

## Unexpected participation in a postmodernist experiment (Autumn 1987)

by Rutherford

In Paris as part of our grand tour of Europe ahead of our planned departure for New Zealand in November, Stephane Clavier presented me with a copy of the newly published [If on a winter's night a traveler](#) by Italo Calvino. Stephane explained: 'It's Postmodernist. It's about you the reader. You might like this.'

A book I hadn't expected. I tucked it away inside of one of the 'coming with us to NZ' duffle bags (as opposed to the 'bags full of stuff we need to keep to hand' while travelling).

The book I wanted but couldn't find was [Sequences](#) by the photographer Michel Szulc Krzyzanowski.



His work had been brought to my attention in an article by Abigail Solomon-Godeau<sup>1</sup> in a copy of the Canadian fine art photography magazine *Photo Communiqué* in 1981. I had been unable to find a copy of *Sequences* in any of the bookstores in Toronto – and had now found it unavailable in London, Paris or Florence. On our way to Copenhagen, we stopped for a visit to Amsterdam where (possibly because Szulc Krzyzanowski lived in Amsterdam) I *finally* found one bookstore's last copy.

Got it. After a quick glance through the photographs back at the hotel – it too was then tucked safely away in one of the 'coming with us to NZ' duffle bags for later enthusiastic poring.

A few weeks later, settled into my seat on the long-haul flight from London to Denver (and from there, on to Honolulu and then to Auckland), I began to read Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*.

Each chapter is divided into two sections. The first section of each chapter is in second person, and describes the process the reader goes through to attempt to read the next chapter of the book he or she is reading. The second half is the first part of a new book that the reader ("you") finds. [Wikipedia](#)

Early in the reader's reading of *If on a winter's night a traveler*, there is confusion when, seemingly at random, the entire text begins again.

The narrative starts out when you begin reading a book but then all of the pages are out of order.

It turns out (according to the first section written in second person), due to an error in printing, the copy of *If on a winter's night a traveler* being read by 'the reader' repeats the first page signature (the large sheet containing the first 16 pages),

'Clever', I thought. Reminds me of Luis Buñuel reusing a filmed 'moment' in [The Exterminating Angel](#).

I liked it when Buster Keaton climbed into the movie he was projecting in *Sherlock Junior* (the film in which he broke his neck), and I like it whenever the 'rules of the medium' are an acknowledged and welcome collaborator in the work being produced (see [Is This Photograph Taken?](#))

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<sup>1</sup> Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. 1981. Photographing the Photographic. *Photo Communiqué*. Summer 1981: 26-30

After the first few chapters of *If on a winter's night a traveler*, set it to one side and I pulled out Szulc Krzyzanowski's *Sequences* for the long-awaited 'proper' look at the work of a photographer whose three pieces accompanying Solomon-Godeau's article had so impressed me.

Nice,

Nice.

Nice.

VERY nice.

Then, wait...

That's the same photo as the first one...

And THAT's the same photo as the second one...

Closer investigation revealed that, clearly due to a highly co-incidental error in printing, the first page signature (the large sheet containing the first 16 pages) of the copy of *Sequences* in my hands had been accidentally repeated.

Funny old world.

In reply to my letter, the publisher apologised and sent me a new copy.

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