

Virtual "Kultur"

Just back from the Stuttgart Book Fair, I cannot resist sharing some mischievous thoughts inspired by the observation of a surrealist stand near the entrance of the exhibition.

The fair took place in a beautiful venue downtown, in a building with decorations as white as the snowy streets outside. The stand with an enigmatic name had for sale a system of glass cased shelves, in kits. More surprising still, they were decorated with colored photos of bindings glued to the cases. I was hit by the thought that this was an anticipation of the bibliophily of the future, as one would be able to buy a shelf of Goethe or Hegel, of Fichte or Kant, or more modestly a choice of classical German texts to build an entirely virtual collection for the gentleman of the 21st Century (no longer a learned gentleman, but a gentleman with a certain virtual learning). One would still have to adapt this concept to the

famous "French cultural exception" however, even if this concept seems to tend towards universality. After the world of "contents without containers" (the digital world), here I was facing a nice anticipation of the "containers without content" (the fake bookshelves). It would enable one to complement one's collection of virtual, numeric or digital books with a pseudo façade of a library serving to hide some obscure DVD's and other objects not meant to be seen, while showing off beautiful sets of antiquarian books. After all, nobody really expects the celebrities who pause in front of bookshelves filled with bindings to have read any of the books meant to highlight their own posterity.

I was again hit by another thought: The Germans are really exceptional ... Here was another item of German technology: virtual culture in a kit !

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