaves. I wait a while before leaving the grounds.

As soon as I'm outside, I see him, sitting at the landing of the Ponte Cavello, some ten meters to my right. He's looking at me. Concealing my emotions, I determinedly cross the piazza, circle around the monument, and pretend to study it. I feel his eyes on me. I walk along the hospital's right wing. There's an alcove. Finally I'll be out of his sight. *I've got to get a hold of myself. I lean against a column and close my eyes.*



His solitude made me audacious. I've diverted him from his course. He's intrigued. I should keep my distance, and yet I stay close. Perhaps I'm weary of playing this out alone.

I open my eyes; he is in front of me, quite close. We are alone. He doesn't say anything. *He seems to be absorbed in thought—a few seconds' respite—is he trying to remember?*

Then he speaks: “Your eyes, I recognize your eyes; that's what you should have hidden.” He backs up to photograph me. He suggests, “Would you like to walk together?” I signal that I would.

5:00 P.M. We take the Fondamenta dei Mendicanti. It ends up at the docks along the Laguna Morta. In the distance we can make out the San Michele cemetery.

On the way, he asks me what I have seen of Venice. I cannot think of an answer. In the face of my silence, he tries something else: He tells me that I shouldn't have left my I.D. card in plain sight on the pensione's reception desk. A childish invention.

I smile at him. *I am relieved that he doesn't say, “If I were you . . .” or “You should have. . . .” I like the awkward way he's hiding his surprise, his desire to be master of the situation. As if, in fact, I had been the unconscious victim of his game, his itineraries, his schedules. . . .* I stay silent. He talks to me about the beauty of the city, he wants to know if I saw this church, that museum. I answer only with a yes or a no.

Now he's silent, too. We walk along the lagoon; the neighborhood is deserted. He tells me he has an appointment in about an hour, close to Piazza San Marco. He suggests we go there together by vaporetto. I accept. *I am at his disposal.*

We climb aboard and sit in the back of the boat, next to one another. Throughout the ride we don't exchange a word. He says nothing more about my I.D. card; from now on he avoids any allusion to the situation.

I put on some lipstick and adjust the veil on my hat. He turns towards me, compliments me.

The boat docks. Preparations are underway for the carnival ball; in a few minutes the first firecrackers will go off. Stands have been erected for the orchestra, a costumed crowd invades Piazza San Marco.

We pass by, still silent. *Am I relieved, disappointed?*

We arrive in front of the Café Florian. He says that we must part. I try to photograph him; he holds his hand up to hide his face and cries, “No, that’s against the rules.”

We simply say good-bye. I believe he smiles ever so slightly. He walks away under the arcades. I photograph his back and let him go.

What did I imagine? That he was going to take me with him, to challenge me, to use me? Henri B. did nothing, I discovered nothing. A banal ending to this banal story.

I return to the carnival. I dance hours on end and spend the night on a bench with a harlequin.

At daybreak, I leave while he sleeps. Nobody is on the streets. Alone, I wander back over the routes we took together these last two days, Henri B. and I.









Wednesday. February 20, 1980.

7:00 A.M. Locanda Montín. The proprietress scolds me. She tells me she waited for me last night.

10:00 A.M. Today I will not wait for him on Calle del Traghetto.

I cannot follow him anymore. He must be worried, wondering if I am there, behind him—now he thinks of me—but I will be on his trail. Differently.

He likes cemeteries. I take the vaporetto and go to the Island of the Dead, Venice's main cemetery.

I stand for a long time in front of a burial vault on which a Christmas wreath is hung.

The old caretaker approaches me. He invites me for a drink in his hut, set up right in the middle of the tombstones. As soon as we enter, he locks the door behind us. I show him a picture of Henri B.: Has he seen this man before? He can't recall. We chat. Ten minutes later I ask to leave. He puts away his whiskey bottle and opens the door for me. He smiles and says, "You were scared, no?"

3:00 P.M. I call Dr. Z.; he agrees to see me at his home on Calle del Traghetto,
at 5:00 P.M.

5:00 P.M. I ring at Dr. Z.'s house. He's on the phone and has me wait a few
minutes in his sitting room. The windows all look out onto the street.

He comes back. He must be sixty years old. I like him. I tell him the whole
story.

Dr. Z. agrees to lend me a window on the second floor, mornings only.

He asks in return that I take off my wig for him. I consent. He tells me he
prefers me as a brunette.

At 7:30 P.M. I leave. I'll be back tomorrow at 9:00 A.M. to station myself at
his window.

Why this obstinacy, this window now?

8:00 P.M. I go to the Trattoria ai Cugnai, where he had dinner two days
before. It's a pleasant place, lively, rather modest. The menu is written in four
languages. Service is provided by three old women. Englishmen are sitting on
my left, Germans on my right. The food is greasy, but the price is right.

10:00 P.M. I return to Locanda Montín and go to bed.





Thursday. February 21, 1980.

9:00 A.M. I ring at Dr. Z.'s house. The cleaning woman opens the door for me. She's the only one home. She was told to take me to the guest room upon my arrival. She leads me there. With my Leica equipped with the Squintar, I approach the window. I am just a few meters from the entrance to Casa de Stefani. I wait for him, bent over. From time to time I photograph passersby.

If I see him going out, I will not follow him. I want only to watch him one more time in hiding, photograph him, but I wouldn't want to annoy him, displease him.

10:00 A.M. A young man rings at Z.'s house, drops off an envelope, then leaves.

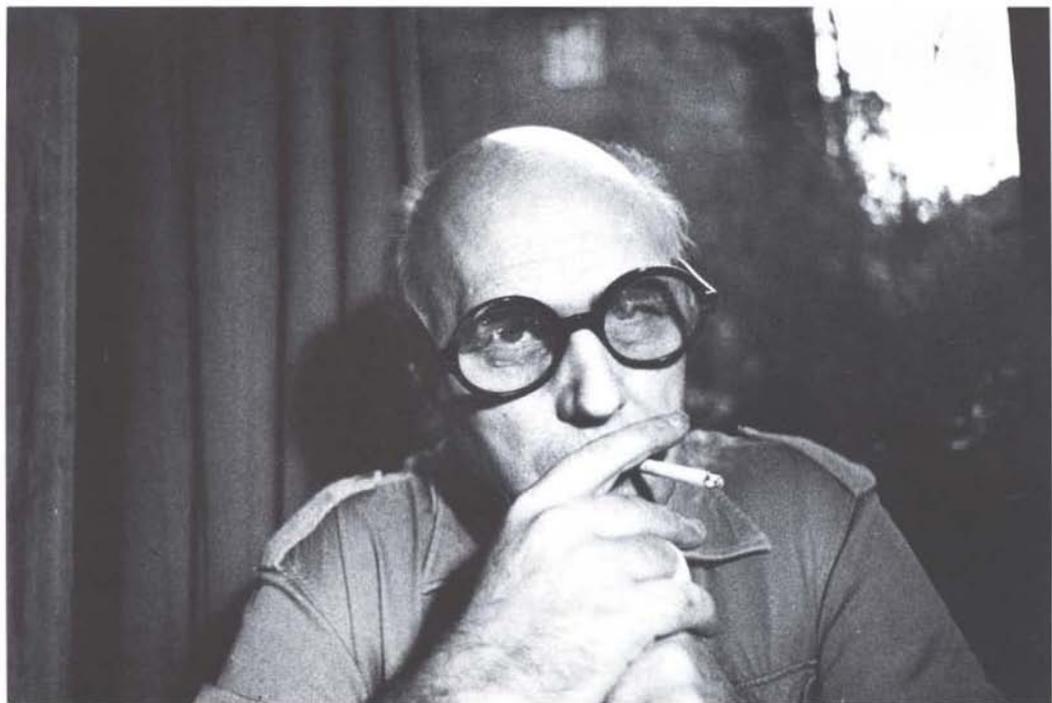
11:30 A.M. I give him one last chance: I count to one hundred, he doesn't appear, I leave.

Noon. I wander around Piazza San Marco.

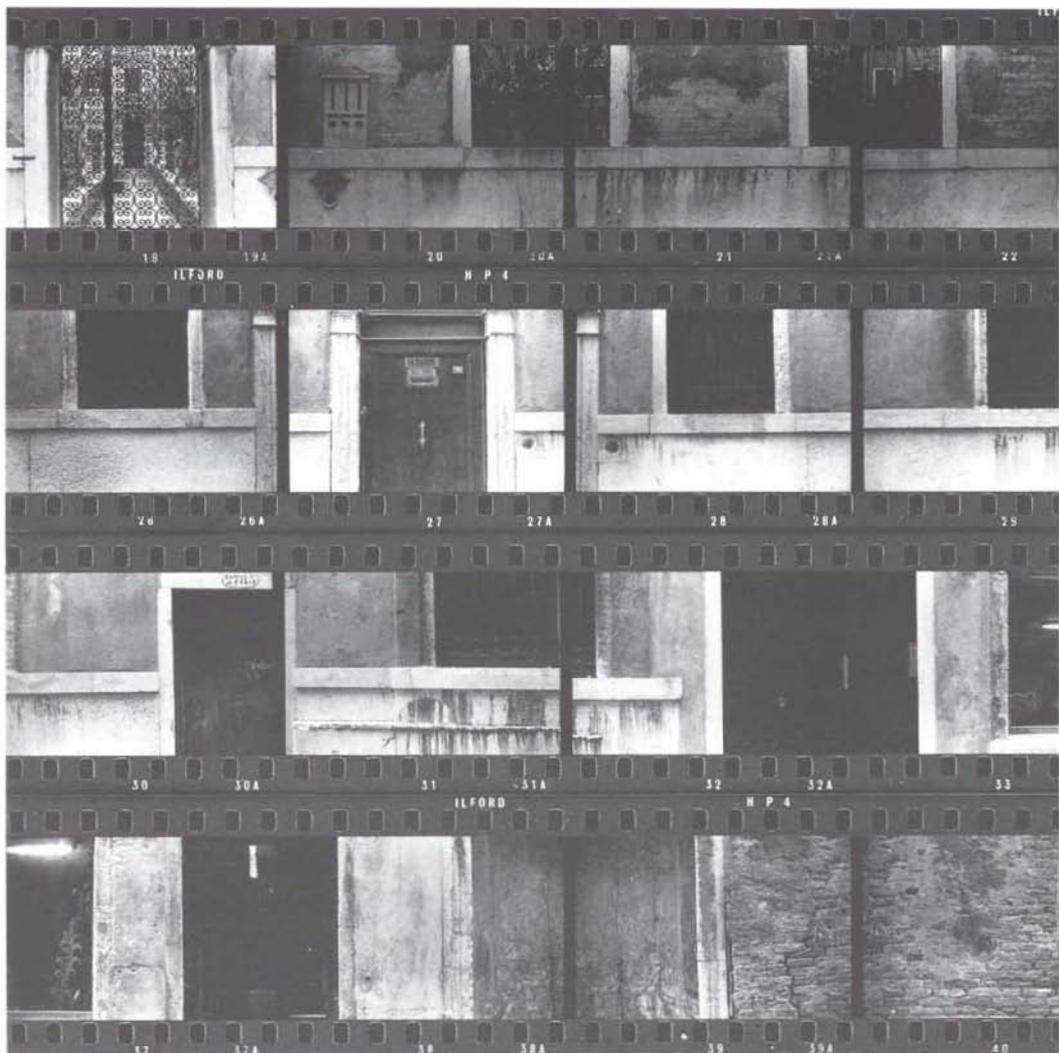
During the afternoon I photograph Calle del Traghetto, section by section, on each side. *A desperate gesture. But what to do?*

This evening I will try not to go near him. I'll rest; I'll forget him for a while. My day has passed in bewilderment. Am I giving up?

I go to bed early.







Friday. February 22, 1980.

9:00 A.M. As I did yesterday, I settle down at Dr. Z.'s window. I leave at 11:00 A.M. without having seen him.

11:20 A.M. Piazza San Marco. I have my picture taken in front of the church by a local photographer.

In a blond wig, my outstretched hand full of seeds for the pigeons, strangers watching me pose: I'm ashamed. What if he saw me?

I wander listlessly along the streets. *I'm weary.* The afternoon slips away like this, forlornly, absent-mindedly. *Did my adventure with him come to an end because he discovered me, because he knows?*

6:00 P.M. I go to the meeting set up by the antique dealer. I ring, the door opens. I climb to the second floor. Luigi greets me. I remind him that I was sent by Henri B. He exclaims, "Oh, yes! The one whose wife is a cabinetmaker. It was Daniele D. who sent him to me." I nod my head.

Luigi remembers his visit; he recalls in a loud voice, "Indeed, we chatted for quite a while the other night. He came to ask if I could direct him to abandoned palazzos. But I wasn't really able to help him."

Luigi looks at me as if waiting for me to confirm this information. I remain silent, he continues.

I learn that Henri B. is scouting locations in Venice because he's going to make a film here with B., the Italian painter, that he's planning to take a year's lease on an apartment, and that he will come back in November.

This is what they were talking about last Monday.

Luigi has me sit down in one of his armchairs. He offers me a whiskey and inquires, "Did you know that Henri B. is also taking pictures in Venice for a book by C., the English writer?" I nod yes. Luigi adds, "Look, they have even signed my guest book, the last names, there. . . ." I read: Henri B. and N.M., 6 avenue M., Paris. Telephone: 281-. . . .

The antique dealer stops talking about Henri B. and starts in on the city's curiosities. I want to buy a small object, a souvenir from his shop. I choose a tiny knife with a wooden handle.

At 8:00 P.M., I take my leave. I spent two hours at the antique shop. He didn't ask me why I had come. *I could have discovered something significant about Henri B., something secret, during my shadowing of him or at Luigi's. I cannot stop contemplating this. How can I not imagine such a possibility even though today I am content that nothing has happened.*

I go back to my pensione, I have dinner at the restaurant on the main floor, and at 11:00 P.M. I go to bed.





Saturday. February 23, 1980.

10:00 A.M. I have my breakfast in the dining room at Locanda Montin. It's been six days since the owner, G, telephoned his friend at Casa de Stefani.

G. approaches. I ask him if he would do me the favor of calling this person back and asking if Henri B.'s departure date has been set.

G. calls right away. He finds out that Henri B. and the woman will be leaving for Paris that very evening.

I go back to my room and pack my suitcases. I pay my bill and gratefully bid farewell to the owner. At 11:30 A.M., I am at Luciana C.'s.

What to do in Venice without him. I think I should leave, but I also envision myself taking his room, sleeping in his bed.

At my request, Luciana C. calls Casa de Stefani. She says that since her friend, Henri B., is leaving the city, she would like to reserve that very pleasant room he had, starting this evening. The room, as well as all the others in the pensione, is already taken.

The only thing for me to do is leave Venice.

12:30 P.M. I go to the train station in the company of Luciana C. The night train leaves Venice at 9:15 and arrives in Paris at 10:05 the next morning.

If I take the same train as he does, I inevitably will cross paths with him in the corridor. It will be too close, and she will be there, too. . . . I worry about a confrontation.

I check the information boards and confirm that by making a detour through Bologna, I can reach Paris five minutes before him (if the railways serve me well and stay on schedule).

If I take the 4:22 P.M. train for Bologna, I'll be there at 6:51 P.M. I'll then await the 9:00 P.M. train, which will arrive in Paris at 10:00 A.M. sharp.

Luciana C., who wants to know the end of this story and see France again, decides to accompany me.

I spend my last hours in the sun on my bench in Piazza San Marco.

4:22 P.M. The train moves out. I have reclaimed my black hair and assumed my normal appearance.

7:00 P.M. Meal at the Bologna cafeteria and a short walk in the city's streets.

9:00 P.M. The train to Paris. I fall asleep. *I know I will see him one more time.*





Sunday. February 24, 1980.

10:00 A.M. The Bologna train enters the Gare de Lyon, track J, at the scheduled time. I take out my camera and hurriedly get off to find out about the Venice train. Luciana takes care of the luggage; she will wait for me on the platform.

I walk a short distance. On my left a train enters the station on track H and passes me. It is 10:06 A.M. On the cars, the panels show Venice as the station of departure.

Track I is empty; from my platform I can watch the first passengers arrive. I wait for him.

10:08 A.M. I see him getting off the train. The woman follows him. Both of them carry cumbersome baggage. They walk slowly and with great effort towards the exit.

I photograph him one last time as he passes through the station gate.

I will not go farther. He moves away, I lose sight of him. *After these last thirteen days with him, our story comes to a close.*

10:10 A.M. I stop following Henri B.





Please follow me.
Jean Baudrillard.

A strange arrogance compels us not only to possess the other, but also to penetrate his secret, not only to be desired by him, but to be fatal to him, too. The sensuality of behind-the-scenes power: the art of making the other disappear. That requires an entire ritual.

First, following people at random on the street for one hour, two hours, in brief, unordered sequences—the idea that people’s lives are haphazard paths that have no meaning and lead nowhere and which, for that very reason, are “curious” (fascinating, but undoubtedly curious of you as well).

The other’s tracks are used in such a way as to distance you from yourself. You exist only in the trace of the other, but without his being aware of it; in fact, you follow your own tracks almost without knowing it yourself. Therefore, it is not to discover something about the other or where he’s heading—nor is it “drifting” in search of the random path: All of this, which corresponds to various contemporary ideologies, is not particularly seductive. And yet this experience is entirely a process of seduction.

You seduce yourself by being absent, by being no more than a mirror for the other who is unaware—as with Kierkegaard’s mirror, hanging on the opposite wall: The young girl doesn’t think of it, but the mirror does. You seduce

yourself into the other's destiny, the double of his path, which, for him, has meaning, but when repeated, does not. *It's as if someone behind him knew that he was going nowhere*—it is in some way robbing him of his objective: seducing him. The cunning demon of seduction slips between him and himself, between you and him. This is so powerful that people can often sense they are being followed, through some sort of intuition that something has penetrated their space, altering its curvature—a feeling of being reflected without knowing it.

One day Sophie decides to add another dimension to this “experience.” She learns that someone she barely knows is traveling to Venice. She decides to follow him throughout his trip. Arriving in Venice, she telephones a hundred hotels and ends up locating the one where he is staying. She convinces the owner of the house across the street to let her use a window, so she can watch this man's comings and goings (he is there on vacation). She has a camera, and at every opportunity, she photographs him, the places he has been, and the places he has photographed. She expects nothing of him; she does not want to know him. She does not consider him to be particularly attractive.

It is carnival time in Venice. As he might recognize her, she dons a blond wig to cover her dark hair. She puts on make-up; she disguises herself. But carnival pleasures do not interest her; following him is her only concern. At great effort she spends fourteen days on his trail. She learns his plans by questioning people in shops he has visited. She even discovers the departure time of his train back to Paris so that, having taken a different train, she's able to wait for him and take a last picture of him as he disembarks.

Did she secretly desire that he kill her or, finding this pursuit intolerable (especially, since she wasn't consciously expecting anything, least of all a sexual adventure), that he throw himself upon her to do her violence—or that, turning toward her as Orpheus bringing Eurydice back from Hell, he make her suddenly disappear? Did she simply wish to assume his destiny, or that he

assume hers? This game, as any other game, had its basic rule: Nothing was to happen, not one event that might establish any contact or relationship between them. This is the price of seduction. The secret must not be broken, at the risk of the story's falling into banality.

Certainly there is something murderous in the situation for the one who is followed. He can feel resentful and victimized. But that is not Sophie's object (even if that notion had taken shape over the course of hours and days—she is also taking a risk: the other might turn the situation to his own advantage and, having sensed the strategem, drag her into the destiny of his choice—he is not a victim; he has, after all, as much power as she does). No, murder is more subtle: It consists of following someone step by step, of *erasing his traces* along the way, and no one can live without traces. If you leave no traces, or if someone takes it upon himself to wipe them out, you are as good as dead. That's what makes anyone turn around after awhile when being followed. Even without warning or clues, he will have some presentiment of this black magic of erased traces, the sorcery that surrounds him. The powerful blond figure behind the scenes leaves no traces as she follows him: She has lost herself in the other's traces. But she steals his traces. She photographs him. She photographs him continuously. Here the photography does not have the voyeur's or archivist's perverse function. It simply says: Here, at that time, at that place, in that light, there was someone. And it also says, at the same time: There was no reason to be there, at that place, at that moment—indeed, there was no one there—I who followed him, I can assure you that no one was there. These are not souvenir snapshots of a presence, but rather shots of an absence, the absence of the followed, that of the follower, that of their reciprocal absence.

“Follow me, then,” she was told, “I am more interesting to follow than the housewife on the corner.” But that is a misconception and confuses primary interest with the aesthetic intensity of seduction. It does no good to discover, while shadowing someone, that he has, for instance, a double life, save to heighten curiosity—what's important is that *it is the shadowing in itself that is the other's double life*. To shadow another is to give him, in fact, a double life,

a parallel existence. Any commonplace existence can be transfigured (without one's knowledge), any exceptional existence can be made commonplace. It is this effect of doubling that makes the object surreal in its banality and weaves around it the strange (eventually dangerous?) web of seduction.

“The Big Sleep”* is of the same inspiration: to draw the other (or the others) into an arbitrary, inexplicable game that does not even have—above all does not have—the excuse of sex (for which the bed is the spontaneous invitation). To follow someone, but not to approach him, to make people sleep in one's bed, but without sleeping with them: still the same displacement, the same slight *clinamen* (what a wonderful word for the bed, precisely!), which is the characteristic of seduction and which, for this very reason, few people can resist. The most extraordinary aspect of “The Big Sleep” was the ease with which people allowed themselves to be convinced, consenting to this enigmatic project that normally would have provoked immediate resistance. And not only aesthetes accustomed to the delights of stylish little “happenings,” no, but also the apprentice baker on the corner, the baby-sitter, etc. Either people are truly gullible (fascinating hypothesis, but not too appealing), or else one must think that it is by soliciting them in the strangest, the most preposterous way, that they are seduced most easily. Indeed they want to be seduced, that is to say not solicited within their *raison d'être*, but *drawn outside of their raison d'être*, and the same people who most obstinately resist justifiable, reasonable, explicit requests (requests for help, requests for opinion, affective and psychological requests) are prepared to play the arbitrary and absurd game of seduction. We are, in the end, secretly flattered that something is asked or even demanded of us for no reason, or contrary to reason: It spares us the

*In April 1979, Sophie Calle invited twenty-eight people (friends, neighbors, strangers) to sleep in her bed, each for eight hours, one after another, over the period of one week. She studied her sleeping guests, photographing them every hour and taking copious notes. The photographic record of this project, which Baudrillard calls “The Big Sleep,” has been exhibited in Paris, Geneva, and New York City under the title “The Sleepers.”

commonplace and honors us in a more profound complicity. It is on this level that the seduction is played out, and rightfully so: There are few people in whom this basic reflex, this spontaneous response to the challenge of irrationality, has been destroyed by the habits of reason.

It is to the unknown that one yields most impulsively; it is toward the unknown that one feels the most total, the most instinctive obligation. That is one of the rules of the game and part of its arbitrary nature, which alone inflames the passions. The unknown man who is followed or the unknown woman who invites you to sleep over is like a sentence that surprises you, like the illogical act that makes you laugh—one of those things that Canetti described as “effective because they are unexpected.” We have no reservations about them, we encourage them, we rush toward them with a momentum equal to that with which in other circumstances we would oppose them.

The secret of this enigmatic solicitation, in both “The Big Sleep,” and “The Shadowing,” during which Sophie *never* encounters refusals or indifference—everyone helps her in her improbable project, without even asking why—is that of a double, symbolic obligation.

A challenge involves the overwhelming necessity of meeting it. One cannot opt not to respond to a challenge, but one can very well not respond to a request. And yet, if you ask someone to come and lie down in your bed, *to sleep there*, or if you candidly reveal that you have traveled very far to this foreign city in search of a friend whose address you don’t know, you have taken a gamble: Either the other person challenges your folly (at the risk of seeming niggardly and cowardly), or he enters into the game according to the same rules, that is, for no reason. Therefore, it is necessary that Sophie, herself, have *no* reason; that her overture make no sense, in order to have a chance of success in this sphere of strangeness, absurd complicity, fatal consent. We are tired of solidarity, contracts, and exchange. We are very willing to consent to anything, provided it be absurd—we are very willing to submit ourselves to anything, as

long as the request is irrational. It is because Sophie, herself, submits to an absurd task, because she prostitutes herself, as it were, to a senseless enterprise that requires more patience, servitude, boredom, and energy than any amorous passion, that she effortlessly obtains from others this irrational complicity that no consideration for her well-being could ever have inspired. It is to the challenge that the people respond; it is the absurd that they obey.

The other source of passion, which is in a way the opposite of challenge, is the secret wish to submit oneself blindly to the other's desire. When Sophie invites people to sleep eight hours at her home, she removes herself from her own life and installs others in it. That also secretly means, "I have no motive, nothing compels me, I will get nothing from it, and you will not profit by it, but for eight hours, I will take charge of your life. For eight hours you are released from your life and from the *responsibility of sleeping* (one can hardly imagine what burden the least of our actions, including that of relaxing, becomes for each of us as soon as we have to assume it, be answerable for it before ourselves: an incredible servitude, not willful, but a *servitude of the will*). Blessed, beneficent is anything that takes us to the unwilled, into dreamlike disengagement, Rimbaud would say, from our own life. In taking charge of others' lives, even for a stipulated and limited time, Sophie finds herself, as well, released from her own—a marvelous benefit on both sides, and by marvelous I mean a strange benefit, a reflection of another world where we do not have to attend to our own desire, our own sleep, our own will, but to that or those of others—with another attending to yours, etc., in a perfectly unalienated succession since we would no longer be busy stealing each other's time, sleep, freedom, life.

And so it happens that, in the staging of sleep by proxy (vicarious sleep), people's dreams, their boredom, their eventual uneasiness, their sexual fantasies belong to her, to Sophie, in a sense, but in a slight and seductive sense. They do not belong to her on her own terms, but rather because of the game and by the rules of the game. Convention saves all, the artificial pact on something as natural as sleep, the pact that is perfectly ritual and ceremonial, not perverse,

sparing us the obscenity (psychological or aesthetic) of manipulating and appropriating someone else's desire. It is never necessary to claim someone else's desire, to win him or to deceive him. One need only know how to be his shadow.

The scenario is the same in "The Shadowing." To follow the other is to take charge of his itinerary; it is to watch over his life without him knowing it. It is to play the mythical role of the shadow, which, traditionally, follows you and protects you from the sun—the man without a shadow is exposed to the violence of a life without mediation—it is to relieve him of that existential burden, the responsibility for his own life. Simultaneously, she who follows is herself relieved of responsibility for her own life as she follows blindly in the footsteps of the other. Again, a wonderful reciprocity exists in the cancellation of each existence, in the cancellation of each subject's tenuous position as a subject. Following the other, one replaces him, exchanges lives, passions, wills, transforms oneself in the other's stead. It is perhaps the only way man can finally fulfill himself. An ironic way but all the more certain.

In comparison with our ideas of liberation, of individual autonomy, which exhaust themselves running after their own shadow (is there genuine desire for all of this?), how much more subtle, more amazing, more discreet and arrogant all at once is the idea still alive in the practical philosophy of the Far East, that someone else looks after your life. Someone else anticipates it, accomplishes it, fulfills it, according to a pact whereby you renounce responsibility for something that does not "belong" to you anyway, which is really more easy to enjoy without constant direction from the will.

Besides, nothing prevents you from taking charge of someone else's life—something people are often more gifted at than taking care of their own—and then from one to the other, each one relieved from the servitude of living, truly free and exposed, not to his own delirium anymore, but only to the ritual or amorous intercession of the other. In the end it is no more than a service, and it is certainly no more absurd to envision things this way than to rely on the decisions of a State, of a lottery . . . or of one's own will.

It is true that Venice serves as an unconscious magnet for this kind of problem. The city is built like a trap, a maze, a labyrinth that inevitably, however fortuitously, brings back people to the same points, over the same bridges, onto the same plazas, along the same quays. By the nature of things, everyone is followed in Venice; everyone runs into each other, everyone recognizes each other (hence the quite reasonable hope of finding someone there without any directions). Venice is an immense palace in which corridors and mirrors direct a ritual traffic. Perfectly opposed to the extensive, unlimited city, Venice has no equal in the inverse extreme except New York (and sometimes, curiously, in this inverse extreme their charms bear a certain resemblance).

Better yet, the only way not to meet someone in Venice is to follow him from a distance and not lose sight of him. This is why the violent moments of the narrative, the dramatic moments, are those where the followed person, seized by a sudden inspiration, as they say, turns around, making an about-face like a cornered beast. The system reverses itself immediately, and the follower becomes the followed, for there are no side exits in Venice, and it is impossible to meet without recognizing each other. Who could hope to get out of this enclosed, insular, immersed, dead-ended city, even by following someone to the end. Never will he lead you to the outside, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin; he will always take you back to the center, by prodigious circumvolutions. And the only dramatic event in this circular maze is the unexpected about-face, (a distant reminder of Orpheus and Eurydice), which risks shattering the fantastic illusion of a double life.

But, of course, shadowing implies this surprise. The possibility of reversal is necessary to it. One must follow in order to be followed, photograph in order to be photographed, wear a mask to be unmasked, appear in order to disappear, guess one's intentions in order to have your own guessed—all of that is Venice, but it is also the most profound, symbolic requirement. One has to be discovered. All of Sophie's anguish and desire during those days in Venice turn on this violent illumination; at the same time she attempts to avoid it.

When you are unmasked, everything is there. And indeed the game stops there, on the Campo di S.S. Giovanni e Paolo, when he recognizes her. “I cannot follow him anymore. He must be worried, wondering if I am there, behind him—now he thinks of me—but I will be on his trail. Differently.”

Consider one of life’s original situations: that of a “hide ’n seek” game. What a thrill to be hidden while someone’s looking for you, what a delightful fright to be found, but what a panic when, because you are too well hidden, the others give up looking for you after a while and leave. If you hide too well, the others forget you. You are forced to come out on your own when they don’t want you anymore. That is hard to take. It’s like turning too fine a phrase, so subtle that you are reduced to explaining it. Nothing is sadder than having to beg for existence and returning naked among the others. *Therefore, it’s better not to know how to play too well*; it’s better to know how to let others unmask you and to endure the rule of the game. Not too fast, not too late.

One shouldn’t say, “God exists, I met him,” but rather “God exists, I followed him.” The encounter is always too true, too excessive, indiscreet. Note how people who meet acknowledge each other endlessly; note how people in love keep saying how much they love each other. Are they so sure of themselves? Is it because the meeting is a proof of existence? Quite different is the secret (and following someone is equivalent to the secret in the space of a city, as allusion is equivalent to the secret in speech, or the déjà-vu, the déjà-vecu is equivalent to the secret in time), which is a blind passion: She follows the other with eyes closed and doesn’t want him to recognize her. Without having really chosen her subject, she exercises the fatal right of following him. Without ever having approached him, she knows him better than anyone. She can abandon him, certain to find him again the next day according to a kind of astral conjunction (there is a fine moment at the end of the day when, weary of the battle, she abandons her shadowing; and yet she knows that she will pick it up again the next day, one way or another, because the city is curved, because

time is curved, but above all because the partner cannot escape the game— besides, chance led him very close to Sophie's starting point and takes him back to it every night).

There is a mystery in the tactile closeness of the people circulating between the walls of the narrow streets of Venice. The mixture of promiscuity and discretion is greater there than anywhere else (it is multiplied in the masks and mirrors game at carnival time). And there is a parallel mystery in the tactile distance kept between she who follows and he who is followed. Minimal distance at times, a dual relationship in space, a relationship of initiation that yields to all of the subject's whims (that is what we love in detective stories), a blind loyalty, but from a distance, and with no possible resolution. And yet, if one takes the time to think about it, all the secrecy of a life gathers itself in this metaphor of closed eyes, all our power is in what we can follow, in what we can attain with eyes closed. The mask, the disguise, the detection preserve that power—and at times the streets of a city such as Venice. How many pathways would you recognize with your eyes closed? How many faces or bodies would you recognize in caressing them with your eyes closed? And from whom would you accept anything with your eyes closed? And you, have you already closed your eyes on your own image, behaved blindly, lost your way blindly, loved blindly, and sensed in the darkness the tactile detour of the streets, the tactile detour of ideas?

Everything is there; one must never come into contact, one must follow, one must never love, one must be closer to the other than his own shadow. And one must vanish into the background before the other turns around.

Everything is at the vanishing point. Everything happens as the result of an unwarranted predestination: Why him, why Venice, why follow him? The very blindness with which this plan is carried out (which is the equivalent of an order received from elsewhere: You shall follow me for fourteen days—but this order was not given by anyone) already corresponds to that blinding effect and

disappearance of will characteristic of the vanishing point. And starting there, everything converges into the same effect: The shadowing, Venice, the photography, all this is being played out beyond the vanishing point. The shadowing makes the other vanish into the consciousness of the one who follows him, into the traces that he unknowingly leaves behind—Venice is a vanished city, where all history has already disappeared and where one enters alive into the disappearance—and photography is itself an art of disappearance, which captures the other vanished in front of the lens, which preserves him vanished on film, which, unlike a gaze, saves nothing of the other but his vanished presence (according to Barthes, it's not so much the death that one reads there, but rather the vanishing. Death is the source of moral fright, vanishing is alone the source of a “seductive” aesthetic of disappearance).

It is not by chance, either, that “The Big Sleep” gathers together sleep—in itself a vanishing of consciousness—photography, and a succession of people who sleep and cross paths in the apartment: at once appearing then disappearing, one into another. One must add to this the vanishing of defenses, of resistance, that sort of hypnosis under which the people acquiesce to the plan for its very improbability.

Imagine a swooning woman: Nothing is more beautiful, since swooning is at once the experience of overwhelming pleasure and the escape from pleasure, a seduction and an escape from seduction.

Please follow me.

For months I followed strangers on the street. For the pleasure of following them, not because they particularly interested me. I photographed them without their knowledge, took note of their movements, then finally lost sight of them and forgot them.

At the end of January 1980, on the streets of Paris, I followed a man whom I lost sight of a few minutes later in the crowd. That very evening, quite by chance, he was introduced to me at an opening. During the course of our conversation, he told me he was planning an imminent trip to Venice. . . .

—Sophie Calle

To follow the other is to take charge of his itinerary; it is to watch over his life without him knowing it; it is to relieve him of that existential burden, the responsibility for his own life. Simultaneously, she who follows is herself relieved of responsibility for her own life as she follows blindly in the footsteps of the other. A wonderful reciprocity exists in the cancellation of each existence, in the cancellation of each subject's tenuous position as a subject. Following the other, one replaces him, exchanges lives, passions, wills, transforms oneself in the other's stead.

—Jean Baudrillard