

Unfolded, Not Opened: On Bernhard Siegert's *Cultural Techniques*

REINHOLD MARTIN

Il segretario, a sixteenth-century guide for princely secretaries, was, it seems, not written but plagiarized by Francesco Sansovino, son of Jacopo Sansovino, the Venetian architect. Francesco, “a printer, a rewrite man, a writer, and a popularizer,” had selectively excerpted and printed under his own name those portions of *Il principe*, a 1561 treatise on the training of princes by Giovan Battista Nicolucci (Il Pigna), esteemed secretary to Duke Alfonso II d’Este, pertaining specifically to the secretarial arts.¹ Sansovino printed *Il segretario*, the first of many such manuals that appeared during the Baroque period, in four volumes in 1564 and then seven in 1579, subsequent to which the work was issued in thirteen more editions through 1608. Perhaps the work’s popularity was due to its promise to those aspiring to serve as secretaries to princes and nobles, sequestered in rooms off to the side but with access to private apartments above, and exerting a quiet, mighty power, to “show and teach the way to write letters in proper fashion and with art on any subject whatsoever.”²

Following detailed instructions on how to write to popes, kings, cardinals, as well as to one’s father, the treatise’s first book ends with instructions on folding and sealing letters to addressees of different social standing.³ As Bernhard Siegert points out in *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, the folding of letters dates to the widespread use of paper as an epistolary medium in the late medieval period, following which anything that circulated on unfoldable parchment was in effect a public document, while anything that circulated as a sealed letter was a possible source of courtly intrigue. According to Siegert, with the arrival of printing presses, what might have previously been a distinction between publicly legible parchment and privately enfolded royal instructions now divided into two paper-based techniques: typography and chirography, or handwriting. Whence, a folded letter could follow its destiny to become, as Siegert puts it, an instance of what Michel Foucault calls, after his seventeenth-century sources, *raison d’état* (state reason), or governmental rationality.⁴

Some time ago, Gilles Deleuze showed that folding was perhaps *the* problem for seventeenth-century European metaphysics, a subset of which was the problem of envelopment.⁵ Five of the ten virtuosic essays in Siegert’s new book, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors and Other Articulations of the Real* (2015), touch on this period. All, however, eschew the cri-

tique of metaphysics for the study of primary material processes, like those that separate insides from outsides. Among the claims that Siegert, a leading media theorist and codirector of the Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie (IKKM) in Weimar, makes for the “cultural techniques” approach is that it “moves ontology into the domain of ontic operations” or “empirical transcendentals.”⁶ Rather than speaking about *beings* as such (like monadic human beings), the study of cultural techniques, which can mean the study of quite a few things, gets underneath their being to the procedures and processes from which they arise: human beings from their hominization, time from its measurement, space from its control, and so on. Culture, brought down from the pedestal of literacy, includes all of the above and more. The archive of media-theoretical analysis thus expands from the material substrate(s) of writing or graphism into essentially the entire playing field of human and nonhuman history.

Fortunately, Siegert does not follow through on his project’s potential scope, although the range of essays gives a preliminary sense. If anything, art-historical close-ups prevail. Deleuze, an epic philosopher in the Nietzschean mold, usually appears indirectly, but with enough regularity to suggest that a closer look may be warranted. Siegert’s opening chapter, on noise as a media-theoretical *a priori*, sets the tone with a forthright evocation of Michel Serres, one of Deleuze’s most consistent interlocutors. Subsequent chapters widen the frame: four anthropological assays, three on graphic construction, and two on “various cultural techniques of folding, opening, and closing” (16).

Let us begin with folding. Although it remains for genealogists of the postal envelope to disclose the origins of the glazed or unglazed “windows” that reveal an address printed on the enclosed letter, according to Deleuze, envelopment characterizes one of the seventeenth century’s principal philosophical innovations, the windowless Leibnizian monad. Deleuze finds “the paper fold defining a minimum of depth on our scale of things, as we see in Baroque letter holders in *trompe l’oeil*, where the representation of a pleated card casts a sense of depth in front of the wall.”⁷ He is most probably referring to the still-life paintings of letter holders, with their contents spilling forward from the taut grids or bands holding them to the implied (and sometimes draped) picture plane, for which certain Flemish painters were known. From here it is a short art-historical step but a daring philosophical one to *trompe l’oeil* frescoes in, and of, Baroque cupolas. According to Deleuze, such cupolas enact nothing less than the folded, two-tiered structure of Leibnizian metaphysics.

Without direct reference to this discourse, Siegert keeps both feet on the ground in a brilliant excursus on folding doors in his concluding chapter. He must, since “the analysis of cultural techniques observes and describes techniques involved in operationalizing distinctions in the real” (14). Such distinctions, like inside-outside, arise from what Serres has called the

“parasite,” in the double French sense that adds “noise” or disturbance to the common English meaning. Serres’s parasite occupies the channel that both separates and connects the senders and receivers of messages. Contrary to classical communications theory, this third term—noise, interruption, the parasite—is not residual to the informatic relay; it is materially constitutive of the entire assemblage. Thus Siegert can argue in his introduction that

[o]perating a door by closing and opening it allows us to perform, observe, encode, address, and ultimately wire [in the sense of a logic gate] the difference between inside and outside. Concrete actions serve to distinguish them from earlier nondifferentiatedness. In more general terms, all cultural techniques are based on the transition from nondistinction to distinction and back. (14)

“Cultural techniques” (*Kulturtechniken*) is an expression that Siegert and others have adopted to distinguish their approach from a more narrowly construed, more technocentric—if not exactly deterministic—media analysis or media archaeology associated with the work of Siegert’s mentor, Friedrich Kittler. The term has its German origins in nineteenth-century agricultural engineering, which in turn reflects the etymological orientation of *Kultur* (culture) toward the cultivation and settlement of the soil or land. Paying close attention, for example, to the way in which ritual meals repeat that cultivation, Siegert, with the help of Serres, turns the tables on Kittlerian media theory by revisiting the human as a media effect. As Serres suggests, the farmer, far from being a primary producer, is a “parasite” who initiates a chain of host-guest relations that put food on the table of a potentially infinite series of last suppers. Like the fable of the city rat who invites his country cousin to enjoy the crumbs of a meal on the carpet of a tax collector’s house, only for both to scurry away when they hear a noise at the door, all meals are necessarily parasitical, drawing on others while eventually being broken up themselves, always leaving crumbs on the table.⁸

Despite our best efforts to eat like human beings, then, we are all parasites. Even more, in our compulsive opening and closing of doors, we are all Maxwell’s demons, unwitting subject effects fending off entropy by sorting what is inside from what is outside, whose hard-won humanity is nothing but the programmed “logic” of electromechanical operators such as the doors that, with sarcastic obsequiousness, part the wall without us so much as turning a knob. This, despite Enlightenment philosophers putting their speaking pets through a kind of perpetual Turing test in order to secure the human-animal difference and apply it, as Johann Gottfried Herder did, to their parroting students. But might a noise coming from above or below be different from one coming from beyond or without? Are floors and ceilings different from walls and doors? Does the difference between inside and outside and up and down

make any difference at all?

Minimally, these questions suggest a thicker, less absolute ground than that laid out in Siegert's programmatic introduction, a ground where what he calls "elementary" techniques conflict rather than coincide as they produce their being-effects. They also return us to Deleuze. Declining the invitation to read the book's essays as a logical next step in the auto-poiesis of media theory, we continue reading backward with the penultimate chapter, a beautiful, bravura exercise in "media genealogy" courtesy of the seventeenth-century Dutch trompe l'oeil still life. Inexorably, Siegert shows the trompe l'oeil still life doubling its frame in response to the illuminated hour book cutting through its own two-sided paper and setting in constant motion the line (or fold, in the sense of the paper's two sides) that distinguishes one from the other. In the northern Baroque, before the abstraction of the printed text had been secured, Siegert finds painting "oscillating between the transparency of the imaginary pictorial space and the opacity of the material carrier" that generates the trompe l'oeil in the first place. Consequently, we witness "the pictorialized, ongoing, unarrestable collapse of the distinction between material carrier and painted object" (191). What we are seeing here, he suggests, is nothing less than the birth of the "order of representation" proper, which delaminates the image from its material planarity. In the trompe l'oeil, as in the illuminated page, the medium is still barely copresent with what is represented, just as the body of the reader remains copresent with that of the imagined object, be it an insect crawling across a table setting, a tendril winding through a text, or (we can add) an unfolded letter overlapping the gridded bands that hold it vertically in place.

Things that should lie flat on the real page or canvas vie constantly with those that appear through implied window-like openings. This competition is essentially intermedial, insofar as printing and painting transform in relation to pressures from one another. At the moment of maximum tension, an interplay between horizontality and verticality reigns. This interplay, which is also one between immanence and transcendence, not to say ontics and ontology, bears comparison to what Deleuze calls the "Baroque house," an allegorical thought-structure that could easily have been modeled on the palaces in which the secretaries who read Francesco Sansovino's treatise lived and worked. In place of a conventional stair is a draped textile that acts as a tympanum, translating up and down between two distinct levels. Below is the cavernous, spongy domain of bodies, "like that of Commoners who are forever expressing movement, propagating waves, and acting upon one another." Above are reasonable souls, singular monads "like private apartments that are not connected to one another, that do not act upon each other, and that are variants of the same interior decoration."⁹ Two noncommunicating causalities determine the situation: horizontally and below, a "subaltern" causality of physical laws, and vertically and above, a regime of final causes and moral

necessity presided over, ambiguously, by God.

Baroque art and architecture were fond of gyrating verticals: spiral staircases, twisted columns, turbulent drapery. As Deleuze writes, “In the Baroque the soul . . . discovers a vertiginous animality that gets it tangled in the pleats of matter [below], but also an organic or cerebral humanity (the degree of development) that allows it to rise up, and that will make it ascend over all other folds.”¹⁰ These reasonable souls descend at death and ascend again at the Last Judgment. “We move,” says Deleuze, “from funerary figures of the Basilica of San Lorenzo to the figures on the ceiling of Sant’ Ignazio.”¹¹ That is, we move from Michelangelo’s Medici tombs to Andrea Pozzo’s trompe l’oeil fresco, begun in 1685, depicting the Jesuit saint Ignatius, accompanied by representatives of all the world’s continents, rising to the heavens through a nonexistent opening in the church’s vaulted ceiling.

Seen from a point in the nave marked by a marble disk in the floor, Pozzo’s fresco blends seamlessly with the church’s real three-dimensional elements, including attic windows, arches, and entablatures, and unfolds the vaulted ceiling into a profusion of figures perched on an intensely crimped architecture of paired columns, inverted corners, brackets, and monumental arches framing the collective ascension. Like many other frescoes, it is based on a preparatory drawing executed in linear perspective with a superimposed grid. To this Pozzo applied the technique of *quadratura*, or gridding, a variation of *quadratura* image-transfer methods described by Siegert that addresses the specific problem of projecting the scaled-down image onto a curved surface above without distortion. This entailed stretching a woven grid corresponding to that on the preparatory cartoon across the base of the nave’s barrel vault, and then pulling a taut rope vertically from the viewpoint on the floor through each coordinate point to find its matching point on the vault.¹² Physical ropes thus draw perspective’s lines through a gridded Albertian *velum*, or veil, which, as Siegert observes of other, earlier frescoes, provides each point on the painting’s surface with a coordinate address.

Insisting on the primacy of the fixed viewpoint/vanishing point, Pozzo was a staunch defender of Albertian linear perspective who outspokenly opposed alternative methods based on the projective geometry of Girard Desargues.¹³ Deleuze, following Serres, associates Desargues’s theory of conic sections with a Leibnizian relativity, where the cone is traced by an infinity of cross-sections of which the circle with its center point is only a special case; ellipses, parabolas, and hyperbolas pass through the cone at different angles from different points of view.¹⁴ With this in mind, we can say that Pozzo’s technique acts more like a pleated stair than an Albertian window (or a door) and takes the place of Leibniz’s God in bringing “reasonable” monads into being by drawing them upward. How? By placing a material being imperiously upon a marble disk. We recognize this being as human not because it occupies a tran-

scendent point of view projected through a rational grid, but because it is quite literally drawn into the scene out of an infinity of surrounding points, each with jarring anamorphic views of the ceiling, all of which lead irresistibly to the one special case—the marble disk—that brings into focus the “stairway to heaven” that unwraps the earthly envelope of the church.

Siegert makes occasional reference to Bruno Latour’s notion of technical drawings as “immutable mobiles” that gather human beings and things into material networks through their enabling constraints rather than as artifacts of artistic or scientific invention. Design is thus paper-based before it is conceptual, and what matters are constants and variables that are put in relation through projection, scaling, superimposition, combination, and so on, which are “drawn together” in a specific network comprising both human and technological actors. Thus, waterlines drawn on shipbuilding templates transpose the linear contours that were used, beginning in the eighteenth century, to map the sea bottom, drawing together cartography, carpentry, and hydrodynamics. Thus also, subjects and objects, in our example of Pozzo’s transfixed observer and the corresponding figures on the ceiling, are “drawn together”—produced rather than simply represented—by mediating technological assemblages like the architecture-painting one at the Church of Sant’ Ignazio.

But, in a Lewis Carroll-like twist, when opened, or (un)folded, the church’s real door, which mediates the sacred-profane, church-city differential horizontally, turns sideways to become an imaginary, painted “stair” by virtue of the materialities—marble, paint, ropes, and so on—that reflexively stabilize an architecture-painting difference in the first place. Allowing for the undeconstructed structuralism of such blanket statements as “every culture begins with the introduction of distinctions” (14), we can compare this upward-inward, downward-outward fold with the topologies explored in Siegert’s “door logic,” which works mainly in plan. Its own primordial fold is formalized in the architectural theory of Gottfried Semper: the sheepfold that is produced with the erection of a gated fence, and the enclosure/differentiation of animals within and human beings without. In both cases, Baroque church and rural sheepfold, we have a primal scene of hominization. The difference being that the Leibnizian schema rewritten by Deleuze includes a vertical relation that materially orchestrates an imagined transcendence—that is, it produces a window-effect within the windowless monad—while the one based on Semperian gates that convert nomads into herders remains bound to the earthly plane.

When it does appear, in Siegert’s second chapter on the cultural technique of eating, the vertical axis mixes theology and politics in a manner that only hints at the implications. Siegert reminds us that according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, the sacrificial meal operates around an “axis of substitution” whereby food—in the Christian tradition, *flesh*—undergoes symbolic

transubstantiation in the process of being ritualistically eaten. In the Last Supper as depicted in a hinged altarpiece by the Flemish painter Dieric Bouts from 1467, bread becomes body and wine becomes blood, but not without remainder.

A vertical axis running from the ceiling's central beam through the paneling in the background into the middle fold of the tablecloth connects the objects arranged along it: the [empty] bowl that demonstrates that something that was present is now absent, the empty chalice, and a new object the [previously discussed] Master of the Housebook has left out: the host. (34)

Jesus, centrally seated, utters the “words of institution,” *hoc est corpus meum* (this is my body) as the bright white bread/host establishes a central *punctum* that differentiates sacrifice from meal while also binding them together. “The vertical axis is the axis of substitution along which two very different orders confront each other: the mixed and the separated. In the bowl containing the leftovers of the Jewish Pesach Seder, blood and bread are mixed; above it, bread and chalice are separated” (34). Dwelling on the mixtures and separations involved in sharing food, and the interdependency of “phatic communion” and disgust, the chapter concludes with another bloodbath, brought about, in Thomas Pynchon’s early “Mortality and Mercy in Vienna,” by the irrepressible cannibalistic-sexual urges of a male Native American (Ojibwe) Washington, DC, party guest. “In this particular Last Supper, the culinary mingling of subjects and objects is nothing to be avoided; instead, it is the very goal of the meal—a true republican and postcolonial Eucharist” (51–52). Blood as *raison d'état*.

Gender is sometimes proxy for politics here, as when Pynchon’s party-guest-as-hunter hallucinates his female companion as sexualized prey. More frequently, systems close in on themselves like Leibnizian monads. Government secretaries verify the status of potential migrants by establishing social categories through a bureaucratic procedure that paradoxically elicits fictive accounts. Grids divide the land for colonial-capitalist conquest while furnishing coordinate addresses by which inhabitants acquire their identities in the first place. Sectional drawings of ships map the dynamics of the ocean floor onto vessels used for exploration, war, and plunder by transposing medially the dynamics of an uncontrollable sea. Design (*disegno*) divides royal maps into protoperspectival territorial grids that describe known territories by way of the uncharted, autoreferential “white spots” populating the earth’s symbolic order.

In one exemplary instance, the Jeffersonian platted grid spread across the American Midwest accomplishes the commodification of the land and the conquest of a native population. All beings—human, animal, and vegetal—become functions of its “unsparing structure” in a vast matrix of coordinate addresses that seems to prepare the ground for nothing less than an imperial postal system. Siegart expertly demonstrates

that any system patrolled by noise-canceling Maxwell's demons is characterized by a horizontally networked topology of open and closed doors by which things are kept in their place as relative equivalents based on primary differentials, like ones and zeroes. But such a system also entails conflictual, crisscrossing relations of nonequivalence and nonexchangeability that are most visible along the vertical axis, where stairs (un)fold through floors that are also ceilings.

Thomas Jefferson, drafter of grids and other political documents, is a case in point worthy of further elaboration. A product of the literary eighteenth century with classical taste, he wrote his own letters and designed pantographs to copy them, preferring in his private life to own slaves rather than employ secretaries. Jefferson also liked to execute his architectural drawings on graph paper. By the time of the Land Ordinance of 1785 (to which Siegert refers), which mandated the projection of surveyed grids across the western lands, he was living in France as an ambassador. In 1789, Jefferson returned home to Monticello, a house on three levels that he had begun designing in 1768 and completed in 1809.

If the "culture" in cultural techniques refers first to the cultivation of land, and its first demarcation lines are made by a plow rather than by a surveyor's hand, then the plan of Monticello recapitulates what we can call the "mediapolitics" of the grids on which its owner drew in its library. Adapting the site-planning conventions of the Palladian villa, low-lying symmetrical service wings, or dependencies, on either side of a central domed pavilion embrace an expansive view of the rolling Virginia hills. Here, Jeffersonian pastoralism already looks like panoptic control. But again the building's section complicates things. Inside, narrow, ladder-like stairways lead from the parlor floor to the bedrooms. These two upper levels constitute the bourgeois public sphere, including its requisite private realm, that Siegert's antagonists may still consider proper to the republic of letters. Below them, set into the hillside, the dependencies in which the slaves lived and worked constitute its condition of possibility: in the American South, chattel slavery; in the North, as in Europe, variations of the dialectic of lordship and bondage (or master and slave), both of which we cannot fail to recognize when Siegert writes that Jefferson's grids "guaranteed that no shred of land remained masterless" (105).

Power clearly runs upstairs-downstairs here as well as inside-out, but differently. At Monticello, the stairs tucked off the hallway correspond to the relevant division of labor: very tight (twenty-four inches) from parlor up to bedroom, for the passage of Jeffersonian bodies carrying nothing heavier than a book, and wider (thirty inches) from the dependencies, to allow slaves to bring food up to the dining room from the kitchen below. To minimize the disorder that would have reigned had slaves from below mingled too regularly with dinner guests above, the stairs were supplemented by the noise-canceling

device of the dumbwaiter. This took two forms: a movable stack of shelves on which the food was placed so that guests could serve themselves in the knowledge that their conversation was not being overheard, and a pair of little boxes on pulleys built into either side of the dining room fireplace, so that slaves in the wine cellar below could provide the French wine necessary for American enlightenment without interrupting the meal with their bodily, aural presence.

The stairs and dumbwaiters conform to Serres's parasitology; both are mechanisms for minimizing the interruption of the meal by the "noise" of service that, in effect, constitutes the dinner table conversation by its technologically produced absence via the upstairs-downstairs relation, a first-order technique for producing the second-order inside-outside "culture" cultivated at the dining table and through the parlor windows. That the Jeffersonian table was allegedly secular, and concerned matters of state rather than sacrament, is undone by Siegart's implicit contention that every shared meal is a "last supper" in which the purity of the human order, represented by the host, is forcibly reinstated along the vertical "axis of substitution," always with a bloody remainder. The difference being, in this case, that the substitution involves the articulation of two categories of human beings.

In that it entails the partition of the human species, Foucault would call the basis for this articulation "biopower," and its implementation, "biopolitics." *Mediapolitics*, by distinction, manages such processes of subjectivization by excluding noise, or the necessary dysfunction or remainder within Foucault's smooth-flowing apparatuses, or *dispositifs*. In a biopolitical sense, the dumbwaiter belongs to the apparatus of slavery as a mechanism for sorting human beings into relations of domination. In a mediapolitical sense, it accomplishes this by preventing the noise of the dominated from interrupting the serenity of the dominant. That such interruptions necessarily recur, whether as slave revolts or as simple, silent gestures "from below," testifies to the power struggles that underlie them, which are as much struggles among media systems, or human-machine assemblages, as they are among human beings as such.

In the concluding lines of *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Deleuze speculates on the modern dissolution of the monad's strict separations of inside and outside, public and private—and we must add, up and down—into an interpenetrating diagonal, a sort of ramp rather than a stair, on which "monadology" would give way to "nomadology." This gesture toward the philosopher's then-recent collaborations with Félix Guattari and, specifically, to the pair's assimilation of Paul Virilio's analysis of nomadological war machines, adds a final intertext to our cultural-technical reflections. Siegart acknowledges the "enthusiasm" with which Virilio's work was received in German media-theoretical circles concerned with the "abyss of nonmeaning in and from which media operate" (4). In the

hands of a theorist like Kittler, excavating the military origins of mass media technologies revealed the dark side of the republic of letters and its descendent, the communicative public sphere; it also identified war with the entropic noise of non-meaning on which hermeneutics precariously balanced. According to Siegert, the intellectual context out of which the cultural-techniques hypothesis emerged was thereby organized around a polemical, structuring binary: “public sphere” (associated with the work of Jürgen Habermas) versus “war” (associated with the work of Friedrich Kittler). What Siegert calls the German intellectual “post-war” is nothing less than the softening of hardline Kittlerian antihermeneutic antihumanism into a posthermeneutic anthropological materialism aided and abetted by a cultural studies tradition (*Kulturwissenschaft*) attentive to quotidian practices. Thus, says Siegert, “The war was over—and all the index cards, quotation marks, pedagogies of reading and writing, Hindu-Arabic numerals, diagrammatic writing operators, slates, pianofortes, and so on were given a new home” (7).

While it is true that, like its media-analytical predecessors, such work reveals processes blocked out by critical theory’s dogma without resorting to technological determinism, forlorn Habermasian efforts to recover, historically or in practice, the communicative public sphere are not the only possible response to total war. If Kittler too easily invoked war as an engine of technologically induced rupture, that war is most definitely not “over.” Siegert differentiates his project from “American” deconstructionist critiques of the human-animal distinction, suggesting that “the goal is not to grant rights to animals, or to deprive humans of certain privileges,” but to “[decenter] the distinction between human and nonhuman by insisting on the radical technicity of this distinction” (8). But when Deleuze refers to a nomadology, he is not referring only to the difference between hunting and herding. He is also referring to a history of power in which sedentary “state apparatuses” and nomads are locked in asymmetrical struggle. War is not the endgame of the war machine; it is what happens when the state captures the nomadic machine, associated with the unmapability of smooth space, and uses it for its own purposes.

In addition to its evident, authoritative contributions to media theory, the importance of Siegert’s book lies not least in the fact that it allows us to think further about a variety of such captures. The fortification of a Roman city begins with plowing a line in the ground: agriculture as empire. Pirates, highwaymen, and other parasites supply technical knowledge for navigation and urban planning. Bronislaw Malinowski’s seafaring male Trobriand warriors, “Argonauts of the Western Pacific,” are bound by their own paranoid narcissism to a static female gaze that oscillates between Medusa and the Sirens. Spanish ne’er-do-wells looking to escape the oversight of church and crown in the New World wind up generating the requirement of a comprehensive but possibly fictional register.

The same regime uses portolan maps to coordinate, and hence design, the unruly unknowns that drive naval exploration. With the approval of Albert Speer, the Bauhaus architect Ernst Neufert “turns navigation in smooth space into the ubiquitous paradigm of being-in-one’s-place” (115). Twentieth-century streamlined design builds oceanic lines into the bodies of latter-day Tritons, bearers of a hydrodynamic Schmittian *nomos*.

That Siegert has periodic recourse to Deleuzo-Guattarian terminology makes sense, then. But inseparable from its theoretical import is the fact that Deleuze and Guattari developed this terminology as part of a philosophical-practical tool kit to be used against the capitalist state and its proxies. The same goes for Foucault, more subtly. If mediapolitics has left its traces on the above incidences of capture, then intentionally or not, Siegert’s concise, imaginative erudition admits these traces, too, into the cultural-technical fold.

Take, finally, the “door logic” of Robert Campin’s *Mérode Triptych* (1425–1428), which Siegert compares with the Flemish painter’s earlier *Annunciation* (ca. 1420). In both, he observes a proliferation of folds that includes tables, books, garments, shutters, mousetraps, and, of course, doors. Among the latter is the actually hinged left-hand panel of the later triptych, on which a pair of donors is shown observing the archangel Gabriel visiting Mary through an open painted door. In a manner comparable to the *trompe l’oeil*, imagined communication between profane, moneyed observers and sacred vision is mediated by a real hinge where the painted door’s hinge would otherwise have been. Genealogically, the next step is a ninety-degree pivot around the vertical axis, in which vision becomes voyeurism. This, argues Siegert, appears in the seventeenth-century Dutch interior. Thus Jan Steen’s *The Morning Toilet* (1663) stretches a diaphragm arch across the painting’s surface, with open door, through which the implied male viewer, in the place of Campin’s patrons, watches a woman dressing rather than receiving a profitable angelic visit. The painting, like a two-sided door, gazes back.

In modern times, Siegert finds this two-sidedness dissipated with the deployment of revolving doors (“always closed”) and automatic ones indifferent to human agency. Even more paradoxical is the cybernetic door, or logic gate, through which electric current passes only when the gate is closed. “These gates,” Siegert observes, “do not open into an outside or the animal domain. They open themselves by being closed only to other gates and/or to themselves” (203). The result is a psychotic unhinging in which reality and hallucination become indistinguishable, rendering doors obsolete as managers of the inside-outside dichotomies on which human beings rely to house their humanity.

Theodor W. Adorno’s claim in *Minima Moralia* that we can no longer dwell, which sets the whole analysis in motion, is thereby flipped or, rather, folded. “The house is past,” the philosopher wrote during his American exile, with reference

to wartime bombings and suburban trailer parks. At first glance we do seem, as Siegert suggests, to be dealing with a “post-door” (as well as a “post-war”) situation, and Adorno’s bourgeois righteousness in seeing a hint of fascism in the slamming of American car doors seems anachronistic if not absurd. But let us remember that doors, and wars, can fold in many directions. Seen from this perspective, we may well be witnessing today the mediapolitical capture of the very homelessness, the very insecurity that subtends this book’s “grids, filters, doors, and other articulations of the real” by the apparatuses that these articulations have always served. What seems nomadic, deterritorialized, unhinged, and thereby freed from the humanist cage might be just another door, turned on its side and unfolded, like a laptop computer with its inbuilt logical steps, or stairs. Call it the revenge of the Baroque secretary.

Notes

1. Salvatore S. Nigro, "The Secretary," in *Baroque Personae*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, ed. Rosario Villari (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 82–84.
2. Nigro, "The Secretary," 84.
3. Francesco Sansovino, *Il Secretario* (Venice, 1569), bk. 1, 23, https://books.google.com/books?id=x_o7AAAAcAAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s.
4. Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, trans. Kevin Repp (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 30–32.
5. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), esp. 27–38.
6. Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 9, 209 n. 25. Page numbers hereinafter listed in the text.
7. Deleuze, 42.
8. Michel Serres, *Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 3–14.
9. Deleuze, 100.
10. Deleuze, 11.
11. Deleuze, 11.
12. Filippo Camerota, "Exactitude and Extravagance: Andrea Pozzo's 'Viewpoint,'" in *Imagine Math: Between Culture and Mathematics*, ed. Michele Emmer (New York: Springer, 2012), 32–37.
13. Camerota, "Exactitude and Extravagance," 37–40.
14. Deleuze, 20–22.