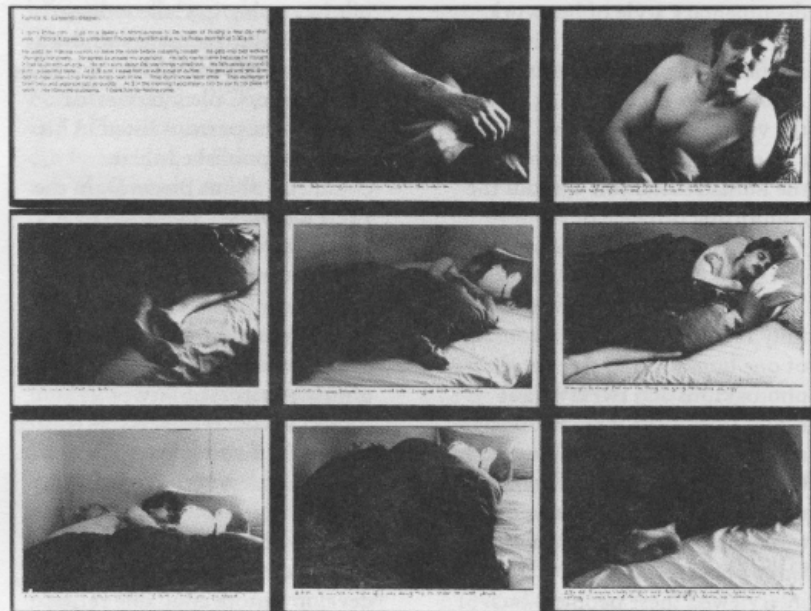


Sophie Calle
MATRIX/Berkeley 133

University Art Museum
early February -
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The Sleepers (Les Dormeurs), 1979



Over the past decade, the French artist Sophie Calle has created works that explore the enigmatic terrain of human identity and interaction. Her art typically evolves from an orchestrated event or situation, which Calle documents with photographs and texts. In these works, which often involve an encounter between the artist and another person, Calle exposes the coexistence of desire and alienation. The cool, documentary style of her work, and the occasionally invasive methods she practices (as in *L'homme au carnet*, 1983), force the viewer to examine the sometimes painful phenomenon of the human condition without the comforting distance of aestheticism or fictionalization.

The Sleepers (1979), Calle's first fully realized installation, consists of one hundred and seventy three photographs and twenty three explanatory texts that document a series of situations, orchestrated by Calle, in which people (friends, neighbors, strangers) allowed her to observe them as they slept. Calle photographed and interviewed these people—each of whom was allotted one eight hour sleeping period in Calle's own bed—over the course of an entire week. Such behavior, which might have seemed intimate or slightly titillating if photographed in a single episode, becomes, when it is repeated twenty three times, of little more interest than a clinical record. Although captured in the midst of their "deepest" reveries, the subjects' psychological states remain inaccessible to Calle's observation and to the viewer's gaze. Like Andy Warhol's minimalist films, *Sleep*, *Eat*, and *Kiss*, Calle's representations of the human body are aggressively anti-

romantic.

If *The Sleepers*, as an exercise in scrutiny, contains an element of self-parody (how, indeed, can sleep itself ever be witnessed), Calle's *L'homme au carnet* (1983) comes discomfitingly close to real surveillance. This work began with the address book of a man identified only as Pierre D. which the artist reports having found on the rue des Martyrs in Paris. After photocopying it, Calle returned the original to its owner who was on a work trip to Norway. During his absence, Calle interviewed many of the persons listed in his book and published their comments about Pierre D. in the French tabloid *Liberation* over a month period. Despite the apparent intensity of its investigation into an individual's identity, this work depends as much as *The Sleepers* does on the ultimate inaccessibility of its subject. Calle seems less interested in actually finding her quarry than in the ceaseless action of pursuit.

In some of her more recent work, Calle seems to have tried to develop a more equitable relation to her human subjects and even to reveal something of her own identity. *The Blind* (1986) is a series based on the artist's interviews with people who have been blind from birth. Calle asked each of them to describe their image of beauty. The work consists of Calle's photographic portraits of these people, framed texts of their responses, and photographs chosen by Calle to illustrate the objects or images they identified as beautiful. "I saw my son in a dream," says one man, "He was ten years old. He was in pyjamas. He looked at me and smiled. He walked towards me. I

thought he was very beautiful." A little girl replies, "Sheep, that's what's beautiful. Because they don't move and because they have wool." The tone of Calle's interaction with her subjects in *The Blind* seems more respectful of their individuality and more willing to enter into spaces that might be construed as psychological. The work is not without irony, however. Most obviously, this installation, which is based on the experiences of the blind, can only be fully experienced by the sighted. Furthermore, as in *The Sleepers* and *L'homme au carnet*, *The Blind* can be understood as an exercise in self-exploration and thus, ultimately, raises the question of Calle's own aesthetic sensibility.

Her most recent work, *Autobiographical Stories* (1988-89), isolates remembered incidents and images from the artist's own past. Calle juxtaposes texts describing these memories with large black and white photographs. The scenes she describes are potent in themselves. One piece recounts how a man who had been renting a room in her parents' apartment set himself on fire in the bed which Calle herself had slept in until the age of seventeen. The photograph depicts a destroyed bed lying in the street far below. Despite its deep psychological resonance, the self-revealing aspect of *Autobiographical Stories* is tempered by a familiarly cool and distanced sensibility. The correspondence between the texts and photographs in this work, for example, seems almost too precise; one wonders whether these are indeed pictures of distant memories or simply reconstructions after the fact.

Curiously, Calle's perpetual return to the surface of things does not amount to a denial of depth in the human experience. Rather, her work suggests a passionate drive for human contact tempered by a keen awareness of the difficulty of such an endeavor in a society where the notion of individuality itself is in deep crisis.

Sophie Calle was born in 1953. She currently resides in Paris.

Lawrence Rinder

Works in MATRIX (all works courtesy the artist and Fred Hoffman Gallery, Santa Monica, unless otherwise noted):

1. *The Sleepers*, (*Les Dormeurs*), (a.k.a. *The Bed*, *The Sleep*), 1979, gelatin silver prints with ink and black metal frames, 199 pieces (176 photos and 23 texts) and one typed photocopied manuscript, 6 x 8" each photo and text unit, 62 x 162" overall.
2. *L'Homme au carnet*, August 2 - September 4, 1983, 30 photographs and text in daily newspaper *Liberation* and one photocopied edition with wood and glass vitrine, 14-3/4 x 11-1/2" newspaper, 42 x 20 x 15-1/2" vitrine.
3. *The Blind*, (*Les Aveugles*), 1986, 15 sets (23 sets in complete installation) of texts, in wood frames on wood shelves, gelatin silver prints, ektachrome prints, 16-1/4 x 12-1/2" each portrait, 17-1/4 x 33" each text, color images

are of varying sizes ranging from 15 x 20" to 31-1/2 x 22", 47-1/4 x 5-1/2" shelf.

#1 Collection of Stuart and Judy Spence, South Pasadena

#6 Joseph and Elaine Monson Collection, Seattle

#8 Courtesy First Bank System, Inc., Minneapolis

#11 Courtesy First Bank System, Inc., Minneapolis

#15 Courtesy Craig Cornelius, New York

#17 Courtesy Judy Polone, Los Angeles

#18 Courtesy First Bank System, Inc., Minneapolis

#23 Courtesy First Bank System, Inc., Minneapolis

4. *Autobiographical Stories*, 1988-89, text and black and white photographs with wooden frames, 3 gelatin silver prints, 18-3/4 x 18-3/4" text, 45-1/2 x 65-3/4" to 64-7/8 x 38-7/8" photos.

Selected one person exhibitions:

Canon Photo Gallery, Geneva '81; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris '83; Association pour l'Art Contemporain, Nevers, France '85 (catalogue); Galerie Crousel-Hussenot, Paris '86; Galerie Montenegro, Madrid '88; Fred Hoffman Gallery, Santa Monica '89 (catalogue); The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston '90.

Selected group exhibitions:

A.R.C./Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, *XI Biennale des Jeunes* '80; Fashion Moda, New York City, *Une Idée en*

L'Air '80; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, *Autoportraits* '81; Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York City '88; International Center of Photography, New York City, *Culture Medium* '89 (catalogue); A.R.C./Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, *Histoires de Musée* '89.

Bibliography about the artist (see also catalogues under exhibitions):

Gerstler, Amy. "Sophie Calle," *Artscribe*, Jan. - Feb. 1990.

Pagel, David. "Sophie Calle," *Arts Magazine*, Nov. 1989.

Weissman, Benjamin. "Sophie Calle," *Artforum*, Nov. 1989.

Pincus, Robert L. "Sophie Calle: The Prying Eye," *Art in America*, Oct. 1989.

Baudrillard, Jean. "*Please Follow Me*," Postface to *Suite Vénitienne* by Sophie Calle. Edition de l'Etoile, 1983. English ed. Seattle: Bay Press, 1988.

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