

**“THE ABUSE OF POWER AND INDISCRETION”:
IDENTITY, MOURNING AND CONTROL IN THE
WORK OF SOPHIE CALLE**

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Abstract

At the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007, French artist, Sophie Calle presented for public consumption a starkly simple yet elegant work entitled *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*. The work was not only a comprehensive investigation of the Biennale theme for that year of capturing a fleeting moment in life but was also an ethically challenging and confrontational piece. Calle chose to display a video loop from the final moments of her mother Monique Sindler's life. As the title in a childlike manner informs the viewer, the subject of the work is Calle's inability to physically comprehend this moment. She, to add in the poignantly missing referent to the English translation of the title, “couldn't capture death”. Calle prompts the audience not only to watch but to actively look for the universally ungraspable moment of Monique's passing.

Pas Pu Saisir La Mort is unique piece which both characterises Calle's work while also marking a departure from her normal style of working. It raises challenging issues of the ethical responsibilities of the contemporary art Biennale and of a more moral nature for the audience by placing them in the intimate role of voyeur. At the centre of aesthetic theory and within contemporary art writing the idea of a connection to universal concepts or notions of an underlying humanity within art is referenced, debated and negated. I believe in *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* Calle engages with this discussion through foregrounding the idea of the contemporary sublime and re-evaluates art's connection to modernist universals as illuminated though the recent work of Thierry De Duve in particular his concept of 'nous voici' or work with speaks to the 'we' of humanity.

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Introduction:

Sophie Calle and the Venice Biennale

French artist Sophie Calle is acutely self-aware. She cultivates a complex artistic identity which is constantly explored within her diverse oeuvre. As theorist Yve-Alain Bois has noted according to Calle photography is marked with the “abuse of power and indiscretion.”¹ This particular description of photography, one of Calle's mediums of choice, serves well as a discussion point for her production as an artist. Notions of power and control are key elements which Calle consistently explores. Calle often works in a type of auto-fictional investigate style combining journalistic information gathering techniques to explore and display a project. Typically her work makes public the private or ritually reveals others intimate secrets. Calle's work is indiscreet. She is given to melodrama and so too the seductive nature contained within the play of power between artist and subject. Through this Calle is able to explore the often private boundaries of interpersonal relationships in a public arena and draw our attention to important questions of personal experience which elude to an underlying humanity. It is this connection to and re-evaluation of an underlying humanity or modernist universals explored in Calle's work which elevates it within popular contemporary practice.

This thesis aims to engage with key themes such as the role of identity, mourning and control as questioned in Calle's work. In particular I will explore the way in which these themes have developed through Calle's typical use of a documentary style investigation in combination with the psychoanalytic use of rules to subvert and control the auto-fictional subject matter contained in her work. I will discuss a moral and ethical dimension to Calle's work in relation to the recent installation, *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* (2007). *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, was first exhibited in the Italian Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale and stands to date as a uniquely poignant example of Calle's work. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* draws together a number of important themes from Calle's oeuvre, however, it is the creation of a very different aesthetic experience closely tied to an inherent re-evaluation of modernist universals which sets *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* apart.

Calle is a popular and notorious figure in contemporary practice. Often it seems as if Calle's work has no personal boundaries. Works such as *The Address Book* (1983), where Calle systematically exposed the

private life of a stranger in French newspaper *Le Monde*, have placed Calle in legal trouble. Others, such as *Exquisite Pain* (2003) and *No Sex Last Night* (1992), show Calle placing the intimate details of private love affairs for consumption in the public arena. In 2007 Calle was invited to take part in the 52nd Venice Biennale as both the representative for France and as an individual artist in the Italian Pavilion. As representative for France she was given the entire French Pavilion to use. Calle advertised publicly to fill the position of curator for this international event. She employed artist Daniel Buren for the position. As Calle puts it the “Venice Biennale is a complex situation. What I needed was not so much a curator as an accomplice, someone to stand by me. Daniel did much more than that. He protected me, and, more importantly, he helped me to think about the work.”²

The work in the French Pavilion, *Take Care of Yourself* (2007), centred around a breakup email sent to Calle by an ex-lover which the artist subsequently circulated to 107 women. Calle asked them to interpret the letter according to their own point of view. *Take Care of Yourself* was a very popular work at the Biennale. Calle strategically ensured that *Take Care of Yourself* was multimedia and multilingual so that the work could reach a wider audience. However, the much smaller and hastily put together work shown in the Italian Pavilion, *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, carried a much greater emotional impact.

Pas Pu Saisir La Mort deals with the forever imminent issue of our own mortality through focussing on the death of Calle's own mother, Monique Sindler. The video work displays the last eleven minutes of Monique's life on a continuous loop. As Calle explains in the gallery text, on the day she found out she was to represent France at the Biennale she received two phone calls. One informed of her role at the Biennale and the other of the fact her mother had only months left to live. What then ensued is portrayed as Calle's natural psychological response to dealing with this kind of uncontrollable situation. The outcome of which was *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*. The work is hauntingly poignant in its simplicity and might never have been exhibited if it were not for the intervention of Robert Storr curator of the 52nd Venice Biennale. Calle states:

... [Storr] knew I had filmed my mother's death and he suggested—and then insisted—that I deal with the subject. I didn't feel ready to watch the 80 hours of film that I had taken of her dying, but then I remembered the 11 minutes between her life and her death during which I was really wondering where she was ... Then when I finally came to show the film in Venice I was busy with all the usual technical

issues: sound, lighting, painting, and the size of the image. It was only when it was installed and I went to look at it that I realized that this was my mother, and I started to cry.³

The complex issues around the display and intensely raw emotional effect of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is the subject of chapter four. The preceding three chapters will develop a context through which to consider the questions raised by *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, specifically through looking at the broader critical framework surrounding Calle's practice. An understanding of how Calle engages with notions of display, negotiates the contemporary climate of art theory and the psychological associations of her work will be the critical areas of discussion throughout.

Chapter one will focus on contextually situating Calle's oeuvre with regard to key critical commentary around her work. With attention to the theme of identity, I will frame how Calle's artistic production fits into the artistic context of the 21st century. In particular I will survey the ideas of theorists Jean Baudrillard, Yve-Alain Bois and Thierry De Duve to explore the concepts of subjectivity and universality as explored through the questions raised by Calle's work. I will discuss Calle's early work through Baudrillard's theoretical framework of both simulacrum and seduction with attention to Calle's particular conception of identity. Calle's strategies of identity formation are also identified by Bois as central to Calle's practice. Through the exploration of the ways in which these two well regarded theorists have engaged with Calle's work common themes of what are the central qualities particularly around identity within a Calle work emerge. These qualities I argue connect to Thierry De Duve's recent writing re-evaluating the way we talk about the tricky subject of universality in art through his concept of “nous voici”, or art which addresses the “we” of humanity.

Chapter two will investigate the physical attributes and technical strategies used in creating Calle's work. Focussing on three key elements: the visual, narrative and the presentation of Calle's work, I will discuss the central concerns of medium and process in Calle's work through the ideas of Rosalind Krauss, Luc Sante, Nicolas Bourriaud and Joost de Bloois. For Krauss, Calle's work is tied to the technical support of documentary journalism, for Sante Calle's medium is information. Bourriaud focuses on the performance of Calle's chance encounters, while de Bloois analyses the

role of visual auto-fiction in driving the narrative attached to this performance.

Due to the nature of Calle's subject matter any discussion of Calle's work is inseparable from an exploration of Calle's projected personal life. Chapter three explores the overt psychoanalytical themes displayed in the subject matter dealt with by Calle. Her subject matter is intimately tied into the process of working and display and thus the work lends itself particularly well to psychoanalytic readings. The subject matter or the impetus for the initial production of a work often centres around moments pulled from Calle's own life. While the truth of these moments can be doubted as being truly autobiographical or fictional, the psychological picture she provides the audience with is telling, even if it is only what she wants us to believe.

Calle's work revolves around ideas of power, control and subversion. These notions of identity, subversion and seduction in relation to the auto-fictional and internal subject matter as played out in Calle's work has captured the attention of psychoanalytic theorists. For Darian Leader Calle's work epitomises the mourning process, for Marina Van Zuylen it is the ordered result of voyeuristic monomania and for Judith Rugg it is characterised by gendered play of Freudian concepts. All three believe that the issues discussed extend beyond Calle as the artist and reflect her personal characteristics. Comparatively many similar issues could be raised about the work of Tracey Emin. Both artists deal with an auto-fictional subject matter, psychoanalytic ideas and sexuality, however, Calle's treatment of these issues and outcome is very different to Emin's.

Calle's work is notorious for crossing boundaries, of privacy, of obsession and of identity and she is well aware, as an artist, of these issues. Calle is constantly at play with the subversion of these constructed boundaries. Chapter four seeks to answer the question of whether the display of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* was morally or ethically responsible of Calle as not only an artist but as a daughter. The work is imbued with the exploration of power, control and personal identity as effected by the process of mourning. Her use of rules and ritual are strategies, as observed in

chapter three, for living that allow Calle to justify much of her obsessive behaviour. Through addressing these topics Calle constructs private moments as public art that provide social commentary on contemporary issues. In doing so, Calle finds a way of working through her own pain or in the case of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* of mourning her mother. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is a powerful work which I argue addresses us all in a sublime and humanistic manner.

Through the climate of the 52nd Venice Biennale Calle was given the opportunity to produce a work which developed and clarified many of the key themes central to Calle's production. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* when seen in the light of Calle's wider oeuvre is a significant work. It utilises an attitude embodied in the abuse of power and indiscretion seemingly showing an abuse of power by Calle as caregiver and daughter in Calle's usual indiscreet manner. This thesis does not attempt to give a conclusive or retrospective style view of Calle's entire body of work. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is, I wish stress, part of an evolving oeuvre. The works that discussed are those which best display the themes important to the continued development of her work.

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- 1 Yve-Alain Bois in 'Character Study: Sophie Calle' in *Artforum*, April, 2000, p. 128.
 - 2 Sophie Calle as quoted by Louise Neri in 'Sophie Calle' in *Interview Magazine*, <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/sophie-calle/> accessed May 30 2009.
 - 3 Sophie Calle as quoted by Louise Neri in 'Sophie Calle' in *Interview Magazine*, <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/sophie-calle/> accessed May 30 2009.

Chapter One:

The Paradox of Sophie Calle

Sophie Calle is a notoriously contradictory figure. She has consciously created a very public, constantly evolving, artistic persona. As an artist Calle is concerned with questioning society's preconceived notions, particularly those of identity and truth. Though she has stylistic trends, Calle is not tied to a particular method of working. The inability to conclusively fit Calle's work into a category stems from the nature of the questions she uses her work to explore and the artistic strategies she employs. Calle questions notions of truth and identity. She often focuses on the negation of the idea of one static truth in favour of a more fluidly adaptable or subjective reality. Calle's cultivation of multiple identities within her work embodies a slippage between medium and subject typical of postmodern impulses. A subjective postmodern view of reality is consistently reiterated in the way each work by Calle strategically builds upon and revisits moments from within her autobiographically focused oeuvre. However, this apparent postmodern embodiment, toyed with in Calle's work, is far more complex in its relationship to particular lingering elements of modernism than is initially apparent.

Throughout Calle's oeuvre there is tension between a subjective postmodern reality and of underlying modernist universals. This tension is continually built upon within Calle's oeuvre. Calle's work, I argue, engages with notions of both subjectivity and universality. It is these notions which make her work so intriguing. I will discuss the problematic notion of universality particularly with reference to Thierry De Duve's recent writing on the idea of art addressing the “we” of humanity grouped under the term “nous voici”. Calle engages with these notions through outwardly relying on subjectivity whilst also utilising the modernist idea of the universal to critique subjectivity and find the common ground between the artist and audience.

Calle's work provokes discussion. Her autobiographical subject pool is often likened to a documentary investigation. As Yve-Alain Bois puts it, it seems every moment of Calle's life is carefully archived ready for future use.¹ These moments are mentally filed later to be retrieved, in a very selective form of embellished autobiography. Particular moments crop up repeatedly, with slight anomalies or additional information, in different works by Calle. The same blond wig appears in *The Striptease* (1979),

True Stories (1988-2003) and again in *Appointment With Sigmund Freud* (1999) [Figure 1 and 2]. With each appearance the text revisits and revises the particular story attached to the wig. This highlights the subjective nature of Calle's narration. No mention is made whether this is also the wig from *Suite Venitienne* (1979) [Figure 3]. Calle is at heart an investigator exploring all aspects of an event often continuously returning to the memory and scouring it for new piece.

Not all of Calle's work stems from an autobiographical platform, she often simply asks to be taken to a place of meaning by a participant or for the person to tell Calle their story.² This is shown in *The Eruv of Jerusalem* (1996) in which, as Calle puts it, she “asked the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Israelis and Palestinians, to take me to a public place that they considered private.”³ This work displays a personal element of physical danger for Calle personally. She is willing to be taken at random to a place of a stranger's choosing. Calle's work continuously fuels the persona of Sophie Calle as artist and rule maker.

Calle presents herself as having fallen by chance into the art world. The question of whether what she was doing was art was answered for her by art critic Bernard Lamarche-Vadel. Calle writes in the dedication to *The Sleepers* (1979) “In fact, it's he who decided that I was an artist.”⁴ This is starkly similar to Marcel Broodthaers' account of his first show in which he records the gallery owner as deigning what he was doing as art. Broodthaers writes, “But this is art, he said, and I'll gladly show it all.”⁵ *The Sleepers* was Calle's first exhibited work, however, Calle began her artistic career in 1978 when, in an effort to integrate back into Parisian society after seven years of travelling, she began to follow randomly chosen strangers. She would record in note form the chosen stranger's movements, notes which she supplemented with photographs as a kind of proof of their movements. The following quickly grew more elaborate as Calle added rules for her to adhere to making the following into a kind of game.

Calle's following of people initiated what would become, *Suite Venitienne* (1979). Originally this work was exhibited under the date 1980 to avoid possible legal action from the subject of the work. The “game” was initiated when a man who Calle had very briefly been following during the day turned up at a party that evening. Calle took this chance occurrence as a sign and, on overhearing that he was preparing to leave on a trip to Venice, decided to follow him. For a little under two weeks Calle shadowed the man. This act took her from Paris to Venice and back. The diary entries and photographs she took were later displayed in a gallery as art in an installational form of wall text and photographs [Figure 1.4]. In 1983 *Suite Venitienne*

was published in book form with an accompanying essay 'Please Follow Me' by French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard [Figure 1.5].

Suite Venitienne raised questions which became central themes in Calle's later work particularly in relation to the treatment of identity. Calle uses the text accompanying the photographic images to rationalise her seemingly irrational behaviour. She puts forward that she followed people, innocently to start with, as a way of finding her place in society. This following took a simple turn and Calle persuades the reader she had no choice but to follow the man she refers to as Henri B. Calle projects the idea, in the accompanying text, that it is as if her whole identity, her meaning as a person, is caught up in the act of following Henri. The text that Calle attaches to the work is important to the spectator's experience of the work. The work does not stand as photography alone, it is inseparable from the context of Calle's diary entries. A photo such as Figure 1.4 shows nothing of the complex ideas that the work as a whole is dealing with, neither does Figure 1.6 where the photograph is not of Henri B at all but of Calle practising her “stealth” camera work on some men in a restaurant. Without Calle's words the photos are simply confirmations of the time and the place. These diary-like entries make it clear that the work is not really about Henri B or a simple case of infatuation but is much more self involved than this.

Calle's work is not an unfiltered documentation of her actions. A self aware explanation is set out in the narrative element of the work. Calle uses this narrative to present the rules of the particular game which is being viewed. Calle's work, because of its subjective relationship to time, place and cultural modes of behaviour, raises moral questions of Calle's behaviour and ethical questions of what can be considered as art.⁸ The need for an explanation of her behaviour to justify the work as art raises questions of the narrative balance between fact and fiction in Calle's work. This narrative element to Calle's work and her use of “the rule of the game” is focussed on particularly by Yve-Alain Bois.⁹ Through Calle's treatment of narrative she explores notions of truth particularly in identity and of the subjectivity of experience.

Calle highlights the importance of this accompanying narrative in the work *Unfinished* (1988-2003). Originally commissioned by an American Bank, *Unfinished* is an installation multimedia work, in which Calle creates a work around her failure to complete the work. It was begun in 1988 but only finished in 2003. The work shows a questioning of the artistic identity that has been built up by Calle. Calle was given access to video footage from security cameras mounted above cash machines. [Figure 1.7] However she struggled

to complete the work hence the title *Unfinished*. The only way that Calle could find to show the work was by admitting her failure to complete the work and thereby making the work about herself or rather about her artistic identity. *Unfinished* was too far away from Calle's personal experience to be comprehended as art.

Exquisite Pain (1984-2003) on the other hand is a work that was too intensely personal for Calle to initially complete. As with *Unfinished* it took Calle a number of years to complete *Exquisite Pain*. *Exquisite Pain* is a response by Calle to the end of a relationship. The break up was at that point in time the most painful experience that Calle had emotionally experienced. In it she positions her own experience repeatedly in different narratives ninety-eight times physically beside the narrative of others' experiences of pain. Accompanying the work are photographs of Calle's trip to Japan which contributed to her break up [Figure 1.8]. The extremely personal nature of the narrative is pitted against the stark black and white photographs stamped in red ink that make up the physical installation [Figures 1.9 and 1.10]. Questions of the subjectivity of experience are explored through Calle's detailed narratives recalling the incident over and over from every possible view point. The format of placing these narratives alongside the narratives of others' pain, places significance on the diversity and at the same time the universality of emotion. Each personal voice is heard reflected against Calle's own story, explored from every angle.

There is a constant oscillation between subjectivity and universality within *Suite Venitienne*, *Unfinished* and *Exquisite Pain*. Each work, however, explores these issues in different ways, questioning the notions from a different angle. *Suite Venitienne* plays with the idea of a very personal diary like narrative in which the author, Calle, is able to play a role thereby making herself a blank canvas. In *Unfinished* Calle negates the idea of authorship entirely by asking French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard to write the captions for the images, although this proves to be unsuccessful as a working method for Calle. In *Exquisite Pain* Calle supplements her writing with that of others and in doing so questions her own position as narrator. Is this role replaceable without damaging the integrity of the work?

Ideas of a constructed identity and subjective reality in Calle's work are particularly interesting when explored in relation to Baudrillard's work. Baudrillard utilises semiotics and post-structural literary theory, following on in a critical tradition of French theorists, and applies them to media. He analyses the structuralist conception that a sign is made up of the signifier and the signified (concept or form) and the post-structural addition of a secondary level of signification which links the sign to larger dualisms and

opens it up for deconstruction. Baudrillard, the so called “high priest of post-modernism”, was an early influence on Calle.¹⁰ He was Calle's lecturer at university and played a key role in helping her to 'complete' a degree while only attending six months worth of lectures.¹¹ His influence on Calle's work is seen particularly through the idea that, within our contemporary world, reality has become radically abstracted.¹² Of Baudrillard's theories it is his writing on seduction and his concept of simulacra which are the most relevant to Calle's production.

Baudrillard states that within contemporary society the sign has become irreconcilable with reality. He believes that we have reached a point where images, signs and symbols, so prevalent in today's media, no longer reference reality. They now reference the simulation of reality. This is what Baudrillard terms the simulacra. Simulacra is a point whereby the sign or image no longer corresponds to reality but becomes a kind of reality in and of itself.¹⁴ This conception of reality and identity is useful when looking at Calle's early development particularly because of the personal relationship between Calle and Baudrillard. Not only did he influence her but Calle's work had a noted affect on Baudrillard particularly his own interest in photography.¹⁵

In his essay 'Please Follow Me', published in the book form of of Calle's work *Suite Venitienne*, Baudrillard describes Calle's artistic processes, as a type of game, as an exploration and seduction of the other. Baudrillard's evocative essay is written in the second person unravelling Calle's secrets by slipping the reader into her artistic role, as Baudrillard writes, the “network of the other provides you with a means of being absent from yourself.”¹⁷ This way of writing mirrors the way Baudrillard believes Calle to be using her art as both an escape and reaffirmation of identity. She makes the reader both implicit and impotent through the narrative voice. He discusses the works *Suite Venitienne* and *The Sleepers* (1979) looking at the voyeuristic approach that Calle takes towards the subjects of her works and how this draws us, as viewers, into the work.¹⁸ *The Sleepers* was Calle's second work and consists of Calle inviting twenty-eight people to sleep in her bed in eight hour shifts to ensure that her bed was never empty [Figure 1.11]. Each subject was interviewed and while sleeping photographed hourly. These interviews and notes were then published along with the photographs within a gallery setting [Figure 1.12].

Baudrillard identifies a common theme of seduction in both *Suite Venitienne* and *Sleepers*. Seduction for Baudrillard, is the feminine power to counter masculine sexuality. It is the postmodern ability to de-

centre modernism, as Baudrillard puts it, “to deny things their truth and turn it into a game, the pure play of appearances and thereby foil all systems of power and meaning with a mere turn of the hand.”¹⁹ Trans-gender people are a commonly cited example of this, as for them gender no longer relates to the reality of the sexual organs. Through the idea and “traditional” image of femininity a person can identify with the female gender without having the organs that would have originally denoted this and vice versa. Baudrillard's theory of seduction builds on his ideas about simulacra. Within the cultural climate of simulacra the idea of seduction is given more counter power. The simulacra or image that references simulation rather than reality allows Calle to fully explore seduction as a de-centring power. The form of seduction Baudrillard develops is of seduction in a specific sense, not one with an end goal of sexuality. According to Baudrillard, seduction with its ability to decentralise and disguise truth, is opposite to the masculine sex drive associated with centralised power and modernism.

In Calle's early work the concept of seduction develops from her choice of subject matter. Calle's use of seduction comes through her interest in identity. She is self reflectively interested in her own identity. Calle constantly plays with the power to assume the identity of the Other. In *Suite Venitienne*, and in the build up to that work of following people around Paris, Calle shadows strangers. She imitates their movements but is not interested in them as people only as Others. In *Suite Venitienne*, Baudrillard identifies a double play of seduction. Calle follows a stranger playing with seduction, allowing her path to be chosen at will by the other. However the stranger being followed is also robbed of his purpose, he is stalked. Through this his power is decentralised. In *The Sleepers*, rather than following and playing with the identity of an other, Calle turns the tables by inviting people to be her, inviting people to take her place in her bed. Not to sleep with her but to sleep in her place. At all times Calle is aware of them as other and also of herself as other. Calle is keenly self aware. She is interested in the play between the otherness and the seduction of this other. In both *The Sleepers* and *Suite Venitienne* there is a provocative sexual element in their conception; in *Suite Venitienne* Calle follows a man in an infatuated style across Europe, in *The Sleepers* she asks people into her bed. However, in each piece it is made clear by Calle from the outset that this is not sexually motivated; it is a detached seduction.

In the essay 'Please Follow Me', Baudrillard explores how Calle's work hinges on seduction and in a seemingly contradictory turn on a methodically detached sexuality between Calle and the subject of the

work. Calle invokes sexuality, she puts us through the motions, or as Baudrillard puts it to “follow someone but not to approach him, to make people sleep in one's bed but without going to bed with them: always the same displacement, the same slight clinamen ... which is the hallmark of seduction and which for that very reason, few can resist.”²⁰ It is through this negation of sexuality that we, and the participants in the work, allow ourselves to be seduced, through the purported innocence of the work. The work is posed as an absurd type of game with rules stated by Calle. In *The Sleepers* it is the strangeness of the request, “come sleep in my bed”, that throws the participants off guard and rouses the interest of the audience.”²¹

The detachment that Baudrillard sees in the seductive approach to subject matter in Calle's work is further reinforced through the clinical style notation in which Calle, outlines the rules of the bizarre social experiments that she sets up. As in *The Sleepers* she explains, “I asked people to give me a few hours of their sleep. To come and sleep in my bed. To let themselves be looked at and photographed. To answer questions.”²³ And in the more personal *Suite Venitienne* where Calle must remind herself, in thought form italics spliced into the detective-like spiel, not to get swept into the idea of what she is doing “*I must not forget that I don't have any amorous feelings towards Henri B. The impatience with which I await his arrival, the fear of that encounter, these symptoms aren't really part of me.*”²⁴ Calle states plain “facts” for the audience to take in, and let themselves be taken in by, seduced as were the participants in *The Sleepers*.

In *Suite Venitienne* Calle's writing is somewhat more personal than in *The Sleepers*, as seen in, the italic inserts. However, the thoroughly detached photographs accompanying the script of *Suite Venitienne* make up for this emotional deviation. The photographs are taken with no particular skill and many are not of the subject Henri B. at all [Figure 1.6]. Some function as practice shots while others document simply being in Venice at that particular point in time.²⁵ Calle is less interested in the medium of photography itself but of photography's inherent ability to record a time and place. Calle is interested in the relationship between the photography and the text describing the artistic experience that Calle has set up.²⁶ Thus, once Calle produces a work as a book it is the relationship of the event, photographs, text and accompanying essay that form the work of art. In *Suite Venitienne* Baudrillard's essay becomes a collaboration through its engagement, and publication, with the work.

Calle's collaborative relationship with Baudrillard continues later in her career, with Calle asking him to be part of *Unfinished*, a work which she was commissioned by an American bank to produce in 1988.²⁷

The bank gave Calle footage from security cameras and let her take images from within the bank [Figure 1.7]. Calle found the work problematic and so at one point asked Baudrillard if he would write the captions to be included as part of the work. Baudrillard complied by writing four pages of captions for Calle. Baudrillard's contribution, while being displayed as part of the work, was not the answer Calle was looking for when it came to the source of her artistic dilemma. *Unfinished* eventually came to fruition fifteen years after it was begun. *Unfinished* provides us with insight into the how Calle defines her own artistic formula. She found she could not legitimately exhibit the photos, taken by machines and security cameras, with text, written by Baudrillard, as Calle puts it in an excerpt from *Unfinished*, “I kept on thinking that those images were not sufficient unto themselves. The text was missing. This text that wont let go of me. My trademark: *images and texts*. By showing found photos, without any input from me, I wasn't clinging to my own style. That seemed too easy.”²⁸ Though Calle's work plays with notions of the author and the negation of authorship we find, through *Unfinished*, that it is vital that there is some part of “Sophie Calle” within the work, and particularly within the text of the work.

The interplay of situational photography, text as medium and subject matter pulled from Calle's life, combine to make up a Sophie Calle work. However, as an audience aware of postmodern discourses and attitudes, we are unable to take what Calle poses as her own identity at face value. She is constantly subverting issues of identity and authorship within her work. Through this subversion the idea of 'Sophie Calle' the artist becomes itself a simulacrum. Of course there is always the reality of Sophie Calle the living person but it is her public identity, or the self reflective identity that she constructs for herself in each work, to which I am referring. Calle plays with the boundaries of fiction and fact by the creation of an identity based upon the successive identities created in each work. Who is to say if this initial starting point, the moment before she assumes the identity for the work, the literary starting point where she sets out the rules of her game, is reality or simply another persona. Like a simulacrum Calle references a simulation of reality, this 'Sophie Calle' artistic persona, another identity, and thus makes herself completely compliant with the postmodern society that Baudrillard describes.²⁹ Calle does not rely on physical reality; rather, she builds her artistic identity upon the fiction she has invented for herself.

Baudrillard views Calle as engaging with postmodernism through playing with the idea of originality, subverting it and negating truth through the subjectivity of identity. In bringing attention to these

postmodern issues of identity in the way that Calle does, she engages with the modernist idea of the great artistic genius. Calle in whatever role she is assuming becomes the artistic mastermind. As Calle says about *Unfinished*, she could not exhibit it because the work she realised was not her, her work was text plus image and in particular not anyone else's writing, not Baudrillard's, but her own. The notion of the artist as mastermind is particularly prevalent within Calle's productions. Problematically Baudrillard's writing is solely concerned with Calle's early work and his discussion of seduction is chronologically a starting point within her oeuvre. Perhaps this is why the captions that he produced for *Unfinished* in 1994 were not sufficient for Calle as she had developed a further artistic style that did not align as well as *Suite Venitienne* and 'Please Follow Me'.

Janet Hand argues in her essay 'Sophie Calle's Art of Following and Seduction' that although Baudrillard's discussion of seduction in relation to Calle's work is interesting to consider, Calle's strategy does not conform so simply to the identified pattern of seduction. Hand questions the escapism of Baudrillard's text stating that “In Calle's work, the circuits of her seduction to follow rules and people are shown to break down in a reverse logic by dint of her intimate probings, her distractions and anxiety.”³¹ Calle is not entirely lost in the act of following she is constantly the author and master of the game.

Yve-Alain Bois focusses on the idea of Calle as the rule maker controlling her simulated artistic identity which Baudrillard explores in its early stages. Bois lectured with both Jean Baudrillard and Sophie Calle at the European Graduate School in 2004. He has, out of the critics discussed in this chapter, written the most prolifically about Calle's work. Bois discusses Calle's work well into her established artistic career, particularly looking at the role of identity and rule making in Calle's work. Bois has been criticised as being a formalist art critic as a “new kind of Greenberg, one with hindsight.”³² He meets these criticisms head on in the article 'Whose Formalism?' published in *The Art Bulletin* in 1996.

In 'Whose Formalism?' Bois addresses the state of formalism in art criticism historically and today. Formalism is associated with the modernist art critic Clement Greenberg. It is Greenberg's particular use of formalism, not formalism itself, which Bois finds problematic. Formalism is the idea that art should be discussed in terms of the formal elements that make up the work, such as the use of colour and composition, rather than meaning, social or historical context. Greenberg used this type of analysis to form an art historical link between art objects. Thus, all art objects produced were tied into an evolutionary system in a

“continuous present.”³³ Bois positions his own use of formalism as coming from a Russian formalist tradition rather than American. He evaluates the different critical uses of formalism: “For Greenberg, form gradually became morphology; for Clark, and formalism at its best, it is a generative structure.”³⁴

Bois describes his own critical style as being “a formalist who does not believe we can separate form and content, so it is not exactly formalist.”³⁵ Alongside a formalist reading there are other important notions that contribute to the interpretation of a work. Bois is interested in the “conditions of possibility”, or the conditions at any given time that make a work of art possible. These are historical considerations rather than formalist. It is through a close formalist reading in combination with a historical knowledge of place and time, ideology and context, which Bois thinks we gain the best understanding of a work as by “missing the detail, one misses the whole.”³⁶ The “conditions of possibility” for Calle's work bridge the socio-historic moment of postmodernism breaking with modernist traditions.

In 2000 Bois wrote a cover article for *Artforum*, about the work of Sophie Calle titled 'Character Study'. In it he explores how Calle is often claimed by different artistic groups. Calle's flexible and varied working styles are easily assigned to many contemporary tendencies. As he puts it she “has worked in so many genres and fields that it's not always easy to realize that the whole is more than the sum of the parts.”³⁷ Many of Calle's works are reproducible in book form or begin as book form and are then translated into installation grids. As a general subject matter Bois sees Calle's work as centring around “issues of distance and absence, of voyeurism and exhibitionism; it has largely adopted the structure of the forensic archive; it has often deliberately confused levels of reality- or, more precisely, it has successfully transformed reality (the archive) into fiction (narration), and vice versa.”³⁸ He notes her disinterest in being a photographer emphasising her utilisation of photography for sleuthing rather than artistic purposes. This article gives a general overview of Bois thoughts on Calle's entire oeuvre, thoughts which he then refines and expands in the article 'Paper Tigress' published in *October* in 2006.

In 'Paper Tigress' Bois like Baudrillard focuses on the issue of identity, the need for the persona or the “Sophie Calle” in Calle's work. This building of identity is, Bois discusses, not an unusual thing for an artist to do. Artists must stake out their living within the art market in some way. However, with Calle it “is both her insistence and the all out nature of her strategies of impersonation” that set her apart.³⁹ As Bois points out “ ... She only gives shape to this mask in order to dispel it as an illusion. She writes “I” and “Me”

every three lines so that we fully grasp that this very self does not exist.”⁴⁰ Bois identifies three loose categories, in a traditional sense, of identity formation within Calle's work. These are, surveillance (“Sophie the Peeping Tom”), exhibitionism (“Sophie flaunts herself”) and absence (“Sophie in Mourning”).⁴¹

'Paper Tigris' was originally printed in the exhibition catalogue *M'as tu vue* in 2003. *M'as tu vue* means, as Calle points out in a definition in the opening pages of the publication, “did you see me?” or is an “allusion to the question with which actors draw attention to their success. Vain person.”⁴² This was the title of an exhibition of Calle's work at the Centre Pompidou running from 19th November 2003 to the 15th of March 2004. The exhibition contained a sampling of Calle's work as well as the new work *A Woman Vanishes* (2003). *M'as tu vue* in the catalogue form presents Calle's oeuvre in categories similar to those that Bois identifies: “shadows, investigations, vanishings”, “hotel rooms, sleepless nights and other true stories”, “games and ceremonies”, “journeys”, and “absence”. In 'Paper Tigris', over top of Bois's three categories, surveillance, exhibitionism and absence, other less traditional strategies of identity formation are mapped out within Calle's work.

In 'Paper Tigris', Bois identifies a key point which I believe relates to Baudrillard's ideas of simulation and simulacrum. “Sophie Calle” the persona that is presented to the audience is, in itself, a simulacrum based on the simulation starting point of “Sophie Calle” the artist. Calle toys with notions of reality. Bois describes this strategy, the “constant, essential rule of her game,” as proxy.⁴³ Calle in acting by proxy, “undermines the foundations of her “person”, of the unity that all her thematic recurrences are allegedly producing ... this very self does not exist.”⁴⁴ It is only through the cultural climate of simulation, as Baudrillard brings to light, that this strategy could function as art in the way it does. Simulation and the postmodernist understandings form the conditions of possibility for Calle's work.⁴⁵ All of her work is about “Sophie Calle” and yet we really learn nothing about “Sophie Calle”.

Bois expands this idea through a discussion of the work *Double Game* (1999). *Double Game* is like *M'as tu vue* published in a book form. *Double Game* is a response by Calle to the novel *Leviathan* (1992) by Paul Auster. Auster is an American novelist and acquaintance of Calle, who enters into a collaborative relationship with Calle through his inclusion of a character based on her, in *Leviathan*, called Maria. Becoming a fictional character in a book Bois believes is something Calle “has been working at, by proxy, for many years.”⁴⁶ In *Double Game* there are three moves: how Calle's life influenced Maria's, how Maria

influenced Calle and the merging together of their experiences or as Calle puts it “how to try to become a character out of a novel.”⁴⁷

In *Leviathan*, Auster describes real works produced by Calle and attributes them to Maria, changing details to fit the plot line. Move one consists of Calle copying out relevant pages of *Leviathan*, ones that feature Maria, and marking or correcting the book in red ink. Calle amends these “changes”, such as dates and places, or she marks in the margin “excessive!” or “too much imagination” where she feels Auster has taken liberties.⁴⁸ As well as changing places and dates Auster invents, for his character Maria, extra works surplus to those pilfered from Calle's oeuvre. These surplus works are set out in a similar rule bound game format to many of Calle's real works. Calle takes the description of these works from *Leviathan* and constructs them in real life. So for the work entitled *The Chromatic Diet* Calle lives, as Maria does in the book, under a colour coded diet of food for a week. Calle documents this by taking posed photographs of the food and listing underneath the day, colour and “Menu imposed.”⁴⁹ In doing this all of Maria's works become Calle's works.

Move two in *Double Game* consists of Calle reproducing the original works of hers that Auster described as Maria's. Move three is also published as *The Gotham Handbook*, it is made up of instructions set out for Calle by Auster at her request. These instructions, Bois points out, are far more elaborate than the rules Auster set out for Maria's made up works in *Leviathan*. This is possibly why they stylistically seem to sit better within her oeuvre. They contain a vital element that the *Leviathan* ones do not, the element of danger. Calle's own work often plays with elements of danger; in social situations, as in *Sleepers* asking strangers into her bed, in *Suite Venitienne* following people, or of personal exposure, as in *Exquisite Pain*. The instructions Auster creates for Calle, in short, are to smile at people, to talk to strangers, to give things away to the homeless and lastly to cultivate or beautify a public spot.

Calle takes these written instructions and follows them out as best she can. She keeps a diary of her movements and takes documentary style photographs of the work. The public spot that Calle chooses to cultivate is a public phone booth. She does this by providing things such as chairs, magazines, drink, flowers and tissues. Part of the work is an one sided transcript of calls made from the booth and a comments sheet attached to the booth. The booth is trashed at one stage during the work. In doing all this Calle “applies herself to match two identities – the character of the novel and the artist's personality – suggesting by this

that the latter is as fictitious as the former: such is the effect of proxy.”⁵⁰

Bois also comments on how much of Calle's work centres around failure or lack. He explains this through the work which Calle asked Baudrillard write captions for, *Unfinished*. *Unfinished* is particularly compelling as a work as it deals with Calle's own artistic struggle. It makes Calle reflect on her own work and what it is that is particular to her work: this “Sophie Calle” identity. Bois takes this analysis further stating that it is the lack or failure that is essential to her work. In *Unfinished* Calle realises this, she says “In my work, I make use of my romantic downfalls. Why should it be so different for my professional failings? The difference is that the failure of a project does not distress me as much.”⁵¹ *Unfinished* is focussed on other people, money and banking. Calle struggled with this work as she has no lack of money and no suffering caught up in the work. The idea of the work was interesting but carried no real weight, no real suffering for Calle. The only way Calle could make it her own was to make it about her failure.

Calle's work hinges on an obsessive type of behaviour. This behaviour is what Hand identifies as being disruptive to Baudrillard's discussion of seduction. Bois addresses this behaviour through the writing of Psychologist Marina van Zuylen on monomania.⁵² Van Zuylen focusses on Sophie Calle as an example of monomania. Monomania is when in their mourning a person elevates their lost one to the ideal of perfection. It is the replacement of a scattered reality with a perfect fiction. Calle creates this fiction in her autobiographically focussed work. The difference with Calle is her utilisation of chance. Most sufferers of monomania attempt to eliminate chance as it is the unknown element. Through using chance encounters, such as seeing Henri B. twice in the same day in *Suite Venitienne*, as a trigger for artistic production. For Calle this, as Bois writes, “ensures both identity (I am the one who changes all the time, I am metamorphosis personified) and non-identity (I am a perfect copy).”⁵³ Another defining element of Calle's work is that the encounters and the scenarios that she sets out have a firm beginning and ending, hence her anxiety in the work *Unfinished* the inability to finish a work.

Bois identifies a paradox in Calle's work, which the feelings it explores and plays out should be deadened but are conversely intensified precisely through monomania and entropy. The saturation of information and repetition of narrative with clear outlined rules of the game that Calle sets out ensures that the emotions roused in the work become empty and detached. They obey “this law of information theory according to which the more a message is predictable and undifferentiated, the more it becomes statistic

noise: an expected event is no longer an event, waiting for and hoping are direct opposites.”⁵⁴ For Bois Calle's work hinges on paradoxes. The paradox of Calle's over saturation of information is that where the emotion should be deadened it is heightened. The audience is drawn to possibilities in Calle's work which are conversely exposed; subjectivity is used to convey a universal.

The concept of an underlying universality or humanity in contemporary art has been cautiously revised by theorist Thierry De Duve as work that falls into the category of “*nous voici*”. This term stems from an exhibition entitled *Voici* which De Duve curated in the 'Palais Des Beaux-Arts' in Brussels. *Voici* ran from the 23rd of November 2000 to the 28th of January 2001. For this exhibition De Duve arranged various examples of art from the past hundred years into three categories. These categories are, in his own words, “:*Me voici*, where the work speaks and presents itself; *Vous voici*, where the work addresses itself to the men and women facing it; and *Nous voici*, where the works testify to what we, human beings, have in common.”⁵⁵ While De Duve does not discuss Calle's work specifically I believe this latter category, “*nous voici*”, is particularly suited to an understanding of her practice. What is particular about De Duve's theory and Calle's work is the understanding that this misunderstanding that art can possibly reach this humanist level is nevertheless naively seductive. We are attracted to these unattainable clichés even with the knowledge gained through postmodernism with the breakdown of modernist meta narratives.

In De Duve's words,

Too many crimes have been committed and too many treasons perpetrated in the name of humanism and universality for anyone to hear those words once again without wincing. Yet humans are hopefully still here for a long time to come, and on a planet that is now globalized. How are we to do without big words? Possibly by using little ones. Very simple little words like “we” and “*voici*”, light, movable deictics, available to one and all, free, content-less words, but words which make us reflect on their formal properties ... the advantage of works of art over other products of human desire is that they deal with their contents formally – in short, treat big words as little ones.⁵⁶

These little words are identified as important in Calle's work by both Bois and Baudrillard. As discussed Bois points out Calle “writes “I” and “Me” every three lines so that we fully grasp that this very self does not exist.”⁵⁷ She uses the personal pronoun “I” repeatedly to draw attention to the construct that it

is. As is seen in *Exquisite Pain* with the stories of others pain reflected against her own, Calle addresses her work by separating the “you” and “I” or Calle's own artistic persona from that of the Other. Baudrillard discusses how Calle in a slippage of meaning toys with this notion and becomes the Other in her work, providing herself with the means of being absent from herself. In *Suite Venitienne* Calle constantly makes us aware of this relation. Not only is this important to the constructed artistic persona that Calle presents but it addresses the work to “nous voici”, the “we” which De Duve describes: “Dealing with this “we” as if it were a “you” is thus to remove the “I” from the “you and I”.”⁵⁸ Calle's relies upon these little words to create her paradoxical identity the advantage of this as De Duve points out is “... that it is concrete and aesthetic rather than ideological.”⁵⁹

De Duve does not discuss Calle's work specifically. However, he does explore as an example of the “nous voici” grouping *Living Pictures* (1995) by Sylvie Blocher. *Living Pictures* is a video work with a disarmingly simple premise: Thirteen young actors and actresses chosen through their nomination for the Michel Simon Prize are asked to address the camera and make an “amorous announcement.”⁶⁰ These announcements are filmed using an extreme close up and spliced together. The effect of the simple cutting of each announcement chosen by Blocher is that the actor is seemingly addressing the viewer as the loved one. It is Blocher's sentimental choice of love as the subject of the work that captures De Duve. Calle is like, Blocher, unafraid of exploring emotional topics. Both set up rules to explore an idea through a multiplied individual experience. No one is excluded in these works, there is no “they” just a “you” and “I” and thus a “we”. The difference between Blocher and Calle's work is Calle's all out insistence on being an identifiable and often visible part of the work.

Calle's work plays with subjectivity and universality. It connects to a basic level of humanity because it addresses its audience as “we all”. For Bois and Baudrillard it is the production of fictional identity and the interplay of this fictitious identity with reality as subject matter which informs Calle's use of medium. Calle was not interested in contributing to and critiquing the history of art, as in modernism, or the idea of art, as in postmodernism. Or at least she was not initially, her later works have become increasingly slicker as she has had time to analyse the nature of her own artistic practice.

Baudrillard, Bois and De Duve, common themes and questions which Calle's work continually explores emerge such as the fictionality of identity, or play between reality and narrative. This identity

consciously explored between Calle and the other and between Calle and herself, is what is most critically intriguing about Calle's work. As discussed with Baudrillard this kind of work could not be considered as art without the socio-historic climate of simulation, or without postmodernity. Calle is also reliant upon the history of modernism which directly impacts upon anything created under the guise of the postmodern or post medium. Calle's work wants to believe in universals, it harks back to ideas of modernity but without losing the knowledge that modernity as it was once known is dead.

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- 1 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Paper Tigress' in *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 29.
 - 2 Also seen in works such as *The Bronx* (1980) in which Calle asked to be taken wherever a stranger would like to take her in the Bronx, New York.
 - 3 Excerpt from an installation of *The Eruv of Jerusalem* (1996).
 - 4 Quoted in Christine Marcel 'Biographical Interview with Sophie Calle' in *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 80.
 - 5 Marcel Broodthaers as quoted in Thierry De Duve, *Look, 100 Years of Contemporary Art*, Ludion: Brussels, 2001, p. 30.
 - 8 Calle is notorious for getting into legal trouble for her work notably in the work *The Address Book* (1983) which Calle was court ordered to not display and *The Hotel* (1981) in which the narrative abruptly ends with the termination of Calle's employment as a chamber maid.
 - 9 I will come back to this idea of “the rule of the game” on page 19.
 - 10 Jean Baudrillard, 'Politics of Seduction', interview with Jean Baudrillard, *Marxism Today*, January, pp. 54-6.
 - 11 Baudrillard would place Sophie's name on other students work over the seven years that she spent travelling to ensure that her father still paid her her allowance. From Christine Marcel's 'Biographical Interview with Sophie Calle' in *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003.
 - 12 Ideas which have been widely assimilated into popular culture particularly though films such as *The Matrix* (1999). Jean Baudrillard, 'The Hyper-realism of Simulation' in *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Eds.) Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, Blackwell Publishers Ltd.: Oxford, 1992, p. 1049-51.
 - 14 I will come back to this notion of the simulacrum in a discussion of Calle's work on page 16.
 - 15 “[Baudrillard] began producing photography in earnest shortly after his collaboration with Sophie Calle was published.” for more see Steve Redhead, *The Jean Baudrillard Reader*, Columbia University Press: New York, 2008, p. 71.
 - 17 Jean Baudrillard, 'Please Follow Me' in *Art and Text*, (Ed.) Paul Foss, March–May, 23/4, 1987, p. 103.
 - 18 Baudrillard uses the title *The Big Sleep* instead of *Sleepers*. Jean Baudrillard, 'Please Follow Me' in *Art and Text*, (Ed.) Paul Foss, March–May, 23/4, 1987.
 - 19 Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, (Trans) Brian Singer, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990, p. 8.
 - 20 Jean Baudrillard, 'Please Follow Me' in *Art and Text*, (Ed.) Paul Foss, March–May, 23/4, 1987, p. 105.
 - 21 Sophie Calle, 'Provoking Arbitrary Situations Which Take on the Form of Rituals' in *Art and Text*, (Ed.) Paul Foss, March–May, 23/4, 1987, p. 81.
 - 23 Ibid.
 - 24 Sophie Calle, *Double Game*, Violette Limited: London, 1999, p. 89
 - 25 Sophie Calle's ability to photograph is notoriously unprofessional and she often uses photographs taken by other people within works as her friend and critic the late Herve Guibert put it “A so-called photographer, she can't even take a photograph (though she's making progress).” quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, 'Paper Tigress' in *October*, No. 116, Spring 2006, p. 45.
 - 26 I will focus in depth on Calle's use of photography and text in Chapter Two.
 - 27 Calle's relationship with Baudrillard is later continued in a professional sense when they both lectured at the European Graduate School 2004.
 - 28 Christine Marcel, 'The Author Issue in the Work of Sophie Calle. *Unfinished*', in 'Sophie Calle: *M'as-tu vue*' (Ed. Christine Marcel), Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 24.
 - 29 I will come back to this simulacrum idea with the notion of proxy as discussed by Yve-Alain Bois on page 19.
 - 31 Janet Hand, 'Sophie Calle's Art of Following and Seduction' in *Cultural Geographies*, No. 12, 2005, p. 469.
 - 32 Joseph Kosuth as quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, 'Whose Formalism?' in *The Art Bulletin*, New York, March, 1996, p. 2.
 - 33 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Whose Formalism?' in *The Art Bulletin*, New York, March, 1996, p. 3.

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- 34 Bois is referring here to Tim Clark, Yve-Alain Bois, 'Whose Formalism?' in *The Art Bulletin*, New York, March, 1996, p. 2.
- 35 Yve-Alain Bois as quoted in Lan N Nguyen, 'From Art to Barthes, and Back Again', in *The Harvard Crimson*, September 19, 1991, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=230425> .
- 36 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Whose Formalism?' in *The Art Bulletin*, New York, March, 1996, p. 3.
- 37 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Character Study: Sophie Calle' in *Artforum*, April, 2000, p. 126.
- 38 Ibid, p. 127.
- 39 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Paper Tigress' in *October*, No. 116, Spring 2006, p. 38.
- 40 I will come back to this discussion of Calle's use of personal pronouns on page 23 in relation to the work of Thierry De Duve. Ibid.
- 41 “..She only gives shape to this mask in order to dispel it as an illusion. She writes “I” and “Me” every three lines so that we fully grasp that this very self does not exist.” Ibid.
- 42 Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, Prestel Verlag: Munich, 2003, p. 1.
- 43 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Paper Tigress' in *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 31.
- 44 Ibid, p. 32.
- 45 I am using the term postmodernist concerns here as a cumulation of knowledge gained through postmodernity not implying that Calle is a postmodernist or suggesting that her work is definitively postmodern.
- 46 Yve-Alain Bois, Paper Tigress' in *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 32.
- 47 Sophie Calle, *Double Game*, Violette Editions: London, 1999, p. 2.
- 48 Ibid, pp.8-9.
- 49 Ibid, p. 14.
- 50 Yve-Alain Bois, Paper Tigress' in *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 35.
- 51 Ibid, p. 37.
- 52 I will explore Van Zuylen's ideas in further depth in Chapter Three. Marina Van Zuylen, *Monomania*, London: Cornell University Press, 2005.
- 53 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Paper Tigress' in *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 38.
- 54 Ibid, p.39.
- 55 Thierry De Duve, *Look, 100 Years of Contemporary Art*, Ludion: Brussels, 2001, p. 7.
- 56 Ibid, p. 251.
- 57 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Paper Tigress' in *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 32.
- 58Thierry De Duve, *Look, 100 Years of Contemporary Art*, Ludion: Brussels, 2001, p. 252.
- 59 Ibid, p. 253.
- 60 Ibid, p. 255.



Figure 1.1 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, 1999, Sophie Calle, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2005, p. 20.



Figure 1.2 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *The Striptease*, 1979, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 253.



Figure 1.3 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Suite Venitienne*, 1979, Sophie Calle and Paul Auster, *Double Game*, London: Violette Editions, 1999.



Figure 1.4 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Suite Venitienne*, 1979, Sophie Calle and Paul Auster, *Double Game*, London: Violette Editions, 1999.

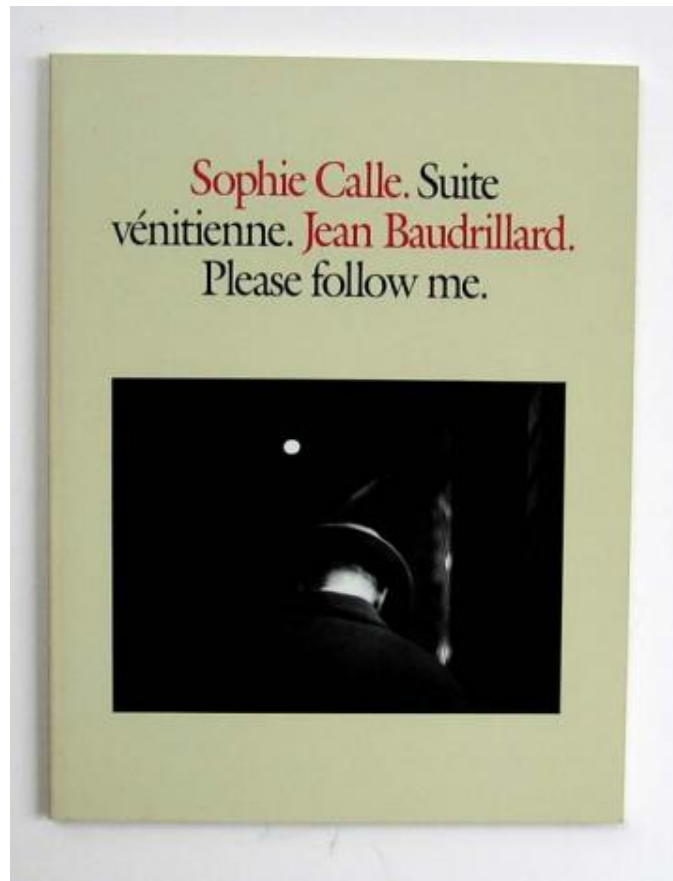


Figure 1.5 **Sophie Calle and Jean Baudrillard**, *Please Follow Me*, Paris: Editions de L'Etoile, 1983.



Figure 1.6 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Suite Venitienne*, 1979, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, pp. 87-88.



Figure 1.7 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Unfinished*, 1988-2003, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 428.



Figure 1.8 **Sophie Calle**, installation view *Exquisite Pain*, 2003, Janet Hand, 'Sophie Calle's Art of Following and Seduction' in *Cultural Geographies*, No. 12, 2005, p. 467.



Figure 1.9 Sophie Calle, detail from *Exquisite Pain*, 2003, Sophie Calle, *Exquisite Pain*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005, pp. 214-5.



Figure 1.10 Sophie Calle, detail from *Exquisite Pain*, 2003, Sophie Calle, *Exquisite Pain*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005, p. 94.



Figure 1.11 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Sleepers*, 1979, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 150.



Figure 1.12 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Sleepers*, 1979, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 151.

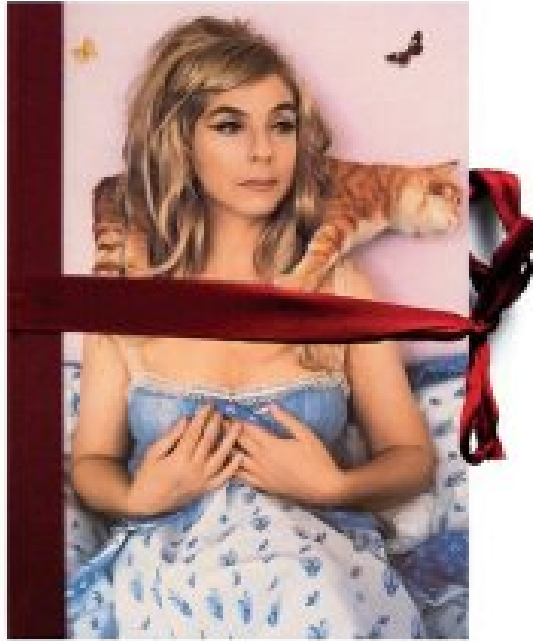


Figure 1.15 Sophie Calle and Paul Auster, *Double Game*, London: Violette Editions, 1999.

Chapter Two:

Calle's Strategies of Presentation

Categorising Sophie Calle's work is problematic. Her work is calculatedly situated in opposition to the idea of a fixed medium, or movement. This is in part due to her currently evolving oeuvre but also to her choice of subject matter and methods of display. Subjectivity, identity and truth all play major roles as central and pervasive themes in the production of Calle's work. Alongside her elaborately constructed artistic identity there are strategies that Calle uses to create work which cohesively hold her notably diverse oeuvre together. These strategies produce a unique physical experience that is particular to Calle's work.

The focus of this chapter will be to explore this physical experience and to analyse the elusive role of medium within Calle's work. And in doing so to answer part of the question: what are the key non subject driven components particular to Calle's work? I will explore the complex relationship to the role of medium in contemporary art, starting with the idea of the post-medium condition as posed by Rosalind Krauss and her observation of the reliance by some key artists on the exploration of specific technical supports. Medium, as discussed by Krauss, is still a viable discussion point in contemporary art despite problematic certain Greenbergian connotations. Medium if analysed from a contemporary viewpoint, wary of the loaded meaning of the term, is a useful tool to unpack the complex working strategies of the artist. This chapter will pick apart the driving technical processes behind Calle's work.

For Krauss Calle's medium is bound up in the idea of a documentary journalism based technical support. She draws on autofictional elements, such as invagination, in her critical thinking about Calle's work and help to embellish her idea of a journalistic technical support as the driving quality in Calle's oeuvre. Art historian, Luc Sante, on the other hand, identifies in Calle's work the use of a much more subjective information based medium reliant upon an element of uncertainty within her work. Both Krauss's and Sante's discussions of medium identify, but do not focus on, the performance based aspect within Calle's work, preferring to focus instead on the narrative approach that Calle takes in the finished product. Using the French critical theorist Nicolas Bourriaud, and his understanding of operational realism as an alternative view on Calle's artistic strategies, I will discuss Calle's work as it is encountered by the spectator and its

strategic relationship to the spectator through relational aesthetics. In relying on, what Bourriaud views as, elements of reality and chance social encounters as part of the medium of her work Calle connects with his theoretical discussion of relational aesthetics, or more pointedly operational realism. Looking from a more cynical viewpoint, however, she achieves this through annotating these strategically engineered personal experiences, Calle rules out elements of uncertainty and chance, aligning herself with the literary style of autofiction discussed in relation to Calle's work by Joost de Bloois.

To grasp the physical elements within Calle's work this chapter will first focus on these technical aspects of observed in specific examples of Calle's work; identifying and assessing the physical components of Calle's work by exploring Calle's particular strategies of production and display, namely looking at the three main loosely termed elements of narrative, photography and installation, often used by Calle. In analysing these elements trends being to form in the way that Calle creates a work. Calle's work could be seen to take on a two part structure; an initial performance based work leading to a larger literary focussed display based around the 'documentation' of the initial performance of the work. Both steps are hinged on a particular notion of temporarily within Calle work and encompass elements of Krauss, Sante, and Bourriaud's observations. In this Chapter the focus will be specifically on the physical nature of the work rather than the subject matter or the more psychoanalytic content which I will be focussing on in Chapter Three.

The particular examples of Calle's work I will be discussing are, *Double Game* (1999), *No Sex Last Night* (1992), *The Blind* (1986) and *The Birthday Ceremony* (1980-1993).¹ These works give a broad view of the different ways Calle puts together a work and they are well spaced from within her established artistic career. *Double Game*, as discussed in chapter one, is a complex undertaking, in collaboration with Paul Auster. It intertwines many of Calle's works and is produced primarily in book format, though it is also exhibited as an installation work. *No Sex Last Night* is a video work in collaboration with Greg Shephard which brought Calle to the attention of the international artworld and to a more general public audience by being shown in theatres around the world.² *The Blind* is a smaller and less personally close work for Calle, consisting of a photography and text installation that contrasts as a starkly elegant example of Calle's work. *The Blind* is also reproduced in book format, though as part of catalogues such as *Mas tu vue* (2003) rather

than as a stand alone publication. In contrast to the other works, *The Birthday Ceremony*, is an object based example of Calle's work rather than photographic installation. *The Birthday Ceremony* takes many installation configurations evolving over time due to the particular 'rule of the game' Calle has assigned the work. It is also published in *Double Game* in the first section as a work included in *Leviathan* by Paul Auster as a work by Maria.

Key aspects within Calle's work, which these works will be used to illustrate, are her use of language, as both text and narrative, and the interaction between Calle's use of language and imagery associated with the work. Most often this is photographic though Calle also uses film and objects as the visual component to her work. Vital to the text and visual elements is the subsequent presentation in either installation or book format. Through using these particular elements Calle draws attention to not only the physical aspects of her work but also temporal aspects that inform her strategies of presentation. The temporal notion in Calle's work is the outcome of attempting to exhibit something that takes place in real time and her attempt to convey this temporal nature within the constructed form that the artwork takes.

In general, but not exclusively, much of Calle's work is presented in the form of, either, gallery installation or artist books. These kind of display techniques rely upon the interplay of language, photography and the spectator. They both lend themselves to the display of documentary style art work. The use of these methods of display highlight the experiential nature of the work; the experience of a work is changed when viewed or reproduced as a book rather than installation or vice versa. Flipping the pages of a coffee-table sized book is a somewhat different experience to being surrounded by the same photographs and text as displayed on gallery walls. However, as display techniques they manage to highlight similar temporal aspects of Calle's work.

Both installation and book productions lend themselves to the display of Calle's work by demanding a physical experience in their viewing. The viewer must physically either walk around the display or turn the pages. These two techniques are complimentary with the artist book providing a viable commercial element that the installation cannot. As Walter Benjamin points out in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production' works “of art are received and valued on different planes”, these two planes are the ritual basis of art and the exhibition value. In the age of mechanical reproduction art has slid towards the exhibition value

rather than the traditional ritual value. Calle's work walks a line between both these values, she documents what seem to be personal rituals but uses the gallery space to create a spectacle of these personal rituals. In 'Knowledge as Spectacle' Chris Townsend discusses Calle's work negatively in relation to Benjamin's theory. He describes how in Calle's work the everyday transcends, through “discard and reappropriation- into an object of consumerist or secretarial spectacle (in Calle's work the spectacle of the self as object of pathos and spectatorial investment, stripped of any relation between autobiography and history).”³ Often Calle's work loses its ritual nature through it's spectatorial display.

The artist book, while actively part of a consumerist society, conforms to Benjamin's idea of the ritual value of art. The book, seen as an artist book does not demand your attention in the way the exhibition does. Calle uses carefully edited elements of personal experience to create a consumerist spectacle that demands some participation in the ritual by the audience. The spectator must not passively look but actively read the work as the image loses its meaning without the explanation. In a photograph of a work, as Benjamin observes, we lose the unique time and space presence of the work.⁴ In Calle's work through the combination of photography and text there is no real original per say. The work is reproduced to fit the exhibition space, it is documented in book format and re-appropriated into later works. The book format in all its editions, in the case of a work such as *Double Game*, is the original format in which the work was produced. *Double Game* was initially published in a three part book format, the installation display of the work came later. The use of these literary techniques bypasses and brings attention to the idea in visual art of originality. Originality in the literary sense does not grapple with the issue in the same way that visual art traditionally has. Calle embraces this more literary notion of originality. Her work is able to be reproduced in installation and book form with no loss to the original integrity of the work.

Calle has to date nine carefully crafted publications in English and French through Aces Sud and many more smaller limited edition publications.⁵ The book form of presentation within Calle's work is produced either as: a catalogue piece to the installation work, such as *La Visite Guidee* (1996), a production combining a number of works and essays about Calle's work, such as *Mas tu vue* (2003) or as the art work itself, such as in *Double Game*. These books add another physical dimension to the experience of Calle's work that is very different to the installation through which we are physically absorbed and surrounded by

the work.

Calle uses language in two different capacities as text both visual and narrative. These two uses of language are important to delineate between in exploring the elements that Calle uses when creating a work. The word text I am defining here as her use of words visually as part of an installation or book. The clearest example of this textual use of language is in *Exquisite Pain*, as the pages of the book, or the panels of the installation, progress Calle's words printed in white on the left hand side begin to fade into the grey tone of the paper [Figure 2.1]. Or in *Ghosts* (1989-1991) where Calle asked museum staff to recall through any form of description a work which was on loan to another gallery. In the empty space left by this painting she visually presented a collage of their memories, in drawings and text [Figure 2.2]. In these cases Calle is using text as a visual prop within her work.

The use and exploration of narrative is what Krauss, and Calle herself, identify as being central to her artistic production. Taking cue from Linguist Gerard Genette, Calle's narrative can be treated as a fictional narrative even if technically it is not fictional.⁶ Her work constantly plays on the idea of the factual and the fictitious narrative. It combines techniques from autobiography and fiction engaging with the literary techniques of autofiction.⁷ This narrative constantly references Calle as the author and in doing so conversely gives Calle a space of authorial freedom within the text. This central use of narrative in Calle's work feeds into her use of photography, film and objects, as documentary props rather than aesthetically considered items even when she is focussing on the concept of beauty, such as in *The Blind* [Figure 2.3]. Here the stark images of the face of the blind subject and the image of their concept of beauty is used in collaboration with the framed text which explains and anchors the image. Calle makes no attempt to overly beautify the image that they describe; the image is thus merely illustrative.

The way that Calle uses photography, for the recording of events, is similar to that of the photographic documentary journalist as Krauss points out. Calle values photographs not for their aesthetic content but for the time, place and events that they record or give evidence of. This snapshot style of photography, often used by Calle, reinforces the idea of recording reality. A photograph, as Calle often emphasises to prove her point may not even be taken by her but documents the time and place thus becomes part of the larger work. This is seen in *The Striptease* (1979) a work included in *Double Game* where the

Calle is the subject of the photographs taken by a friend rather than the photographer [Figure 2.4]. These photographs are then installed around the text. In using photography like this Calle draws attention to the paradox that is photography, as identified by Roland Barthes, and builds up the paradox of identity that is Sophie Calle.⁸

Barthes in his essay 'The Photographic Message', first published in *Image-Music-Text* (1978), considers the press photograph as a charged medium. The photograph in this form is always attached to some form of text; the caption or article. This means the message is formed through two different structures which combine to make up the substance of the message. The photographic image used in this way obtains a special status and is “never an “artistic” photograph” it is, however, an image without a code.⁹ The idea that it is “without a code” or that the image is purely a factual source is what gives the press photograph its paradoxical power. It is in combination with the article that the code becomes clear herein lies the paradox of a message portrayed with and without a code. This is not to say that the image has not been carefully crafted, chosen and treated according to ideological norms but that at its initial encounter it is simply a descriptive unit for the text that it accompanies. Calle calls upon this type of carefully chosen photographic image, in combination with the text that she presents, to ground her work in reality.

These typical elements of Calle's work are seen in *No Sex Last Night* a 35mm film documenting a trip across America, from New York to Oakland, in collaboration with her, then partner, artist Greg Shephard [Figure 2.5]. The film centres around the breaking down of Calle's and Shephard's relationship, which was already failing before they embarked on the road-trip. Shephard and Calle both recorded the trip narrating their personal thoughts into their camera rather than dealing with their frustrations verbally to each other [Figure 2.6]. Calle speaks to the camera in French which Shephard does not understand, while Shephard keeps his narration private through whispering in English to the camera. The footage from both cameras was then spliced together to produce the film. The title comes from Calle filming the bed they slept in each night and recording the result “no sex last night” the one night this changes to the affirmative is the night of their impromptu marriage when they reach Las Vegas [Figure 2.7]. In the video release of *No Sex Last Night* the title is changed to *Double Blind*. This title invokes the dualistic reality of the film produced by two artists and draws attention back to the film being a collaboration. The film painstakingly draws attention to the

differences between Shephard's reasons for doing the film and Calle's reasons; or as Robert Beck puts it the collaborating artists “drive cross-country at cross purposes- her aim is to marry him, his aim is to make a movie.”¹⁰

The medium of film ensures a more compact unchangeable work compared to the installation pieces, made of photography and text, where the various components can be altered to the installation space, as seen in this installation shot of *The Shadow* (1981) [Figure 2.8]. *No Sex Last Night* unlike other works by Calle such as *Double Game* or *The Blind* is set to the finite medium of film. Film carries with it a fixed time period that the work can be experienced in. This temporal notion in art is an important element in Calle's work, it contains both the notion of the viewer's experience of the work and the initial performance of the work. For *No Sex Last Night* it seems these two experiences come close with the viewer given a voyeuristic window to the “real event”. Though as Calle stresses in an interview with Louise Neri, “we filmed 60 hours; of those 60 hours we chose just 90 minutes. We could have made 20 movies, all saying different, even opposing things.”¹¹ It would seem through the inherent properties of film this work is just as connected to the literary elements within Calle's work through the editing process of what is included and what is left out. *No Sex Last Night* is also recorded through still images in *Mas tu vue* and the text narrative of the film is narrated and emphasised through the subtitles for Calle's French in the English production and the subtitles for Shephard's English in the French production. Through this we can see Calle treating the medium of film in a similar style to any of her photographically based works by “captioning” the film with subtitles.

The work centres around a performance piece, the act of the road trip, and the relationship between Calle and Shephard [Figure 2.9]. The work then shown as an installation then invites the viewer to become a voyeur to the very intimate relationship they are being shown, the viewer is invited to witness the very intimate details of the relationship. They are privy to the inner thoughts of the two subjects; the intimate details they have both chosen to portray in the editing process such as Greg's physical and emotional response to the marriage “Just the fact that we were married ... made me want to take you. And not for one second did I want to ask, or need to ask, or feel I should ask ...”¹² The audience is shown the breaking down of a relationship something which is usually dealt with privately rather than shown publicly and freely by those involved. They are over saturated by the information given the viewer is given the gods eye view so to

speak they are privy to both sides of the story. This over saturation is what Krauss discusses as the paradox of Calle's work. The emotion is intensified rather than sentimentalised by the raw way in which they are analytically privy to information. *No Sex Last Night* takes on two part structure interconnected within the act of filming as part of the performance which is narrated autobiographically as the road trip proceeds and in the second part through the editing process of what is discarded and what is included in the final product.

Double Game is also the product of a collaboration, or social interaction, however, between Calle and the American author Paul Auster; an acquaintance rather than a lover. The work is a much less personal work than *No Sex Last Night* but no less self involved. Calle was prompted to create the work when Auster included a character based on Calle, Maria, in his novel *Leviathan* (1992). The novel prompted Calle to produce a three part work that was published in separate volumes, then later as on complete work under the title *Double Game* [Figure 2.10]. I will be mainly focussing, for this discussion, on the final conception of the work in the 1999 *Actes Sud* publication, however, the work has also been exhibited as an installation piece, for example, in the Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, 2000 and in the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art from May 27 2001 to April 2002.

The work is based around the idea of the ability to intermingle fact and fiction in literature and art. The work almost reads as a case study of how to produce a work of visual autofiction. Its three parts consist of Calle becoming the character Maria, Maria becoming Calle, and the third step Calle following out a set of instructions given by Auster printed as *The Gotham Handbook* (1994) or as Calle describes it 'how to try to become a character out of a novel'.¹³ For part one to become Maria, Calle enacts, with some minor adjustments, all the works attributed to Maria that were not her own works, thereby making them her own works. Part two is simply a collection in book form of a number of Calle's own works described by Auster as being Maria's in the book. *The Gotham Handbook* sees Calle travel to New York City and live by a set of rules outlined by Auster. These rules have Calle taking a public space in New York, a phone booth, beautifying and caring for the spot, and have Calle offering cigarettes and sandwiches to random people, smiling and talking to strangers.

The physical production of *Double Game* has been manifested in many ways. It has been published in three part book format, displayed as an installation and finally as the complete volume in the *Actes Sud*

publication. Each method of display has a slightly different conception of the work. But both formats, installation and artist books, are typical methodological types of display for Calle. They both contain the ability to effectively convey what Calle in *Unfinished* (1989-2003) states as essential to her work “image and text.”¹⁴

The text that Calle uses directs the viewer in how they should experience or understand what they are viewing. This text conveys the conceptual ideals behind the work but is itself very much part of the work itself drawing attention to the two part structure of Calle's work. The text forms a clinical style narrative that lays out what Calle describes as her “rule of the game” and reports what happened during the documented event.¹⁵ Calle's use of narrative in *Double Game* work complexly draws upon many of her previous works by simply including these works in part two. Part one introduces the works as they are described by Auster with red ink corrections by Calle. These works are then played out by Calle in her typical style, rules, photographs and diary style notation. In this way the works become works within a work within a work. This is what Krauss and De Bloois describe as invagination. As described by Jacques Derrida, invagination is the systematic folding of one narrative into another.

At its very outset, Auster's novel, as Krauss identifies, is itself a product of invagination. In the book the narrator describes the writing of a book itself called *Leviathan* by a character in the book. Auster extends his gratitude to Calle in the opening pages of the book for allowing him to use elements of her in the character Maria he writes: “The author extends special thanks to Sophie Calle for permission to mingle fact with fiction.”¹⁶ Calle as we know takes this invagination one step further in her attempt to intermingle fact and fiction by becoming the character Maria and having Maria become Calle. The narrative of *Double Game* is told from the point of view of Calle as artist. The entire text is internally focalised through Calle but at the same time externally focalised on Calle as Maria.¹⁷ Through introducing a character that she is becoming, or by blurring the boundaries of fact and fiction, Calle creates a narrative structure that playfully acknowledges the socially constructed nature of art.

In 1986 Calle created a very simple, but startlingly effective, work based around impressions of beauty from people who were born blind. The work, called *The Blind*, was exhibited in installation form and later reproduced, through installation photographs, in the book *M'as tu vue* (2003). *The Blind* is an example

of Calle creating art to be viewed in the installation or book format. She creates a very simple situation as she sets out “I met people who were born blind. Who had never seen. I asked them what their image of beauty was.”¹⁸ This is her rule of the game.

In the narrative of *The Blind* Calle takes a different stance to many of her more self involved works. After characteristically setting out the rule of the game she leaves the narrative to the subjects of the work. In putting the exhibition together in this way she becomes as Christine Marcel puts it a surrogate author, “she lets her interviewees talk and also appropriates their writings.”¹⁹ Calle is ever present as the author despite the words being written by others. This is the effect of “visual autofiction”; Calle folds their narratives subjectively into her own narrative. Calle combines three framed pieces for each person interviewed, a front on cropped portrait of the person, their answer framed and a photo provided by Calle of the idea of beauty as interpreted by Calle through their words. Out of all the people interview it is interesting to note that most choose to describe beauty through a visual format, one even describing beauty as the colour green [Figure 2.11].

Another work that presents a deviation from Calle's three main physical elements is *The Birthday Ceremony*. In it Calle uses objects rather than photographs as the visual event documenting element in her work. Also less prevalent in *The Birthday Ceremony* is Calle's use of narrative. Text is limited to the set up of the project and to lists of items within the glass display cabinets [Figure 2.12]. However, the work is still reliant upon the text for meaning without it the work is simply a collection of diverse objects inside a display case. The work is the documentation of Calle's birthday ceremony. For each birthday Calle would invite a set number of guests correlating to her age that year to a dinner party. Each present that was bought was then encased in a glass display case and exhibited as part of the evolving work *The Birthday Ceremony*. The work became notorious because of the people who were invited to the ceremony often other artists and writers. It has inspired literature in the form of *The Mystery Guest* by Gregoire Bouillier. Bouillier was a guest to one of Calle's birthday dinners. *The Birthday Ceremony* selectively documents, in gift form, the performance of Calle's birthday diner parties. As well as being displayed as an installation it was included in *Double Game*. *The Birthday Ceremony* provides a useful counter example of how Calle's usual strategy can be adapted.

In *No Sex Last Night* the medium of film is treated like photography and narrative within any other

Calle work. The image is captioned by subtitles and the narrative is just as carefully presented through the editing process as if Calle had written it, in her simple precise style, herself rather than in collaboration and while filming with Greg Shephard. Film however does have a temporal limit in its installation that photography and text do not. The work consists of an initial performance, which is self consciously documented, analysed and exhibited as an installation. *Double Game* is also a collaboration and the relationship between the two artist's, as in *No Sex Last Night*, sets the tone for the work. Photography is used in a documentary style as a prop for the text that describes the initial performance that the photographs document. It was produced as a literary work but also installed in various fluid conceptions. In *The Blind* photographs are more clearly used as props by the inclusion of a frame around the text which the photographs illustrate. These photographs illustrate particular concepts of beauty but do not attempt to beautify the subject matter. The research the act of asking the blind people could be seen as the initial performance of the work that is documented.

In *The Birthday Ceremony* objects rather than photographs complete the visual element in Calle's work. This visual element is supported by a list of objects inside the glass exhibition case. There is a “rule of the game” text also displayed and remarks by Calle but the objects, the visual presence, unusually for Calle's work, take precedence. This is possibly because these physical objects were part of the initial performance and in that what was an evolving performance with each additional birthday. In the act of evolving Calle could not take on the rigorous second part analysis that she attaches to much of her work.

From this discussion of *No Sex Last Night*, *Double Game*, *The Blind* and *The Birthday Ceremony* certain trends in the way that Calle uses the three identified elements of photography, narrative and installation can be seen. This is in the way the work takes on a two important components. Calle displays works that document a performance. This performance is a step in the work which is then analysed and documented by Calle. This documentation is carefully chosen and displayed as an installation of the initial performance. This performance is not open to viewing but forms an important part of the make up of the work.

Rosalind Krauss identifies with Calle's use of analysis and documentation techniques specifically in the essay 'Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition' (2006) in which identifies Sophie Calle and

Christian Marclay as postmedium artists. The postmedium, as discussed in Chapter One, revises the issue of medium that Krauss as a critical theorist has had such a complex relationship to. To be participating in the postmedium is to be participating in the avant garde. A postmedium artist is one who pushes the boundaries of art by creating a support or medium through which to explore artistic notions. The idea of the postmedium allows space for the technological developments that are, and have always been, continually stretching and moulding the category of art. Because the idea of medium is so inextricably linked to the traditional categories of artist production, which at some stage were themselves laid down as “new technologies”, Krauss takes the term “technical support”.

The term technical support allows for the inclusion of different mediums within the one technical support but also crucially “welcomes the layered mechanisms of new technologies that make a simple, unitary identification of the work’s physical support impossible.”²⁰ Through this Krauss finds a way to comprehend the recent, often conceptual, developments in artistic production that have moved beyond a physically manifested medium such as Calle's. Krauss is careful to outline in this essay the place of conceptual art in relation to these artists. Conceptual art, Krauss states, is the “contemporary avatar of kitsch.”²¹ The avant garde places itself in opposition to kitsch and thus in opposition to purely conceptual art.

Calle, as Krauss describes it, is a conceptual photographer who borrows from the technique of the “investigative journalist's documentary research” as her self-reflective medium.²² Her work often consists of photographs taken with an intentional lack of artistic skill to highlight their realness, text that sets up the situation and clinically written report like statements detailing sequences of events. Calle explores this medium through repetition and, through this repetition, invagination. Calle's use of invagination in her narratives is, Krauss believes, a self reflective modernist kind of exploration of her technical support. Lifting Calle's work out of conceptual kitsch and into the avant garde. This repetition and self-reflective invagination foregrounds the idea of the work as a construct by Calle as artist. This develops into what Krauss sees as a paradox within Calle's work.

The clinical documentary style of reporting saves Calle's work from becoming overly sentimental and subjective. Much of the initial impetus for her work is failed love affairs or autobiographical events which could easily become sentimentally convoluted such as in *No Sex Last Night*. Calle explores at a basic

level her own feeling of loss or failure but does so in a way that detaches the work from a singular experience. The saturation of documentary style information that Calle provides is, of course, unable to adequately describe the emotion that she explores. Krauss describes that in using this technical support Calle's “work expresses itself as paradox: her medium not only unable to support, but contrived to deaden the feelings she is looking for.”²³ The feelings however are not entirely lost on the viewer and through using this technical support, by drawing attention to the subject in this way, Calle opens a space for the viewer to explore emotions without dictating, through her over saturation, how this should happen. Hence paradoxically Calle heightens the emotional experience of the viewer through clinically deadening the emotion itself.

Krauss places emphasis on the idea of Calle's work being of a documentary style. The notion of documenting implies an element of reality in Calle's work. This element of reality is emphasised in the style of photography used by Calle. The intentional lack of artistic skill in the photographs that are included emphasises the snapshot idea of recording a time and place. This is also seen in *No Sex Last Night* in which Calle and Shephard use simple home camcorders to make a film. Part of Calle's distinctive practice is the idea that she is in some way setting up, documenting or recording real events. Often Calle will emphasise the element of chance, particularly emphasised in her rule of the game, a as a proof of reality, in her work, though we are well aware, and as Barthes draws attention to, the finished product of the work is carefully crafted and edited by Calle. For example in *The Birthday Ceremony* while Calle sets out the rule of the game she leave it to chance as to what the guests might bring as a gift. These moments of chance often happen in the initial stages of the work and are then strategically capitalised on by Calle. She draws focussed attention to multiple realities or points of view as focalised through the artist author Calle. However, is it the event that she is drawing attention to, the conceptual performance that she seems to be documenting and the relationships within this, and between the viewer, that the work relies upon or is it the documentation itself that is the artistic work?

The capitalisation on chance by Calle is discussed also by Luc Sante in the essay 'Sophie Calle's Uncertainty Principle'. Sante argues, more generally that Krauss, that Calle's medium is simply information. A medium that lies in some other dimensional space that sits between cyberspace, the archival document,

reporting and so on. Information as a medium has, Sante believes, a lineage in contemporary art from the Surrealists, to the conceptual artists and has become “a commodity central to the economy of her [Calle's] time.”²⁴ Calle's work parodies the bureaucratic information trade. She relies upon a principle of uncertainty because, as Sante puts it, “It is nearly always inconvenient; it is unproductive and inefficient; it is often dangerous. And that is why it is so beautiful, as Calle repeatedly demonstrates in her work.”²⁵ Calle would lead us to believe that she leaves things open to the possibility of chance. Her open rules of the game ensure that the real time event is subject to certain elements of chance.

Sante identifies a trend across Calle's earlier and later pieces, with the former focussing upon a narrative element and the latter tending towards a more visually based component, He likens Calle's work, in a similar way to Krauss, to an investigative report. The earlier works such as *Suite Venitienne* (1979) and *Sleepers* (1979) being prime examples of the more narrative focussed reports and *The Blind* and *Ghosts* being examples of the more visual “indetkit sketch”.²⁶ I believe what Sante is addressing here is more of a division between subject matter than a period trend as more recent works by Calle have just as much report focussed narrative drive such as *Exquisite Pain* and *Take Care of Yourself* (2007).²⁷ Sante's acknowledges language as the key element in Calle's work. His thought experiment of someone recreating Calle's work from only a description is poignant “it is possible that one might imagine its theme to be the poverty of language, or of image, the insufficiency of secondhand experience ... her work continually stresses the beauty of imprecision, the poetry of gaps and lapses.”²⁸

Another key thinker who discusses Calle's strategies of production and in particular the element of chance is Nicholas Bourriaud in his 1998 text *Relational Aesthetics*.²⁹ *Relational Aesthetics* focusses on a trend in art of creating situations, and renewed emphasis on human interaction, stemming, he believes from developments in art reacting to societal changes seen over the past century. Bourriaud discusses the development of a relational form of art which focusses on a public interaction between artist and audience or that takes “as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space.”³⁰ One of the main changes in the past century has been urbanisation, which has changed the way we interact with public and private spaces. Calle's work typically plays with ideas of what is private and what is public. Often she works to break down or explore

human experience, or emotion, methodologically in a quasi scientific documentary style.

Bourriaud unlike Krauss and Sante focusses on the physical performance of the work over the analytical outcome. He identifies Calle as an example of relational aesthetics under the heading of “Conviviality and encounters”.³¹ It is her reliance on chance that Bourriaud focusses on, “her encounters with strangers: she follows a passer-by, searches hotel rooms after getting a job as a chamber maid, asks blind people how they define beauty, and then, after the event, formalizes the biographical experiments that led her to “collaborate” with the people she met.”³² This element of chance is carefully constructed by Calle. While there may be chance encounters and situations that prompt the artwork, or are capitalised upon in the performance of the work, the later display of the work is highly edited for our viewing. This is where we begin to see the two part structure to Calle's work. Within Bourriaud's theory Calle's medium is conceptual rather than concrete and based around which technique is best for conveying the relational experience had by Calle and the participants and later by the viewers. For Krauss on the other hand the work is elevated beyond a conceptual work through its exploration of the technical support used by Calle.

This engages the question of where is the art in Calle's work, is it the point at which she is playing the game, performing the work, or is it simply the display of the work in a gallery? If the point at which Calle is being followed or interviewing people is the work or the work simply is the situation in a conceptual sense then Bourriaud's theory is most relevant. If, however, the work is focussed on the display in the gallery, possibly including but not necessarily the later publications, then Krauss's discussion of the documentary photography journalist is most pertinent. To gain a more comprehensive understanding it is pertinent to consider Calle's work in both situations, they are not mutually exclusive, with the initial set up of the work impacting on the later display. Both the conceptual event and the exploration of Calle's technical support are necessary elements to the production of her work and form a dual output within each work, the performance and the documentation.

Calle herself places such emphasis on the display and on the text that accompanies the work that it is obvious she is interested in more than just the relational aspect of the work; despite her conceptual techniques she is very much concerned with the visual outcome of the work and is particularly invested in the narrative accompanying the visual elements. The later display and in particular the books that are

produced are obviously the most publicly accessible element of, the constant exhibitionist, Calle's work though it is in the tension between the viewer/artist relationship, this private world turned out for public display, that Calle's work relies on. However, Calle's use of narrative, as Krauss identifies, more than simply a melding of an information medium as Sante argues, that is vital to the completion of her works. It is the “text that won't let go of me” as she identifies in *Unfinished* (2003).³³

A movement that Calle herself aligns her own strategies with is the French literary movement of autofiction.³⁴ As Olivier Rolin puts it “If anyone makes and weaves the silk of fiction using herself as the basis, it's her.”³⁵ Autofiction is a term used in literary theory for a style paradoxically conflating the genres of autobiography and fiction. It is a much contested field. The term was coined by Serge Doubrovsky on the back cover of his novel *Fils* (1977). Autofiction has expanded into contemporary artistic practice, this development and the term of “visual autofiction” is traced by Joost de Bloois in the article “The artists formerly known as...or, the loose end of conceptual art and the possibilities of 'visual autofiction'” (November 2007).³⁶ Bloois believes that the autofiction had in its conception close ties to the practice of conceptual art. In his article Bloois discusses the term “visual autofiction” as addressing ideas of authorship and self-criticism which are central to contemporary practice, his argument follows that documentary photography is itself an autofictional strategy leading off from conceptual art. Autofiction opens up a viable field for critique within the context of the postmedium. It allows the visual artist a stance from which to explore notions of the self, truth and fictionalization.

Autofiction is drawn upon by Krauss in her discussion of Calle's work as part of the postmedium condition.³⁷ Specifically in Krauss's use of the term “invagination”. Derrida as a literary theorist has contributed this term to the field of autofiction. As de Bloois discusses invagination comes from an uncertainty of authorship, ‘this principle of uncertainty affects the narrating voice in such a manner that we are left with a folding of relentless narrative voices and points of view; thus resulting in invagination.’³⁸ The systematic folding in of narrative and points of view is a strategy which draws attention to the central role of identity in Calle's work.

De Bloois argues that documentary photography is a key strategy for visual autofiction. In the same way that conceptual artists took up photography as the logical method for the documentation of conceptual

art performance they have moved to narrative as the logical companion to photography. Autofiction applies itself particularly well to the expanded field of art, which has taken, as we see with Calle's work, text as an artistic medium. The use of photography to document a performance is ironic, or as de Boois puts it, 'the uniqueness of the performance is simultaneously attested and expropriated by the use of photography as documentary evidence.'³⁹ Michael Newman calls this the “double bind” of documentary photography. Interestingly “Double Blind” is the alternative title for the work *No Sex Last Night*.

The narrative of *No Sex Last Night* uses the auto-fictional strategy of invagination with the story folding in upon itself. The two stories told at the same time, within the same trip, through differing voices, each going through the same process of loss. The final product has each story playing off against each other. Both narratives play off one another and becoming one larger narrative for the film. This use of narration plays with ideas of authorship, both Calle and Shephard share the narration. In doing so they emphasise the point of view issue at the heart of auto-fiction. Like the snapshot photography Calle often uses we take the home-made cam cording as proof of authenticity.

Through a discussion of the different ways theorists have attempted to come to terms with Calle's particular use of medium, key components of her work emerge. For Krauss the documentary relationship between image and text is what elevates and defines Calle's work, for Sante it is the uncertainty that Calle's work leaves itself open to by using a information based medium in which language is the key, Bourriaud on the other hand, explores Calle's work not from a narrative or language perspective but from the initial performance on which the documentary is based. Calle's work can be analysed from two perspectives, the performance based aspect and the more documentary style final product, however, the driving force behind Calle's work is an auto-fictional self conscious narrative that she is trying to create. The most important element in Calle's work as concluded in chapter one is the identity of Calle as artist. Calle's work is typically displayed in installation and book format and what they contain, namely looking at her style of photography and use of text. As a medium Calle manipulates information particularly but not exclusively in a documentary style. She borrows from elements of auto-fiction but includes an important illustrative visual component to her work. For Calle medium is a means to an end that has become increasingly important to the way she thinks about her work.

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- 1 *No Sex Last Night* (35mm film)is also published in video under the title *Double Blind* (1992).
 - 2 For more on the burgeoning popularity of Calle's work due to *No Sex Last Night* see Christine Marcel, 'The Author Issue in the Work of Sophie Calle. *Unfinished*' in *Sophie Calle: Mas tu vue*, (2003), p. 17.
 - 3 For more on Sophie Calle and Walter Benjamin see Chris Townsend, 'Knowledge as Spectacle' in *Art Monthly*, No. 322, December-January 2008-2009, p. 13.
 - 4 Walter Benjamin, 'Extracts from *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*' in *The Photography Reader*, Wells, L. (Ed.), Routledge: London, (2003), p. 46.
 - 5 These books are *Des Histories Vraies* (1994), *L'erouv de Jerusalem* (1996), *Doubles-Jeux* (1998), *L'Absence* (2000), *Les Dormeurs* (2001), *Des Histories Vraies + Dix* (2002), *Douleur Exquise* (2003), *En Finir* (2005) and *Prenez Soins de Vous* (2007).
 - 6 Christine Marcel, 'The Author Issue in the Work of Sophie Calle. *Unfinished*' in *Sophie Calle: Mas tu vue*, (2003), p. 21.
 - 7 Autofiction is further discussed on page 44.
 - 8 Specifically press photography. Roland Barthes, 'The Photographic Message' in *Barthes Reader*, Susan Sontag (Ed.), Hill and Wang: New York, (1982), pp.194-210.
 - 9 *Ibid*, p.197.
 - 10 Robert Beck, 'Paranoia by the Dashboard Light: Sophie Calle's and Gregory Shephard's *Double Blind*' in *Parkett*, no. 36, 1993, p. 109.
 - 11 Sophie Calle as quoted in a conversation with Louise Neri, 'Sophie Calle' in *Interview Magazine*, <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/sophie-calle/> accessed May 30 2009.
 - 12 Greg Shephard as quoted by Robert Beck in 'Paranoia by the Dashboard Light: Sophie Calle's and Gregory Shephard's *Double Blind*' in *Parkett*, no. 36, 1993, pp. 111-112.
 - 13 Sophie Calle, *Double Game* Violette Editions: London, 1999, p. iii.
 - 14 Sophie Calle, *Mas tu vue*, 2003.
 - 15 Sophie Calle as quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, 'Paper Tigress' in *Mas tu vue*, (2003) p. 29.
 - 16 Paul Auster, *Leviathan*, New York: Viking, 1992, p. 2.
 - 17 Gerard Genette's idea of point of view in a story revises traditional thinking by insisting on delineating between the mood and voice of the narrator thus the difference between narration and focalization. How is the narrator depicting what is told and in what voice. Further to this Genette identifies a difference between “internal focalization”, where the narrative is focused though the consciousness of a character and “external focalization” where the narrative is focused on a character rather than through them. Gerard Genette *Narrative Discourse*, (Trans.) Jane E Lewin, Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1980, pp. 10-11.
 - 18 Detail from *The Blind* as published by Christine Marcel (ed), *Sophie Calle: Mas tu vue*, (2003) p. 377.
 - 19 Christine Marcel, 'The Author Issue in the Work of Sophie Calle. *Unfinished*' in *Sophie Calle: Mas tu vue*, (2003), p. 27.
 - 20 Rosalind Krauss, 'Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition' in *October*, No. 116, Spring 2006, p. 56.
 - 21 She goes on to quote Clement Greenberg as to her notion of kitsch “Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times.” quoted in *Ibid*, p. 58.
 - 22 *Ibid*, p. 59.
 - 23 *Ibid*, p. 62.
 - 24 Luc Sante, 'Sophie Calle's Uncertainty Principle' in *Parkett*, no. 36, 1993, p.72.
 - 25 *Ibid*, p.78.
 - 26 *Ibid*.
 - 27 Though it could perhaps be argued that later work has seen her revise this narrative focus while combining this with a larger visual display as seen in works such as *Take Care of Yourself* and *M'as tu vue* (2003). Though both of these projects were for major institutions so the trend could possibly be viewed as economic success through bigger shows.
 - 28 Luc Sante, 'Sophie Calle's Uncertainty Principle' in *Parkett*, no. 36, 1993, p.78.
 - 29 English edition published in 2002.
 - 30 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon : Les presses du réel, 2002, p. 14.
 - 31 *Ibid*, p. 30.
 - 32 *Ibid*.

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- 33 Christine Marcel, 'The Author Issue in the Work of Sophie Calle. *Unfinished*' in *Sophie Calle: Mas tu vue*, (2003), p. 24-5.
- 34 As Olivier Rolin informally quotes from a night out with Calle: “I found myself saying how little interest I had in the so-called “auto-fiction” vein in contemporary French literature. SC looked upset and a bit shocked: “but that's what I do”. And it is true and indisputable, but I'd forgotten.” from Olivier Rolin 'Beet, Alfalfa, etc.' in *Sophie Calle: Mas tu vue*, (2003), p. 138.
- 35 Ibid, p. 138.
- 36 Joost de Blooiss, 'The artists formerly known as...or, the loose end of conceptual art and the possibilities of 'visual autofiction' in *Image and Narrative*, Issue 19, November 2007, <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/autofiction/debloois.htm> , accessed February 12 2009.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Derrida refers to this as “re-marking”. Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.



Figure 2.1 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Exquisite Pain*, 2003, Sophie Calle, *Exquisite Pain*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005, p. 211.



Figure 2.2 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Ghosts*, 1989, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 397.



Figure 2.3 **Sophie Calle**, *Les Poissons* from *The Blind*, 1986, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 380.



Figure 2.4 Sophie Calle, detail from *The Striptease*, 1979, Sophie Calle and Paul Auster *Double Game*, London: Violette Editions, 1999.

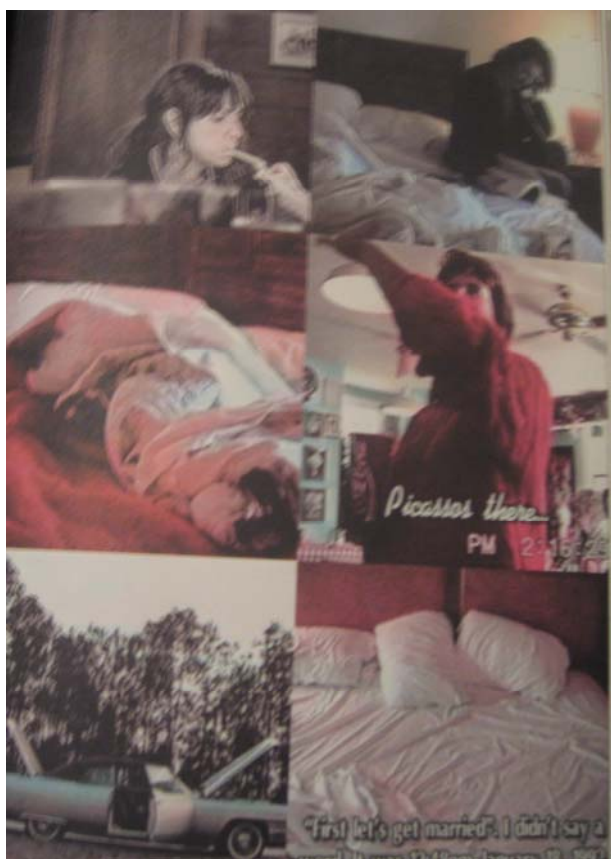


Figure 2.5 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *No Sex Last Night*, 1992, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 330.



Figure 2.6 **Sophie Calle**, still from *No Sex Last Night*, 1992, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 332.



Figure 2.7 **Sophie Calle**, still from *No Sex Last Night*, 1992, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 334.

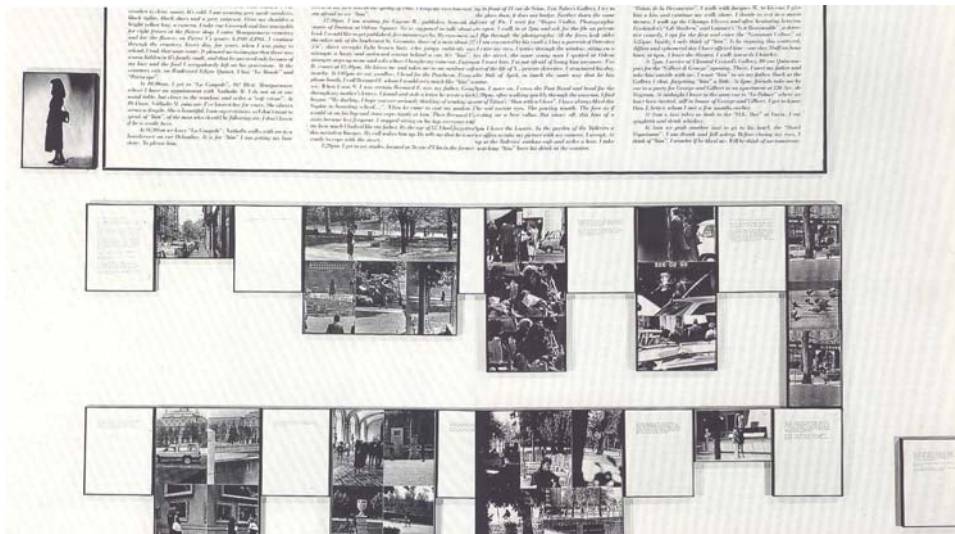


Figure 2.8 **Sophie Calle**, installation view *The Shadow*, 1981, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 101.



Figure 2.9 **Sophie Calle**, still from *No Sex Last Night*, 1992, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 329.



Figure 2.10 **Sophie Calle and Paul Auster**, *Double Game*, London: Violette Editions, 1999.



Figure 2.11 **Sophie Calle**, *Le Vert* from *The Blind*, 1986, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 383.



Figure 2.12 **Sophie Calle**, *The Birthday Ceremony*, 1980-1993, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 263.



Figure 2.13 **Sophie Calle**, *The Birthday Ceremony*, 1980-1993, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 269.

Chapter Three:

Psychoanalytic Themes of Transgression, Loss and Mourning in the Work of Sophie Calle.

Calle's work is a psychological study of the self. As seen in the previous two chapters a discussion of Calle's place in critical context and her strategies of artistic production are difficult to separate from a discussion about Calle's personal life. Because of this her autofictional work lends itself particularly well to psychoanalytic readings. Calle's use of real life events, often mixed in with her stories of others or embellished towards a particular subjective point of view, makes an interesting case study for psychologists. Calle's use of subject matter is intimately tied into the process of working and display. This subject matter or the impetus for the initial production of a work often centres, but not exclusively, around moments pulled from Calle's own life. While the truth of these moments can be doubted as being truly autobiographical or fictional, the psychological picture she chooses to provide the audience with is just as illuminating. Even if it is simply what she wants her audience to believe.

Within Calle's work certain themes underlie the choice of subject matter for a work. She is an exhibitionist whose work is intimately tied to her personal life. Central to Calle's work is a personal reliance on ideas of power, control and subversion. Where as chapter two examined the medium and techniques that Calle uses to display and convey her work to her audience, will consider the psychoanalytic themes that are explored within Calle's work. In this chapter I will also touch on the notions of identity, subversion and seduction, as addressed in chapter one, in relation to the autofictional and internal subject matter of Calle's work.

Calle's engagement with psychoanalytic ideas is conscious. Her work is of a notoriously autobiographical nature. I will use the works *Exquisite Pain* (2003), *Take Care of Yourself* (2007) and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* (1998) to explore the ideas raised by Leader, Van Zuylen and Rugg. Comparatively many similar issues could be raised about the work of Tracey Emin. Both artists deal with of an autofictional subject matter, psychoanalytic ideas and sexuality, however, Calle's treatment of these issues and outcome is very different to Emin's. Calle's work, I argue, self consciously reflects psychoanalytic concepts, however, this is not to say that Calle is being insincere in her work. For the same reasons we find

psychoanalysis so interesting and penetrating we find Calle's work engaging.

Psychoanalysis is a contested field, as Sigmund Freud the father of Psychoanalysis puts it, psychoanalytic theories all stem from that “concerning what we call our psyche or mental life: firstly, its bodily organ and scene of action, the brain (or nervous system), and secondly, our acts of consciousness, which are immediate data and cannot be more fully explained by any kind of description.”¹ Calle's work appeals to those inner notions of our psyche, those that are not able to be explained by science, and to fictive universal notions those which we would like to believe. Calle's use of language in her work as both descriptive and analytic plays into psychoanalytic ideas of control, rules and desire. As Psychologist Elizabeth Wright notes, “Through language, desire becomes subject to rules, yet this language cannot define the body's experience accurately.”² Calle's work, in a similar way to psychoanalysis, attempts to explore, in a form mimicking scientific experiments, the unknown of human behaviour.

Calle's work consists of a systematic investigation into the emotional or psychological behaviour of the subjects of her work. Calle's work focusses on loss, mourning, failure and journeys. Within these topics Calle plays out some of the essential elements speaking to an underlying humanity studied in psychoanalysis. She is aware of this link as is seen in Judith Rugg's discussion of *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* (1999). Calle's use of language engages her work with psychoanalytic theory. Her favoured subject is her own experiences which are often recycled from work to work. As Yve-Alain Bois describes it Calle has an inventoried past it is as if she has mentally filed away moments from her life to be called upon when needed in a work.³ Calle uses her art as a therapeutic tool for dealing with loss and failure. She does not create work around what she considers as happy situations “I live happy events and I exploit unhappy ones.”⁴

Psychologist Darian Leader discusses Calle's work as connecting to an idea of a universal in art. He acknowledges that this is simply a connection to the idea or possibility of the universal rather than advocating the universal as truth. Art, Leader argues, does not expect the viewer to experience the same emotion that is being displayed, rather the work expresses something that the viewer is unable to express. As Leader puts it “What no one can understand about my pain, someone can express in such a way that I can recognize myself in what I cannot share.”⁵ This expression in Calle's work is most clear in her works dealing with mourning and loss.

Calle's work is described by Leader as being typical of a psychoanalytic process of mourning. He believes she manages to bridge a gap between private and public dialogues of mourning. In a private dialogue of mourning representations of the lost one are repeated to the point of exhaustion. In public dialogues of mourning an experience is shared and taken on by the spectator. Leader argues that an artist can display the universal nature of what a mourner feels, this is to say that they do not display the same feeling that the viewer has but, that they display the failure to communicate that which cannot be shared.

This notion of a universal, at once implied and denied, is interesting in relation to Krauss's discussion of the paradox in Calle's work. For Krauss the emotion is intensified by the over saturation of media a deadening of the feeling and the realisation of the inability to wholly describe that emotion. The over investigation of the “technical support” is related to a kind of modernist medium specificity. However, the logical exploration of this support is what leads to the deadening of what she is attempting to do. Which in turn paradoxically intensifies the experience. Leader's discussion also contains a modernist element through the concept, and also the denial of, a universal that lends power to Calle's work. The viewer is not expected to feel Calle's pain but to realise their own experience through the work. Through this, as discussed in chapter one, Calle's work engages with De Duve's “nous voici” category of art which speaks to us all, the “we” of humanity.

In the work *Exquisite Pain* (2003) Calle provides an example of the Freudian process of mourning. Freud conceived that in a private model of mourning the object of mourning is run through and accessed from all its different angles until it is exhausted. The effect of this repetition and description is the gradual detachment of these memories from the libido. The work, documenting Calle's most painful experience at the time, is about her breakup with a lover. In the work she repeats ninety-eight times what happened that night, however, each description is different. Calle supplements her own stories by comparing them with those of strangers [Figure 3.1]. The final day simply contains the word “enough”, signalling that Calle has exhausted the event. Calle is aware of what she is doing, she states “This exchange would stop when I had told my story to death, or when I had relativized my pain in relation to other people's.”⁶

In comparing her own story, with other people's moments of suffering, Calle develops a way of detaching and understanding her own suffering as being simply a story. Calle's descriptions, Leader notes,

betray a waning of libidinal charge, she begins to use language such as “nothing special” and “an ordinary story”. Through her descriptions Calle displays a private Freudian model of mourning. She is, as she describes it, relativising her pain. Her use of this as art and the juxtaposition of others' stories places Calle's private experience of mourning within a public dialogue of mourning. In Calle's installation the page like views of opposing stories mimic a private diary form that the work is also published in [Figure 3.2], but spread open and enlarged for a public airing [Figure 3.3]. Leader associates this public model with Freud's description of hysterical identification.

Hysterical identification engages with the idea that it is not necessary to be close to the person being mourned to identify with the mourner. All that is required is an aspiration or shared bond through which to experience the event. Through this, as Leader puts it, “lack becomes an object”.⁷ In her public display of mourning Calle enacts a process detaching herself from the pain and the reality of the event. Calle did not display the work for fifteen years fearing that she may reopen the wound. For Calle the project was a method of working through her own suffering, the display she makes clear was secondary to this. In displaying the work her pain become something tangible, it become art. Through using this Calle prompts the audience to both empathise with her own situation and pertinently to reflect on their own closed experience.

Calle returned to the method used in *Exquisite Pain*, of working through a break up publicly, at the fifty-second Venice Biennale in the work *Take Care of Yourself* (2007). Presented in the French Pavilion *Take Care of Yourself* was a response by Calle to a email sent by a lover breaking up with her [Figure 3.3]. There was no fifteen year gap between the moment of pain and the display of this work. The email was sent on the 24 of April 2004 and the exhibition went up in 2007. The relationship had never been exclusive or in the public eye. However, Calle's response to it was very public and almost immediately so. She was prompted by the writer, who she refers to as G., using the passing turn of phrase “take care of yourself” as the final sentence in the email.⁸ She seized this somewhat cold ending to a relationship by inviting one-hundred and seven women to respond to the letter. Rather than using others' stories as a sounding board, as in *Exquisite Pain*, Calle asked the women as chosen by profession to interpret her letter [Figure 3.5].

In a stylised Freudian model of private mourning Calle is once again accessing the work from all angles. The letter is translated, critiqued, analysed, acted out, and so on. Ironically and at times spitefully,

G's words are picked apart by the women, Calle makes it clear she is doing exactly what the letter instructed her to, she is mourning the relationship. The letter is even translated into a logic table [Figure 3.6]. Through repetition and analysis Calle distances herself from the reality of the experience; she “takes care of herself” though over saturation. Calle does this in a far more calculated way than in *Exquisite Pain*. In *Take Care of Yourself* Calle does not ask for other's stories but invites *them* to comment on *her* situation. The other becomes her voice.

It is Calle's use of narrative and juxtaposition of text that enables her work to engage with Freudian ideas of mourning. It is also through her use of text that Calle focuses on identity and the ability to disguise this identity. Calle uses her writing as author to put across a particular version of the story. She continually highlights the idea of subjectivity and authorship, though the continual use of personal pronouns in her her writing.⁹ Or through the simple repetition of the event in *Exquisite Pain*; each day a different narrative angle but the same photograph. The photograph of the room in which Calle got the phone call from her lover does not change. Visually the photograph is the static, it is Calle's thought process through the accompanying narrative that changes. Leading up to the moment she receives the phone call are black and white documentary style photographs stamped in red with the number of days until the moment of pain [Figure 3.7].

In *Take Care of Yourself* G. is allowed only what he has written in the letter as it is interpreted and presented by Calle and then passed on to her interpreters. The letter is a constant. This static dialogue from G. is exemplified in the mediation session that Calle attends as part of the project. In an hour long filmed session, Calle, the mediator and the letter standing in for G. are present. The mediator directs questions at the letter which are answered by Calle in reference to the text of the letter. In the session Calle acts out the roles of both victim and perpetrator.

Calle is a strategic mastermind in her works, capitalising on chance occurrences and setting up rules to dictate how the work will play out. However, her work and life, Calle leads us to believe, is subject to the 'decisions' of other people. Or as Leader notes her “very identity is mapped through other people, and the things that happen *in* her life are depicted as things that happen *to* her ... the product of other people's actions and choices.”¹⁰ Through doing this Calle manages to avoid responsibility and authorship while also implying

and reinforcing those very notions.

In *Exquisite Pain* Calle repeats over and over the story of what has happened to her. Each repetition is posited in relation to a story from the Other. Though Calle only physically writes half, it is responses to a question orchestrated and selected by Calle that make up the other half. Calle is the author of half the writing but the mastermind of the entire project. The stories are answering her question, “when did you suffer the most?” As with *Exquisite Pain*, Calle avoids responsibility in *Take Care of Yourself* while also remaining in authorial control. The work is a response to something a man has done to her. However in the text of the letter G. reveals that Calle has placed rules on the relationship, “another rule you laid down at the beginning of our affair”.¹¹ Through his adherence to these rules G. believes he shows how serious he is, he states “I am prepared to bend to your will”.¹² Calle presents a conflicting identity one that is in control and one that is dictated by the decisions of others; she at once asserts and subverts her own authority.

Leader associates Calle's work, in a similar vein to Yve-Alain Bois, as exploring absence and presence. For Leader absence and presence is symbolised, as described by Freud, by a “da” and “fort” a children's game. In the game we witness, Leader writes, “an archaic process of symbolizing the mother's presence and absence. The reel stood for the mother and by making it appear and disappear, the boy was making himself master of a situation over which he could otherwise have little control.”¹³ Freud notes the little boy was registering the emotional process verbally. In Calle's work we see this ability to become attached to the stranger in *Suite Venitienne* then simply turn this attachment off by relinquishing her artistic project. She too is compelled to linguistically register her game. Furthermore she must back up this narrative with physical documentary evidence. It is this compulsion that becomes her art.

Calle's use of her work to distance herself from the pain of reality, and the obsessive techniques she uses, are discussed by Marina Van Zuylen. Van Zuylen believes that Calle and her ritualistic work is a prime example of monomania at work. Monomania is a nineteenth century term, used by psychiatrist Pierre Janet, that has recently been re-evaluated by Van Zuylen. The term refers to the obsessive strategies used, particularly by artists, to “keep the arbitrary out of their lives” and to give structure and perfection to everyday life.¹⁴ Monomania is related to the concepts of fetishism, obsession and hysteria, but is specifically interested in the pursuit of harmony. Calle, Van Zuylen believes, is an example of someone using their art to

effectively deal with this compulsion.

Calle displays a voyeuristic monomania. Her life is dictated by her art, she obsessively creates rituals and rules. Calle follows these rituals to help her control and harmonise her surroundings. Control, as Leader discusses in reference to the little boy's game, is a driving force in Calle's work. By setting up the “rule of the game” Calle relieves herself of responsibility and of any pain, she is able to switch off her attraction and is simply following the rules.¹⁵ Through rules we are given freedom. Without rules there is no concept of freedom as there is nothing to be freed from. Calle states “I like being in control and I like losing control. Obedience to a ritual is a way of making rules and then letting yourself go along with them.”¹⁶ Calle is able to make the rules that she must follow to conversely avoid decision making.

Rules are set up not just as a way of producing art but also as a way of dealing with Calle's day to day life as is revealed by G. in the letter from *Take Care of Yourself*. For Calle they are not just artistic strategies but strategies for living. In the words of Greg Shephard, Calle's collaborator and husband from *No Sex Last Night* (1992), “to be with Calle means being willing to become subject matter because there is no separation between her work and her life. Her art is how she invents her life. It was a choice I had to make-to give up control.”¹⁷ An obsessive need to control and harmonise reality is an outward sign of monomania.

Calle's impulse towards monomania is what Van Zuylen believes prompts her to create art. Calle is successful in her enterprise because, unlike other examples of monomania, because she accepts that life itself is disorderly. Calle uses her art not to find perfection, but to “present life as it is, while at the same time redesigning it as it should be.”¹⁸ By focussing and documenting the small physical details of life Calle acts as if a detective. Her defining work, becoming Maria in *Double Game*, was something, as Bois put it, “she has been working at by *proxy* for years.”¹⁹ As the character in a novel it is the responsibility of the author to guide her actions rather than Calle's choice with unknown outcomes.

Other strategies which Calle uses to achieve the same effect as her detective like investigations are the preservation of objects and/or deferral of an inevitable outcome. In *No Sex Last Night* (1992) the trip is centred around the failing relationship between Calle and Greg Shephard. The work is used as a barrier to this reality. They go on the trip at Calle's request deferring the breakdown of the relationship. Shephard knowing Calle's obsessive tendencies refuses to have sex with Calle during the trip. As Shephard notes,

“Desire is the most important thing for Sophie.”²⁰ Each morning Calle reports to the camera “no sex last night” making the refusal the subject of the work [Figure 3.8]. The work is as Van Zuylen describes it a “staged double-deferral”.²¹ Hence the two titles of the work, the blatant, *No Sex Last Night* and for the video release, the appropriate, *Double Blind*.

Calle preserves objects as a strategy of control and power. Doing this, Van Zuylen, argues “follows the most basic law of Brechtian anti-narrative.”²² An object once used or consumed loses the power it once had, however, if it is preserved from its original function it can retain its power. For example in *The Birthday Ceremony* (1980-1993) in which Calle places the gifts she receives for her birthday each year in a glass case [Figure 3.9]. The work is of course subject to elaborate rules and combines a ritual birthday dinner with a corresponding amount of guests to Calle's age. However, it is the preservation of these gifts that Van Zuylen focusses on. By taking away the functionality of the gifts Calle is able to preserve not only the object but the power that comes with the birthday gift. Were they to be opened each birthday would be officially past and probably forgotten. By keeping and displaying the gifts in this way Calle is able to control, plan the event and ensure she is not forgotten. The one person who acts outside the game is Calle's mother who gives her gifts that are impractical to keep in a case or that Calle cannot resist using. These presents Calle represents with gift cards.

The Birthday Ceremony also displays the need for Calle to continually reinvent the rules by which she deals with life. She states that the reason for the game was to “relieve myself of this anxiety”, the worry that her birthday would be forgotten.²³ But in the same paragraph outlining the rules she abruptly ends the game with “In 1993, at the age of forty, I put an end to this ritual.”²⁴ Calle uses the rule of the game to deal with life but these rules are not constant. They are constantly changing. Monomania is involved at once in forming an identity while at the same time destroying identity. Calle's projects which she attaches her identity to and creates it from never last for long. There is always an ending a point where as in *Exquisite Pain* she has simply had “enough”.

The need to control and replace one reality with another, Van Zuylen believes, is the impetus for Calle's work. Calle reclaims her life through the chance meetings and investigations into the details of life. Through analysing these moments Calle is therapeutically controlling her reality. While Leader discusses this

therapeutic drive in working through mourning and loss Van Zuylen extends Calle's reliance on control as a therapeutic strategy for living. Calle's own description of photography, one of her key mediums, as “the abuse of power and indiscretion” displays an awareness of this kind of power game.²⁵ The power of the photograph in Calle's work is not one that Van Zuylen discusses but it is also part of Calle's strategy. The image once taken displays a static and controllable reality. One that can be repeated and reprinted or lend authority to a text as visual evidence. It is also the way that Calle's work is documented itself particularly in book form.

Calle's work, as discussed in chapter two, is mainly produced in an installation (or book) format for a gallery space. There are characteristic ways in which she displays her work. Judith Rugg in her article 'Sophie Calle's Appointment at the Freud Museum: intervention or irony?' discusses what happens when Calle is given more than a white cube space to play with. Calle was invited to produce an exhibition for the Freud Museum. The exhibition of Calle's work within a cultural institution such as a museum created a new challenge for Calle.

In *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* Calle juxtaposes her own objects with objects of Freud's in the museum space. She drapes her wedding dress over Freud's famous couch and poses in Freud's coat [Figure 3.10 and 3.11]. In doing this not only is she interacting with the objects of Freud, but she is also intervening with the Museum as cultural institution.²⁶ The museum is set up to achieve two goals in its display, authenticity in displaying the objects used by Freud and to reinforce the hegemonic power of psychoanalysis as centrally important to contemporary Western society. The museum works on two levels, as a domestic interior having been Freud's home and as a cultural institution in its capacity as a museum. It is the viewers participation in the space fulfils the functionality of the space as a museum. The museum has actively invited artists to exhibit at the museum since 1994. Curator James Putnam seized the opportunity for Calle to exhibit when he heard that *Double Game* would be being exhibited at the Camden Arts Centre. *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* was a small side project to this exhibition made up of Calle's personal effects.²⁷

Rugg notes the cultural significance of Calle, as a female artist, to exhibit in the Freud Museum. Freud's theories are known for their masculine dominance. However, the idea of the domestic interior contains a distinctly feminine notion. The space that Calle is given to exhibit in is already a complexly

charged space, unlike the neutral walls of a gallery. Rugg argues that Calle's installation at the Freud Museum created an ironic intervention into the space of the museum both in a physical and intellectual way. This exhibition she concludes creates a hysterical intervention into the Freud Museum. Calle took the place of a patient that could not stop talking. Calle's installation consisted of thirty personal objects of Calle's displayed alongside personal objects of Freud's. Some of Freud's personal effects were brought out specifically for the duration of the exhibition. The exhibition was on display from February to March 1999. Each object was accompanied by a text on a pink placard with a short narrative explaining the significance of each object.

In *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* Calle is not working through a particular problem as she does in *Take Care of Yourself* and *Exquisite Pain*. *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* is an example of Calle creating art for the purpose of display, not therapy or ritual. As was discussed in chapter one and of the work *Unfinished* (2003) Calle finds it difficult to create commissioned works. She cannot simply choose rules to live by there and there is a time and a place or a subject that is preconceived. *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* is interesting because although Calle is not using the work as therapy the topic of the work itself is therapy.

Parts of *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* are found throughout Calle's other artistic projects. The objects and stories used are pulled from the appropriate places to make up *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* and to create the identity that Calle wants to display. Many objects and text are also exhibited under the title *True Stories* (1988-2003). Other elements supplement previous works as tokens of authenticity such as the blond wig from *The Striptease* (1979) and a love letter, addressed to another woman, written by Shephard Calle's partner from *No Sex Last Night*. Rugg writes “In the process of psychoanalysis, it doesn't matter if the ‘stories’ the patient tells about their lives are ‘true’ but their selection and interpretation of ‘events’.”²⁸ There is much to be said through the identity that Calle wants us to see. The placement of these objects undermines the goal of the museum in providing an authentic experience of Freud's house. Calle irreverently drapes a wedding dress across Freud's famous couch and in doing so “de-familiarises the ritual imposed by the Museum on the audience by collapsing the familiar with the surreal.”²⁹

Calle is a patient without symptoms. We know all the intimate details of her life, she litters objects

and story excerpts around the house as if she were in a session with Freud. Calle's little pink placards with the autobiographical narrative are set in a confessional tone. She confesses in the text accompanying a picture of her fake wedding, “I crowned with a fake marriage, the truest story of my life.”³⁰ However, this psychoanalytic session she is part of is without purpose for the viewer; we do not know why or what her symptoms are. Possibly Calle's symptoms are not needed life itself is complex enough. The viewer is set as voyeur to Calle's one sided appointment, as she does in the mediation scene in *Take Care of Yourself*. Calle sees no problem with engaging in a one sided dialogue or with putting the intimate details of her life on display. This dialogue becomes in Freudian terms a hysteric intervention. As Rugg puts it, “Freud considered reminiscences to be a symptom of hysteria.”³¹ Calle's texts are invasive within the museum space and mirror the style of stories told by Freud's patients.

Calle is comfortable with the idea of analysis as is seen in her collaboration with notorious British artist Damien Hirst. Calle's collaboration with Damien Hirst was not on an art work but involved the writing of reciprocal catalogue pieces. After meeting at a party Calle asked Hirst to write her a love letter which he did, though they barely knew each other. He later contacted her asking if she would interview him for the catalogue of his new show. Calle was unable to do this but replied saying he knew what she would ask so to go ahead and do the interview. This “interview” was published and twelve years later Calle called upon Hirst for her own catalogue piece. Hirst responded by sending three psychological forms to be filled out and then analysed by a psychiatrist. This catalogue was produced in 2003 for Calle's exhibition *M'as tu vue* at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. The three forms, T4-02, 02-4T and U4-M-E, were filled out by Calle, a friend and Calle's mother. These forms were then returned to Hirst who then sent them to two psychiatrists to be analysed. The use of these assessment forms and the analysis results, which reveal only as much as the information given in the forms, in the catalogue adds authenticity to the autobiographical details used in the show and the identity that Calle is portraying.

The therapy session Calle presents in *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* deals not with a specific event but many poignant carefully selected moments from Calle's life. Calle is rather creating and adding to an identity. She jumps from when she was fifteen and ordered the dessert “Young Girl's Dream”, a phallic representation using ice cream and a banana, to being thirty and wearing a wedding dress to meet a much

admired man.³² The dessert was exhibited made from plastic so it wouldn't melt on Freud's dining room table and the dress was draped across Freud's couch. The objects that Calle presents rely heavily upon the text for meaning. Without the text this meaning would be concealed. As Rugg explains it through Freudian terms “in ego development the meaning of the penis becomes attached to the aims of seeing and being seen (voyeurism and exhibitionism) and is associated with the phallic phase.”³³ In Freudian theory the visual is proof, the cumulation of Freud's theories in childhood development is the visible presence of a penis or not in determining sexual difference.

Calle disrupts this system of meaning by using images that are dependent upon the text for meaning. The texts that she uses to do this with are intimate and confessional they contain detailed insights into Calle's life. However, they are presented both as banal and conversely charged moments. These are the moments that Calle has chosen to display publicly in Freud's house. They are confessional excerpts from an imaginary appointment forcing the visitors to take on a voyeuristic role. As Rugg explains, “Freud saw voyeurism and exhibitionism as ultimately bound up with each other and ultimately linked through scopophilia to the desire to control.”³⁴ Exhibitionism and voyeurism are key elements to Calle's practice. She is an exhibitionist as she acknowledges in the title of *M'as tu vue* meaning “did you see me?” used particularly by actors drawing attention to themselves and their success. She often makes the audience voyeur to intimate details of her life. Calle is also interested in being the voyeur. In her early formative works she follows people or watches them sleep. Calle's kind of voyeurism is charged with more than simple inquisitiveness, as Rugg describes it it is linked to the need to control through the notion of scopophilia.

The literal Latin translation of scopophilia is “the love of looking”. The term is used in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. It conveys a much stronger form of voyeurism taking on sexual connotations of looking and of the masculine gaze made popular in the 1970s particularly in the discussion of film.³⁵ Often the sexual pleasure that scopophilia describes is linked to the viewing of genital organs. *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* is littered with references to and images of sexual organs, such as the banana and ice cream combination of “a young girls dream”, a nude sketch of Calle slashed with a razor blade and a photograph of Calle's bare breasts. The images and objects that Calle chooses are sexually charged articles.

Calle's work often contains habitual sexual references but these references are, as discussed by Jean

Baudrillard of her early works, in some way detached. Rather than appearing blatantly sexual, even when she is performing in *The Striptease*, Calle in her accompanying text endows the images or events as seductive power play rather than sexual devise. Calle does not present us with sexually raw images or text. Some works maybe explicit in her description such as the inclusion in *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* of the 'The Divorce'. In 'The Divorce' Calle describes an intimate moment between her and her ex-husband Shephard. This ritual in which Calle is allowed to act as a man and take the place of Shephard's arms when he urinates. This event represented by a red bucket was documented by Calle as a condition for signing the divorce papers. What had been a ritual fulfilling Calle's fantasy in which she is a man Calle admits in *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* was “an excuse to put my hand on his sex one last time.”³⁶ After doing this Calle feels free to give Shephard the divorce. This act though sexually charged is also detached.

The detachment in Calle's work comes from her use of rules and ritual. Calle is only adhering to a rule. Once she had preformed the task she was free to move forward with the divorce. The rule of the game gives a reason for the event and ensures Calle remains in control. The moment she is documenting contains an intimate bodily knowledge, however, the accompanying text simply deals with the occurrence in a past tense. Calle dryly states 'this is what happened' in her typical economic way. The need to control, an element of monomania, is central to Calle's production. Power relations between male and female, victim and perpetrator, rules and chance, are constantly played with and subverted by Calle. As Calle herself describes her work “What starts as a moment of madness begins to assume a degree of logic. What at first appears arbitrary, becomes through strength of ritual a necessity.”³⁷

Calle's strategies, particularly her treatment of sexuality in relation to her art is clarified in comparison to another female artist dealing with similar themes from a similar time period, Tracey Emin. Calle, like Tracey Emin, acknowledges her art as being therapeutic. Emin and Calle share many artistic strategies. Both use found objects, photography, writing and installation. Calle in comparison tends to solely use these elements while Emin a trained artist, with a Masters degree in Fine Arts, works in a wider variety of medium including appliqué, neon and drawing. Emin as Calle herself points out is from a later generation of artists than Calle. Emin starting her career as an artist in the late 1980s and being associated with YBAs while Calle was active from the late 1970s onwards. However, Calle has also collaborated in catalogue

pieces with the YBA Damien Hirst and both, Calle and Emin, were to represent their countries at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007, Emin for Britain and Calle for France. Despite the ten year age gap Calle and Emin are two of the leading contemporary female artists for their countries.

Both Calle and Emin share similar artistic strategies. They both tend to use autobiographical narrative as the core element to their work. They both play with subversive notions of identity. Calle produced the work *No Sex Last Night* after road trip through the United States with her partner Greg Shephard. Emin also took a collaborative road trip from San Francisco to New York with her partner stopping to give readings from her book. Within the particular techniques that Calle and Emin have chosen to work in there are similarities in subject choice. For both the bed has played a central role. The bed carries with it notions of interior domesticity and through this of feminine sexuality. Emin's installation exhibition of her bed, *My Bed* (1999), recently slept in is one of her notable works [Figure 3.14]. The installation came complete with condoms and menstrually stained underwear. Many of Calle's works have also featured her bed *Room With a View* (2003) saw her bed being installed at the top of the Eiffel Tower where people were invited to come tell her a story [Figure 3.15]. *Sleepers* (1978) she invited strangers to sleep in her bed and in 1999 Calle's bed was sent to America at the request of Josh Greene to allow him to mourn his relationship in *Journey to California* (2003) [Figure 3.16]. Emin has like Calle cultivated a particular well known artistic identity. While Emin, however, is seen as uninhibited and brash, famously appearing drunk to television interviews, Calle is reserved, obsessive and analytical.

Emin's work is blatantly sexual, raw and confessional. Calle confessionally reels the viewer in, seducing the audience, but not for sexual means. These sexual references are analytic and confessional but in a very different way to Emin. Both Emin and Calle utilise intimate details of their relationships and lives therapeutically in their work but have very different goals in this display. Emin, like Calle, is a true exhibitionist. Calle, however, is comparatively, reserved and prompted by more obsessive monomaniacal impulses. Emin's most notorious work is *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995* (1995). This work consisted of a tent containing the names, sewn into the interior of the tent, of every person whether in a non-sexual or sexual way that Emin had slept with [Figure 3.17]. Unlike Calle, Emin uses a tactile physical object to convey her message. She does not adhere to rules, but like Calle she holds no bars when exhibiting very

intimate details of her life publicly.

Use of language and autofictional techniques are important to both artists' practices. Emin, like Calle, uses her art to investigate emotional ties and uses autobiographical memories as art. This element of autobiographical reality is common to both their production. They also both acknowledge that this reality is a subjective memory and may be different to how others might remember that moment; there is an acknowledgement of fictional overtures. Emin corrects psychologist Geoffrey Beattie in an interview of his use of the word memoirs saying “It wasn't diaries; it was writing ... I don't know much about I don't know much about nature and animals, but I do know about me and my life, so that's what I wrote about.”³⁸ Insisting on the term writing rather than memoirs allows Emin the space to fictionalise aspects of her life while presenting them as truth.

Calle's writing is flat and dry it is not descriptive or emotive even when the events that are being used are painful. This is seen in the repetition of Calle's side of the story in *Exquisite Pain*. Though Calle repeats the story ninety-nine times, each time from a different angle, the core emotion and description never changes. Emin is much more liberal with her memories which like Calle she recycles in different works. This difference because they are emotively told. An example discussed by Beattie, is Emin's description of an event at the seaside when she was eleven years old. The story as Emin conveys it, Beattie notes, changes in her attitude towards who was responsible or who was to blame. In one version of events Emin is the instigator of the sexual encounter that happens with an older man and in another he is at fault for exploiting her vulnerability. This variation of description, for Emin's work, brings up many questions. Is she taking the blame for the event, the molestation, as a form of defence or a way of inciting the public. There could be many reasons. Much of Emin's work takes on this raw energy she talks openly about two abortions that she has had and her rape, or “breaking in”, at age thirteen.³⁹

On the other hand, the events that Calle shows as art are not as raw as this. Calle's work is also often about men that have left her or wronged her, however, these events are past for Calle. Neither is her work as violent as Emin's stories. Calle has had time to work through them. Calle's work is a product of mourning as in *Exquisite Pain* the exhibition did not happen until fifteen years after the event. If the wound is too painful she does not exhibit. Emin uses her art as therapy but with very different outcome. Calle's stories are static.

The investigation has already been done. Calle like Emin may have “several versions of the truth” but Calle's fictionalisation is of identity rather than emotionally charged memories.⁴⁰ The autofictional subject matter and treatment of sexuality seen in comparison to Emin's work displays the way that Calle's work in the light of psychoanalytic theories is very different in its goal and eventual artistic outcome.

Through examining Calle's work in light of psychoanalytic ideas we gain understanding of the processes that lead to the creation of Calle's work. For Darian Leader Calle's work is an example of mourning in all its public and private senses. This use of art as a way of obsessively working through pain is something that Calle does in all her work and as Marina Van Zuylen recognises not simply a part of her artistic strategy but a way of life. In particular a way of controlling and perfecting life through monomania. But Calle's work is more than simply therapeutic. There is a drive from Calle to be seen, *M'as tu vue* but also to look herself. This is the drive to be both an exhibitionist and voyeur. These psychological drives prompted by Calle's obsessive tendencies.

Calle emphasises chance and the actions of others as impetus for her work. However, the scopophilic way that Calle herself looks or empowers her viewers to look plays off the need for control. The rules to the rituals that Calle performs are of her own invention not chance; they are strategies for dealing with chance. The ritualistic nature of Calle's work bestows her work subversively with both power and control as the artist and reliance or submission to rules as the subject. The freedom that Calle is granted through her use of ritual, grants her freedom not only from the rules but also from pain and responsibility for deciding her actions, while subversively retaining her authority as artist. Control, authority and responsibility are decisive themes in the production of Calle's work. Tightly phrased text of concluded events ensure the emotion is not raw but inquisitively broken down and finished or static. Specifically it is Calle's successful use of power and control to subvert authority within her own life that is on exhibition.

1 Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, London: Hogarth Press, 1949, p.1.

2 Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice*, New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 1.

3 Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Paper Tigress' in *M'as tu vue*, (Ed. Christine Marcel), Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 29.

4 Sophie Calle as quoted in Christine Marcel, 'Biographical Interview with Sophie Calle' in *M'as tu vue*, (Ed. Christine Marcel), Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 81.

5 Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008, p. 88.

6 Sophie Calle, 'Exquisite Pain' in *M'as tu vue*, (Ed. Christine Marcel), Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p.

353.

- 7 Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008, p. 91.
- 8 Calle concealed the name and any identifiable details of the writer from the women she sent the letter to. Only seven exceptions, including people such as her mother, knew the identity of the lover. Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself*, (trans.) Charles Renwarden, LeMéjan: Actes Sud, 2007.
- 9 Engaging of course with Roland Barthes famous 'death of the author.
- 10 Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008, p. 152.
- 11 Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself*, (trans.) Charles Renwarden, LeMéjan: Actes Sud, 2007, p. 7.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008, p. 153.
- 14 Marina Van Zuylen, *Monomania*, London: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 1.
- 15 In reference to Michel Leiris Bois discusses “rule of the game” as “A list of forbidden moves, a pronouncement of certain refusals...a professional code of conduct...,an ethics of speech' which is the foundation of an *ars poetica*...as well as a way of life” Yve- Alain Bois, 'The Paper Tigress' in *M'as tu vue*, (Ed. Christine Marcel), Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, pp.33-34.
- 16 Sophie Calle as quoted in Christine Marcel 'Biographical Interview with Sophie Calle' in *M'as tu vue*, (Ed. Christine Marcel), Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 75.
- 17 Greg Shephard quoted in Ginger Danto, 'Sophie the Spy' in *Art News*, 92, no.5, May 1993, p. 103.
- 18 Marina Van Zuylen, *Monomania*, London: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 185.
- 19 Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Paper Tigress' in *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 32.
- 20 With the exception of their wedding night. Marina Van Zuylen, *Monomania*, London: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 183.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Sophie Calle, *Mas tu vue*, (Ed. Christine Marcel), Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 261.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Character Study' in *Artforum*, April, 2000, pp. 128.
- 26 Judith Rugg, 'Sophie Calle's *Appointment* at the Freud Museum: Intervention or Irony?' in *New Practices - New Pedagogies: A Reader* (ed.) Malcolm Miles, Routledge: London, 2005, pp.62-74.
- 27 Sophie Calle, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2005.
- 28 Judith Rugg, 'Sophie Calle's *Appointment* at the Freud Museum: Intervention or Irony?' in *New Practices - New Pedagogies: A Reader* (ed.) Malcolm Miles, Routledge: London, 2005, p. 70.
- 29 Ibid, p. 66.
- 30 Sophie Calle, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2005, p. 65.
- 31 Judith Rugg, 'Sophie Calle's *Appointment* at the Freud Museum: Intervention or Irony?' in *New Practices - New Pedagogies: A Reader* (ed.) Malcolm Miles, Routledge: London, 2005, p. 74.
- 32 Sophie Calle, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2005.
- 33 Judith Rugg, 'Sophie Calle's *Appointment* at the Freud Museum: Intervention or Irony?' in *New Practices - New Pedagogies: A Reader* (ed.) Malcolm Miles, Routledge: London, 2005, p. 68.
- 34 Ibid, p. 67.
- 35 For more on scopophilia and the work *Suite Venitienne* see Katie Clifford, 'Scopophilia, exhibitionism, and the art of Sophie Calle', *Art Criticism*, no.10, 1994, pp. 59-65.
- 36 Sophie Calle, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2005, p. 143.
- 37 Sophie Calle as quoted 'Sophie Calle, Sophie's World' in *Another Magazine*, no. 4, Spring/Summer, 2003, http://www.galerieperrotin.com/artiste .php?id =1&domaine=pressA&nom =Sophie%20Calle&dossier=Sophie_Calle&photo =Sophie_Calle_1.jpg , retrieved 05/14/2008.
- 38 Geoffrey Beattie 'On the Couch With Tracey Emin' in *The Observer* Sunday January 15, 2006, <http://www.tracey-emin.co.uk/emin-articles/on-the-couch-with-traceyemin.html> , accessed 18 February 2009.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.



Figure 3.1 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Exquisite Pain*, 2003, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003.



Figure 3.2 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Exquisite Pain*, 2003, Sophie Calle, *Exquisite Pain*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005, p. 203.



Figure 3.3 **Sophie Calle**, installational view *Exquisite Pain*, 2003, Janet Hand, 'Sophie Calle's Art of Following and Seduction' in *Cultural Geographies*, No. 12, 2005, p. 467.



Figure 3.4 **Sophie Calle**, installational view *Take Care of Yourself*, 2007, French Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2007.



Figure 3.5 **Sophie Calle**, detail 'Head Hunter, Christine Cellier' from *Take Care of Yourself*, 2007, Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself*, (trans.) Charles Renwarden, LeMéjan: Actes Sud, 2007, pp.80-1.

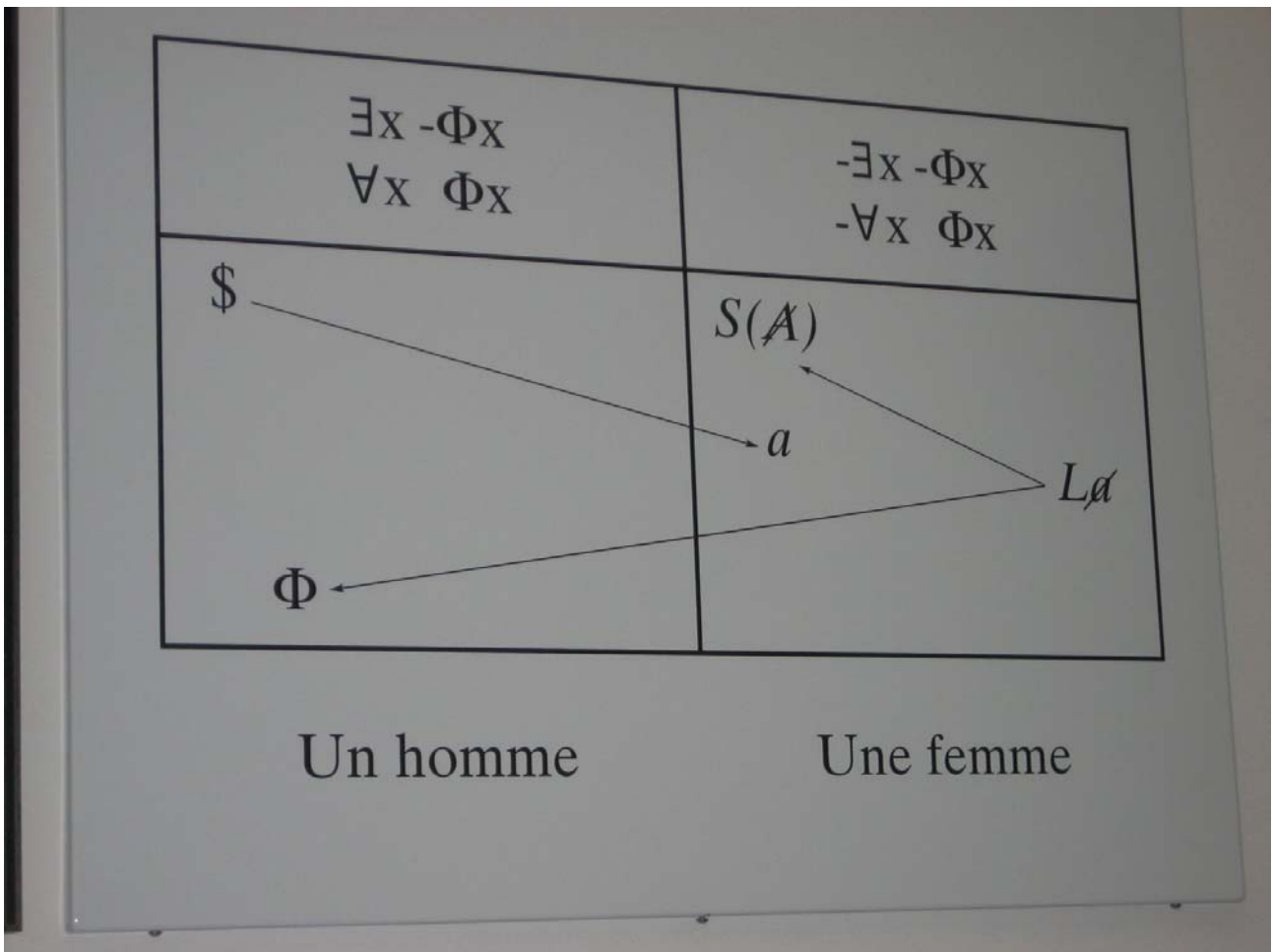


Figure 3.6 **Sophie Calle**, installational view *Take Care of Yourself*, 2007, French Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2007.



Figure 3.7 **Sophie Calle**, detail *Exquisite Pain*, 2003, Sophie Calle, *Exquisite Pain*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005, p. 94.

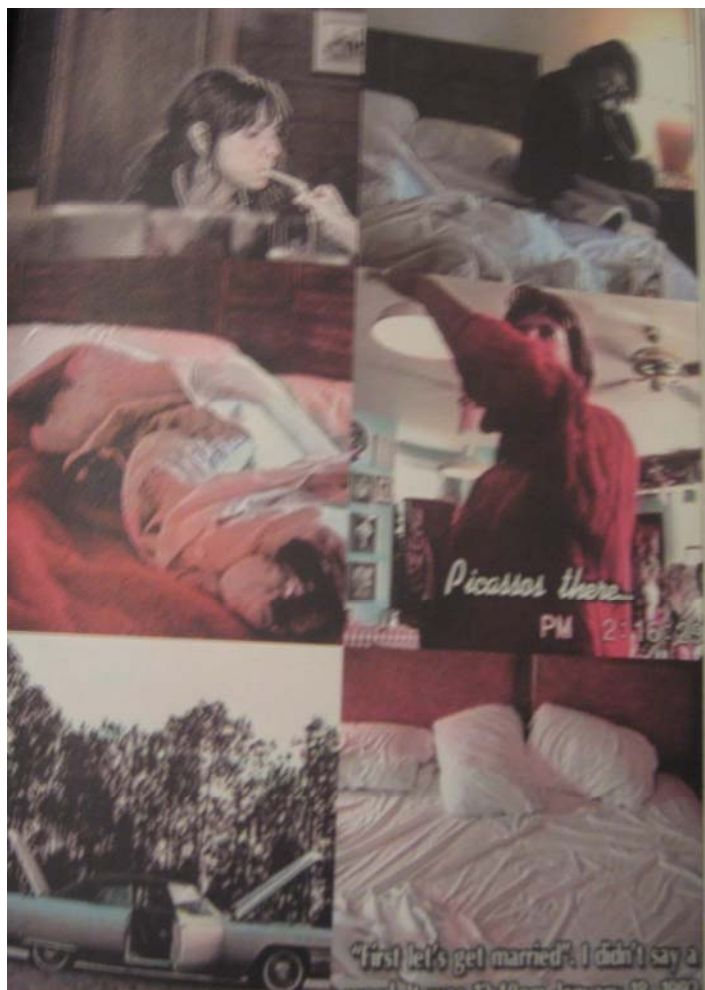


Figure 3.8 **Sophie Calle and Greg Shepard**, stills from *No Sex Last Night*, 1992, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 330.



Figure 3.9 **Sophie Calle**, installational view *The Birthday Ceremony*, 1980-1993, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 269.



Figure 3.10 **Sophie Calle**, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, 1999, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 194.



Figure 3.11 **Sophie Calle**, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, 1999, Sophie Calle, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2005, pp. i-ii.



Figure 3.12 **Sophie Calle**, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, 1999, Sophie Calle, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2005, p. 20.



Figure 3.13 **Sophie Calle**, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, 1999, Sophie Calle, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2005, p. 38.



Figure 3.14 **Tracey Emin**, *My Bed*, 1998, Saatchi Gallery, London.



Figure 3.15 **Sophie Calle**, *Room With a View*, 2003, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 170.

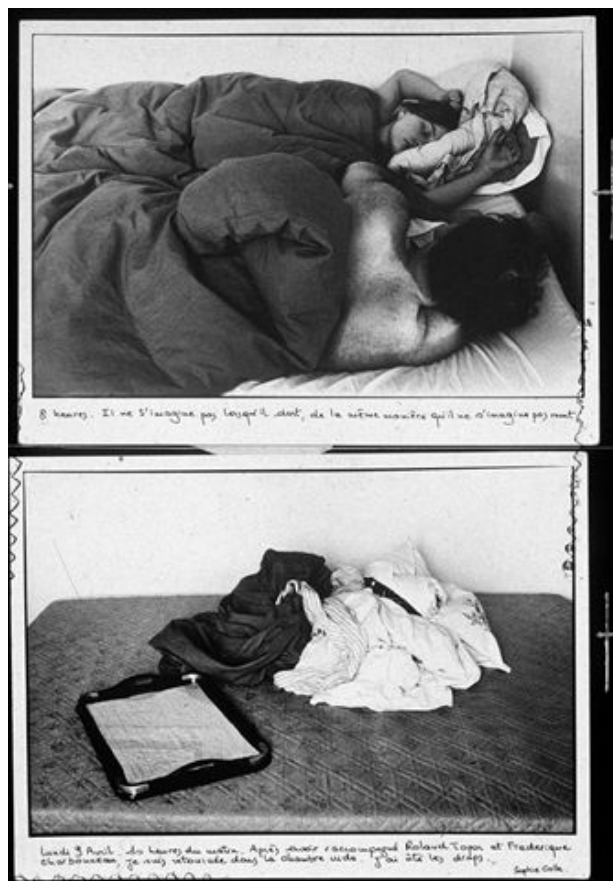


Figure 3.16 **Sophie Calle**, *Sleepers*, 1979, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 151.



Figure 3.17 **Tracey Emin**, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995*, 1995, Saatchi Gallery, London (destroyed in Momart Fire 2004).

Chapter Four:

Capturing Death and the Abuse of Power.

“She didn't want to die. She said this was the first time in her life she didn't mind waiting ... The last breath, somewhere between 3:02 and 3:13. Impossible to Capture.”¹

In 2007 at the Fifty-second Venice Biennale Sophie Calle displayed as part of an installation a video projection on a eleven minute loop. The projection displayed the final moments of Calle's mother's life. The work, entitled *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* (2007), is unique within Calle's oeuvre to date. Her mammoth installation, *Take Care of Yourself* (2007), displayed in the French Pavilion at the same Biennale, was a popular attraction. However, it was this smaller work, one of a multitude of works by leading contemporary artists in the Italian Pavilion, which showed her true strength as an artist and exemplified the reason Calle is considered one of France's leading contemporary female artists. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is at once ethically confrontational, intensely personal and strangely sublime

Calle displayed death, purposely caught on tape, as art. In particular Calle showed the death of her mother not in any way dramatic or embellished, just seemingly “real”. The work was notable for its lack of drama but intense emotional effect. Calle's projects a matter of fact presentation of a “natural” death, situated within a palliative care type setting. It displays a kind of event that has become an increasingly common experience in Western society. This chapter will discuss the questions raised through displaying an elderly female body in the intensely personal and often degrading state of decay and death. I will focus on the moral and ethical issues raised through the merging, and display, of the public and the private within Calle's work and her reliance upon ritual and control to subvert moral responsibility.

Calle's work is notorious for crossing boundaries, particularly boundaries of privacy, obsession and identity. As an artist Calle is well aware of these boundaries in the public eye and she is constantly at play with the subversion of these boundaries. This chapter seeks to answer two questions: why is *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* such a powerful work and was the display of the work ethically responsible by Calle as not only an artist but as a daughter? Yve-Alain Bois states that according to Calle “the abuse of power and indiscretion” are the hallmarks of photography.² Calle's consistent use of photography as a visual component within her

work is not accidental. Calle's work is imbued with the exploration of power and control. These issues are not only tied to photography for Calle; in *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* she uses video to the same effect. Her use of rules and ritual are strategies for living that allow Calle to justify much of her obsessive behaviour. Through addressing these topics Calle brings together private moments as public art and in doing so engages with social commentary on contemporary and personal moral issues of artistic display. Personally she often uses her work to find a way of working through her own pain. In the case of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* Calle uses her work to grieve and preserve the memory of her mother.

Pas Pu Sasir La Mort engages with many of the themes continually addressed in Calle's work, such as, mourning, the clinical investigation of emotion, publicly exposing the private, strategies of identity formation and loss. It also carries a persistent wry sense of humour within the textual element to the work. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, however, differs from Calle's other work through its focus on the very serious issue of physical mortality in a way that Calle has only ever touched lightly on before. Most pointedly it appeared as a side element to the main work, with the death of a close friend while filming, in *No Sex Last Night* (1992) [Figure 4.1]. In this work Calle honours the memory of a dead lover by throwing some flowers into the sea and recalling personal memories of him. Unlike *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* this theme of death is unexpected and a secondary issue to the larger work at hand. Loss as absence is a much more pervasive element developed within Calle's oeuvre. In *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* the corpse is visually present. However, the body of Calle's mother is at once alive and a corpse. Calle's mother is at once present and absent.

Pas Pu Saisir La Mort contains many of Calle's characteristic strategies of both presentation and subject matter, as seen in previous chapters. However, there is also an underlying much deeper theoretical strategy to do with the concentration of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*'s subject matter on the concept of mortality. This work displays the image of an elderly woman in her death bed. It engages effectively with the premise of the Biennale as given by curator Robert Storr to “Think with the Senses- Feel with the Mind” to create “Art in the Present Tense.” Calle's work attempts to grasp an unattainable moment, the precise moment of death. This opens a multitude of philosophically based questions namely to do with the graspability of death and the physical bodily process, in comparison to the theoretical idea, of death. Storr is an important influence in the production of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* not only as the person who gave the theme for the

exhibition but also as the person who pushed Calle to display this particular work. Calle often holds back on displaying works until she herself has some type of emotional distance from them. Notably this is the case in *Exquisite Pain* (2003) which was not displayed until fifteen years after its conception. Storr was aware that Calle had been video taping her mother and encouraged her to present a work using this footage for the Biennale. It was Storr who made the ethical decision, as the director, to display the work as art for the purpose of the Biennale. Storr as Calle herself explains in a recent interview with Louise Neri,

... knew I had filmed my mother's death and he suggested—and then insisted—that I deal with the subject. I didn't feel ready to watch the 80 hours of film that I had taken of her dying, but then I remembered the 11 minutes between her life and her death during which I was really wondering where she was ... Then when I finally came to show the film in Venice I was busy with all the usual technical issues: sound, lighting, painting, and the size of the image. It was only when it was installed and I went to look at it that I realized that this was my mother, and I started to cry. 3

From the many hours of taped footage Calle centred on the final fifteen minutes as the defining focal point of the work. The implausible graspability of the moment of death is the subject of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, or as it is translated in English *Couldn't Capture Death*.⁴ The work displays, on a repeated video loop, the real-life death of an elderly female body, Calle's mother Monique Sindler. Contained within this element of the installation are ethical and moral issues concerning the appropriateness of the display. Calle publicly presents video footage of a moment that is usually experienced privately. Moral concerns hedge around Calle's personal conception of the video as art while ethical notions contained within the work deal with the institutional acceptance of the subject.

The ethical issues surrounding the display of death as art have been recently discussed by Thierry De Duve in his article, 'Art in the Face of Radical Evil', concerning *S-21* a grouping of photographs purchased by MoMA of victims from the Cambodian genocide under the reign of Pol Pot.⁵ The photos were taken by a member of the Khmer Rouge, Nhem Ein, at the extermination camp in Phnom Penh in which 14200 people were executed. De Duve grapples with the fact that these photos, taken unceremoniously before each victim was exterminated, can even be considered as art. For this matter can we consider death as art? Calle's work

while not displaying an outright genocide and made to be art rather than record keeping, nevertheless takes a videoed moment of death as its subject. Death is often displayed in art but not the temporal moment. A video is more confrontational than painting of the moment of death.

De Duve comes to the conclusion that for the *S-21* photographs to address the subject as art addresses the humanity of the work a luxury the people in the photographs were never given. Calle's work in the light of these images seems straight forward. But to simply say there is worse things that are considered art is not viable. It is the treatment of the subject of the work by Calle which makes it able to be ethically accepted as art and the fact that in the video essentially nothing changes, the moment cannot be pinpointed. The work would be morally very different if the moment was graspable. These moral concerns are both intensified and calmed by the highly personal relationship of Calle to the subject of the work. Vivaly in the public display of this work Calle engages with but does not necessarily conform to, the tradition in Western, typically Christian, society of theoretically conflating and judging internal morality, death and the female body in art.

In displaying this work Calle contests a moralistic view of the feminine body in a state of death as decay. She brings to light the impossibility of attempting to moralise a situation we can never truly grasp. The work is both stylistically typical and unique within Calle's body of work. It marks a somewhat sombre, almost minimalist, divergence, from her usual style of working comparable to the stark conceptual nature of *The Blind* (1986). In *The Blind* minimal amounts of text are framed alongside illustrative images [Figure 4.2]. This apparent divergence from complex narrative based work is a simplification of Calle's characteristically complex autobiographical investigative style of working. Calle's work as discussed by Rosalind Krauss is elevated through her over saturation of information which creates a paradoxical response from the spectator. Through this simplification, in *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, Calle prompts an intense emotional response not from an over saturation but through the notion of the theoretical sublime. This emotional response is also tied into the personal negation of a moralistic reading of the body by Calle, which opens up for the spectator through the creation of an ethically free space for a dialogue of public mourning.⁶

Calle's subject matter as discussed in chapter three seems to be either randomly seized upon or the result of an event in her personal life. The attachment she develops towards the external subjects of her work

is often artificial particularly when dealing with a stranger. Or the external subject is a lover who has already ended the attachment or relationship.⁷ The work is often not initially a work but a way of working through or dealing with reality whether this be because of pain or simply boredom. The need to control the situation around her is an obsession which Calle displays in her reliance on rules and rituals to create art. Calle makes art about pain not happy situations. She plays the role of victim well. In *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* the relationship has been cut off only through death. The external subject, Calle's mother, and the attachment that Calle has to the situation is not of someone doing something wrong by her, neither is it the result of an artificial attachment. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* documents a very different kind of loss for Calle in comparison to the rest of her oeuvre. It deals with an inevitable event with no real victim or perpetrator. Calle and her mother were well aware of the looming finality of death.

The work raises questions of what is public, what is private and what is art. These issues have been playfully dealt with by Calle, there have been ethical invasions of privacy most notably in *The Address Book* (1983) and *Suite Venitienne* (1978) but also the open display of intimate moments from Calle's own life such as *Take Care of Yourself* (2007). For the most part these works have been somewhat trivial events. Even her prosecution over *The Address Book* and her public investigation into a stranger's life is treated as a frivolous aberration. Calle often puts herself in physical danger such as in *The Striptease* (1979) in which the work ends with Calle being physically attacked [Figure 4.3]. The persecution and danger that Calle toys with is justified by the rules under which she creates the work; her rule of the game that Bois explores in depth. Calle implies she was rule bound to act that way, it was not a choice. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is different to much of Calle's work because there was no rule of the game or question Calle was investigating during the production of the work. Calle's only rule was to continually change the recording tape when it became full.

Pas Pu Saisir La Mort like *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* (1999) was made to be displayed in dialogue with a particular hegemonic system. As *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* was made to interact with the psychologically charged environment of the Freud Museum, *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* influenced by its environment of display [Figure 4.4]. The Venice Biennale is particularly prestigious and carries its own set of hegemonic devices. For the 2007 Biennale curator Storr chose the open theme of 'Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind.' As a curatorial theme Storr hoped to dissect the temporal nature of art. Storr

understands this as a prompt to include art that strives, in his words, to

'make sense' of things in a given moment or circumstance is to grasp their full complexity intellectually, emotionally and perceptually. That does not promise that our grasp will hold for long, or even much more than the instant in which we awaken to the fact that such fleeting powers of concentration and transformation are ours.⁸

For Calle this doctrine was particularly apt. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* was allocated room thirty-four of the Italian Pavilion. Calle was one of forty-four artists exhibiting within the pavilion. Her work in the French Pavilion, *Take Care of Yourself*, also engages with the theme of the Biennale but I would argue does not capture the same idea of a fleeting moment or epiphany that Storr emphasises as a function of contemporary art. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, however, exudes this notion. It is made up spatially of two small rooms within the labyrinth like Pavilion. The viewer can only come to this point only after having walked through numerous other exhibits. Calle's installation after this trek could easily be lost within the crowd but it is not.

In *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* Calle manages to create a space within the Pavilion which sets its own temporal experience. This is done through her use of film and music, both of which are innately temporal. It is also produced through the intense narrative subject that Calle is dealing with. This subject of death, mourning and the looping repetition of the event is a very public display of mourning that cannot help but open up a public space for mourning. Though the work is presented very publicly the way the installation is treated ensures the work creates its own quietude subversively playing off the collaborative Biennale atmosphere.

On finding out she was to represent France at the Biennale Calle also found out her mother had only months to live. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* was created during the time that Calle cared for her mother as she was dying and was exhibited under the premise of enabling her mother to be there at the Biennale. In the lead up to her mother's death Calle became increasingly worried by the notion that she might miss her last words or not be there for that final moment. Calle defaulting to her obsessive artistic tendencies installed a video camera to ensure she would not miss these final moments. Rather than counting down the minutes of an unknown time frame Calle found a way of controlling the situation through documenting it. Changing the

tape allowed Calle to ritualise the time of waiting leading up to the inevitable moment of death.

The work consists of two rooms: in the first room there are two framed prints of the word *souci*, one oil painting, and text; the second room consist of a video on an eleven minute loop [Figures 4.5-8]. The rooms compared to Calle's usual work are relatively stark and minimalist. Calle, the patient who can not stop talking, is comparatively quiet as author. Her use of narrative is restricted to a plaque containing the same epitaph she published in a newspaper in the days following Monique's death and the gallery text accompanying the work [Figure 4.9].⁹

The only other use of text in the work is the word “*souci*”, meaning “worry or concern”. *Souci* appears twice as a visual use of text in the first room. The word is embossed in two starkly framed textured prints, one dark one light. Alongside these prints, in the initial entry room, Calle exhibits a, society portrait style, oil painting of her mother when she was young. The image contrasts with our view of her mother as seen in the second room. The second room contains only the film and softly played classical music.

The film itself is contradictory in it nothing happens but by the same token everything happens. Monique is framed on her deathbed, she does not move or at least does not seem to move. The film is muted, it is sunk into the wall with no text or sound to guide the spectator and nothing else to look at. The physically sunken nature of the film increases the feeling of voyeurism for the viewer; as if they are peering through a lit window. The event which Calle informs us we are witnessing seems to be a kind of non-event, sparse and almost banal in its reality. Calle is not playing on the idea of death as spectacle. The non-event reality of the minimal display throws the experience of the work back on the viewer, who becomes a voyeur to this very intimate moment.

The narrative that Calle includes to prepare the viewer for the second room is not overly expressive of her personal feelings. Through Calle's stark use of language the reality of the event is emphasised. This narrative reads as an intimate diary like list of details that made up the last things her mother experienced:

Monique wanted to see the sea one last time. On Tuesday, January 31, we went to Cabourg. The last journey. The next day, "so my feet look nice when I go": the last pedicure ... She organized the funeral ceremony: her last party. Final preparations: she chose her funeral dress, -navy blue with a white pattern-,

a photograph showing her making a face for the tombstone, and her epitaph, "I'm getting bored already!" ... She chose Montparnasse cemetery as her final address. She didn't want to die. She said this was the first time in her life she didn't mind waiting. She shed her last tears. The days before her death, she kept repeating: "It's odd. It's stupid." ... Souci was her last word. On March 15, 2006 at 3 P.M., the last smile. The last breath, somewhere between 3:02 and 3:13. Impossible to capture.¹⁰

The last phrase of the text explains the impetus for the title *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* and uncovers a tension between the event of death being impossible to capture or something that Calle herself was unable to do. The idea in the title that it is Calle doing this capturing is only implied. The title of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* lacks a personal pronoun so instead of the formal “I could not capture death” it reads “Couldn't capture death”. This lack of referent gives the title a childish air. Or read another way it gives the work an air of ambiguity, who couldn't capture death?

Calle constantly uses personal pronouns in her work. As Bois describes it, she over emphasises this use, writing “I” and “Me” every three lines so that we fully grasp that this very self does not exist.¹¹ However, in the narrative of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* Calle keeps an emotional distance within the work. The use of personal pronouns is reserved for quotes from Monique, “so my feet look nice when I go” and “I'm getting bored already”.¹² Calle becomes part of the “you” as she is an outsider to this event, it is Monique who experiences what we cannot. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* connects specifically with the notion discussed in chapter one of “nous voici” as theorised by De Duve.¹³ It speaks to a basic humanity. We all are connected in the work through the you and I dichotomy that is Monique and the audience. Death is universal.

Calle's work, as described in chapter three, explores ideas of absence and presence. The absence of Calle from the text of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is interesting to note in relation to the childhood “Da-Fort” game of linguistically registering absence and presence described by Sigmund Freud. Darian Leader describes Calle's practice as simulating ideas raised in this metaphoric game. In the game we witness “an archaic process of symbolizing the mother's presence and absence. The reel stood for the mother and by making it appear and disappear, the boy was making himself master of a situation over which he could otherwise have little control.”¹⁴ This game as discussed by Elisabeth Bronfen as being the first experience of

this notion of absence and presence, or symbolism, for the child and because of this it “is connected with the maternal body, the relation of death to image-making is culturally associated with the feminine.”¹⁵ Calle's absence linguistically, and childlike use of language in the title, is explained by the symbolic presence of the mother.

The mother as pictured on her deathbed is simultaneously present and absent. The point of death cannot be located. The very idea of a “point of death” itself, as Bronfen discusses, is “real but ungraspable by human consciousness.”¹⁶ Death in this “natural” way we logically understand is a process of events, it is the body slowly shutting down, rather than a precise moment. The idea of death, Geoffrey Gorer claims in 'The Pornography of Death', replaced sex as the greatest taboo of the twentieth century.¹⁷ Death has become increasingly prevalent in media and popular culture, both of which place increasing value on the reality and authenticity of the sensationalised image of death. Calle pushes the boundaries of this cultural thrust by displaying a film, not simply a photograph, of a death that is marginalised by the media: the natural death of the elderly.

In creating a work that sits between public and private forms of mourning Calle opens up, what Emma Watson describes as, a public space for mourning. I believe this space is contingent upon the subject of the work being something completely ungraspable in this it is something which is impossible to moralise. This space becomes an ethically free space to explore our own personal moral values. The “moral body” in a dying state is engaged with but subverted by Calle as an impossible and ungraspable physical moment. In negating the moralistic reading of the body in this moment Calle opens up a space of public mourning in which we are freely and sublimely able to explore our own experience of death and mourning.

In using a type of contemporary deathbed portrait *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* engages with the ritual experience of artistic production described by Walter Benjamin in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* does this through invoking the idea of a traditional deathbed photograph. Though it is a video work the main focus is that of the figure in the final moment of death used by Calle as a memorial to her mother as something she is unable to quite let go. As Benjamin puts it the “cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture”.¹⁸ This cult value is part of the traditional ritualistic value of an artwork that has since given through

to exhibition based spectacle, as discussed in chapter two. In Benjamin's own words:

Works of art are received and valued on different planes. Two polar types stand out: with one, the accent is on the cult value; with the other, on the exhibition value of the work. Artistic production begins with ceremonial objects destined to serve in a cult ... With the emancipation of the various art practices from ritual go increasing opportunities for the exhibition of their products.¹⁹

Unlike *Take Care of Yourself* in the French Pavilion where she can be described as engaging in what Chris Townsend calls “an object of consumerist or secretarial spectacle (in Calle's work the spectacle of the self as object of pathos and spectatorial investment, stripped of any relation between autobiography and history).”²⁰ *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* engages with the ritualistic production of art which is further shown by Calle's refusal to exhibit the work unless she is present to lead the installation process.²¹

Calle often utilises elements that are more familiar to the world of documentary journalism which feed into the spectacle nature of works such as *Take Care of Yourself*. As discussed in chapter two, Krauss describes Calle as a postmedium artist whose technical support is that of the “investigative journalist's documentary research.”²² Her work often consists of photographs taken with no particular artistic skill, text that sets up the situation and clinically written statements of events as they happened.

Krauss describes that in using this technical support “her work expresses itself as paradox: her medium not only unable to support, but contrived to deaden the feelings she is looking for.”²³ These feelings consist of those that initially prompted the work. Such as her mother dying or as in *Suite Venitienne* her displacement in Paris after years of travelling. The saturation of documentary style information that Calle provides is of course unable to adequately describe the emotions that she explores. Krauss believes that the over exposure of information paradoxically heightens the emotional experience of the work. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is an emotionally intense work, the audience, however, is not saturated with information but with the same eleven minutes on loop. The text is simple but not clinically so and provides short saturating details of the final moments. The audience is unlikely to stay in an installation for more than one part of one loop but the work is nevertheless emotionally intense.

As Krauss observes Calle utilises elements from media reporting and photojournalism in her work

and it is interesting to compare her approach to that of the media in reporting on death. A major difference between Calle and the media is the type of death she focuses on. Increasingly in western society the death of elderly women in palliative care has become statistically common place. Women on average are outliving their male counter parts and dying with the kind of medical foresight that gave Calle's mother a prediction on how long she had left to live. Without this medical foresight Calle may not have known these were to be Monique's last days and without this knowledge Calle may not have felt the need to deal with the time by documenting it in video format.

The reality of the simple passing of an elderly person is not a topic that is often breached as art or often heard about in the media. Much attention is paid to death as spectacle in the media but this kind of death is dramatically embellished. It is sudden death that is deemed as news worthy not the grim reminder of our own mortality. In *Image Ethics in the Digital Age* photo editor Sam Cardwell describes the process of selecting images particularly of corpses for the press. According to Cardwell “Images that conceal or displace the corpse are ... preferred, because they connotatively communicate death through the body's absence rather than through its painful presence.”²⁴ He describes the system of grading a photograph, used for media purposes, of a corpse in terms of its emotional value. This system describes the photograph in terms of the 'noise' that it puts out comparable to an extremely loud blasting sound. For example Cardwell discusses the selection process of photographs from the funeral of eighteen year old Isaiah Shoels. Shoels was one of the students shot in the Columbine High School shooting in Littleton, Colorado.

Shoels' funeral being that of a young man struck down by tragic means was a highly covered media event. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is very different in the type of death that it is portraying but the discussion of how the media rates the image of death is particularly interesting when applied to *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*. Cardwell explains how the image of a mourner weeping with the close cropped open view of the casket [Figure 4.10] is given “loud” rating of a high impact level ten. The image of a similar scene with the open casket and mourner in view [Figure 4.11] is given a rating of level nine because it is slightly further back than the first image with a number of elements breaking up the emotional intensity of the work such as the white flower. Neither image was deemed appropriate for publication. [Figure 4.12] is given a rating of six because of the people distancing the corpse from view. A wide screen image of the funeral service showing

the open casket was chosen to be used in the media over because of its lower emotional impact of around three [Figure 4.13]. The image [Figure 4.10] of the corpse alone according to Cardwell because of its “unobstructed and intimate view of the corpse created a hazardous image and made publication ethically unscrupulous.”²⁵

In comparison to these photographs Calle's video, which toes a line between the image of a corpse and that of a living woman, oscillates between high impact [Figure 4.14] and lower impact levels as people move in and out of the video [Figure 4.15]. The flowers in the foreground of the picture plane provide a calming focal point as Cardwell describes in the image of Isaiah Shoels' funeral in which the focal point is also a flower [Figure 4.11]. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is a seemingly respectful and quiet display of the reality of death but at the same time the work affects the spectator. It hauntingly amplifies a perspective on death and the body. It focusses, as a video work, on the fleeting moment of passing in a very different way to that of the media. However, while taking into account the oscillation between life and death and the temporal nature of film, the emotional response to *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* could then be described in media terms as a wavering white noise effect of being blasted with the image of a corpse in a high impact composition.

Yve-Alain Bois, like Krauss, identifies an emotional paradox in Calle's work. As Bois understands it her work obeys a “law of information theory according to which the more a message is predictable and undifferentiated, the more it becomes statistic noise.”²⁶ The saturation of information and rules of the game that Calle gives ensures that the emotions roused in the work are intensified through being over investigated. Bois connection here to the idea of noise to describe the visual and physical effect of a work is useful. In *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* the visual effect as studied in the media is comparable to that of intense sound. The media would not print an image comparable to that which Calle uses because it could be seen as “ethically unscrupulous.”²⁷ Who gives Calle the right to use such an image and even if she is allowed such freedom is it morally responsible of her to take it?

Calle's mother was complicit with Calle filming her during this period and the work is presented as a shrine to her memory. Monique's knowledge and compliance with Calle in producing the raw material for the work ethically this makes the display of the work legal. Calle's mother often features as a supportive figure in Calle's work. She took part in the psychoanalytic report sent by Damien Hirst to Calle as printed in *M'as tu*

vue and shows up a intermittent presence throughout Calle's autobiographical works. Particularly in *The Birthday Ceremony* (1980-1993) in which Monique's gifts are tactfully presented so that they must be used outside the game. Such as a much needed washing machine or gift of money that must be listed in the glass case as not present inside.

Calle recounts that her mother wanted to be the subject of a work saying Monique 'always complained that I never did something about her, that I didn't think she was a good subject. When I asked her to participate in *Take Care of Yourself*, she absolutely wanted to be part of it.'²⁸ This letter used by Calle in *Take Care of Yourself*, ends with the knowingly precise words “You break up with someone, someone breaks up with you, that's the game, and for you this break-up could be fertile soil for an artistic project, no?”²⁹ This display of the understanding of Calle's thought process is reassuring in understanding how Monique might have viewed *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*. For although Monique agreed to be filmed digital images are able to be manipulated or used in a way not made clear by the photographer. In the case of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* it is clear Monique supported the work that Calle was carrying out and placed implicit trust in her daughter's judgement. Had Calle simply filmed this work without this permission in the way that she published the comments about the man in *The Address Book* (1983), for which she was legally prosecuted, this work would indeed be morally reprehensible. Calle is keenly aware of the invasive nature of her work, describing photography as 'the abuse of power and indiscretion.'³⁰ The ability for any member of the public to take a simple snapshot or record on a camcorder an unfolding event are the hallmarks of modern technology and open all kinds of media based infringement laws. Calle's work often plays with boundaries of this nature.

The audience in walking into the installation is made a voyeur to the intimate moment of death. Bois describes Calle's work “as centring around 'issues of distance and absence, of voyeurism and exhibitionism; it has largely adopted the structure of the forensic archive; it has often deliberately confused levels of reality- or, more precisely, it has successfully transformed reality (the archive) into fiction (narration), and vice versa.’”³¹ Bois argues that notions of distance and absence are at play throughout Calle's work. She assumes identities at once becoming something, and distancing herself from it by becoming it. This assumption of identity, and the performance based nature of her work, as observed in chapter one, means that Calle is often very physically present in her works and morally subversive through conforming to a particular assumed

identity.

Calle's oeuvre as Bois characterises it is laced with an interest in voyeurism. We seem to learn everything about Calle but at the same time very little about who she really is. She delves into the lives of strangers as the 'other' in her work. In the work *The Address Book* she was prosecuted and is thus unable to display the text of the work as it was ruled an illegal invasion of privacy. In becoming the voyeur Calle raises ethical and moral issues of what is deemed art. The voyeuristic invasion of privacy is seen in her first work, and also one of her most notorious, *Suite Venitienne* (1979). *Suite Venitienne* consisted of Calle following a randomly chosen stranger from Paris to Venice and back. In doing this Calle playfully crosses boundaries of socially normative behaviour. She is not interested in who this person is but in who they are as the “other” in her work as a constructed body. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* contains no “other” to become for Calle. Instead through voyeuristic means places the spectator in Calle's position of grief. The visual image, as analysed by media standards, does not hold back any of the emotional impact of the work.

As discussed in chapter three, Marina Van Zuylen believes Calle's work is characterised by a personal compulsion towards voyeuristic monomania. Monomania leads Calle to create rules and rituals to effectively deal with everyday life. Calle controls these situations often through using the rule of the game. In *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, however, there can be no rule of the game, this is not a game. Calle's response of filming the final days of her mother's life is characteristic of a monomaniacal impulse to control the situation in some way. Calle attempts to control the situation by setting out a video by counting down the minutes of the tape. Rather than waiting for the final moment Calle can record the final moment. In doing this Calle obsessively ensures that no moment will be missed. The moment she might miss by stepping out even for just a moment the mechanical tape will not.

Calle leads us to believe that *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* was not a “consciously planned activity, but more like a automatic response to what was happening.”³² Calle when caring for her mother in those last months had heard that it was common for the carer to spend months keeping a vigil and yet miss that final moment of passing. This thought and the fear of missing what might be her mother's final words to her and of not being there for that moment. Led Calle to install a video camera as a presence for when she could not be there. Her mother was complicit with this request to be videoed. The video as Lorna Collins puts it

provided for Calle “a cathartic distraction to the point that such technology quite simply became her way of being.”³³ Rather than counting down the minutes of an unknown time frame Calle found a way of controlling the situation and stepping outside it. She could count the time until the changing of the tape.

However, even with the footage taken and the fact that Calle was there in those final moments do not help Calle grasp the final moment. What Calle presents to us in the film is a moment of neither presence or absence, this is a body that is at once dead and also dying. Calle focuses on the moment she couldn't capture the moment between life and death. Rather than show us a moment of true absence or true presence Calle displays and draws attention to the ungraspability or impossibility of the moment. We cannot discern when the actual moment of death is but this subversively is the apparent subject of the work. In this way the work returns to a familiar theme of failure within Calle's oeuvre.

Calle's work, as discussed by Darian Leader, is typical of a psychoanalytic process of mourning. She manages to bridge a gap between private and public dialogues of mourning. In a private dialogue of mourning representations of the lost one are repeated to the point of exhaustion. In public dialogues of mourning an experience is shared and taken on by the spectator. Calle's work often brings both these public and private moments together by connecting to the universal nature of human experience. She does this in *Take Care of Yourself* by asking others to interpret for her the letter from her ex-lover. From all angles the letter is analysed and repeatedly accessed mimicking a Freudian process of private mourning.

In *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* Calle is stuck repeating the same moment from the same viewpoint. All she has is the video of this death she cannot physically realise. Unlike *Exquisite Pain* (2003) here she is not mimicking the Freudian process of accessing the object in all its different representations she is simply pushing play.³⁴ Perhaps this is because Calle has not had the time to complete the process of mourning that she often displays as art. Storr's push for Calle to present this work possibly preceded the Freudian mourning process and so the tape mimics Calle's emotional state at the time: stuck on a loop. Like *Take Care of Yourself* Calle uses the work to let the “other”, or the spectator, take her place in the ultimate act of mourning: the mourning of the mother figure.

Calle's use of this intimate moment as art engages with the moralistic Western Christian tradition concerning the conflation of death and femininity. We are presented with a failing body in particular a failing

elderly female body which is contrasted with the inclusion of an oil painting of the same woman in her youth [Figure 4.7]. Elizabeth Bronfen in her work *Over Her Dead Body: Death, femininity and the aesthetic* explores the Western obsession with death and the feminine. Bronfen explores the notion that European culture sees death as a taboo. That we see the corpse and decomposition of the body as a polluted state, and she asks “Why, then, the reversal of all this colloquial understanding in art, where it is precisely the death of a Woman that ... brings about the production of an artwork? Why then the many narratives about experiences of the sublime at the sight of a corpse?”³⁵ This aesthetic conflation comes from a belief that death is the highest form of melancholy and that the female body is the epitome of beauty, thus by combining these two elements you can create an intense aesthetic experience.

Pas Pu Saisir La Mort plays off this historical significance of the dead female body and, in particular, on the ideas of the symbolic death of the mother. The work is bitter sweet it symbolises the relationship between Calle and her mother and Calle's devastation at her loss or as Bronfen quotes, the “absolutely untouchable dead woman signifies, in Kristeva's words, 'jouissance as nostalgia, within reach but lost forever.’”³⁶ The role of motherhood is vital in our theoretical conception of death. Freudian theory connects the idea of the mother with the idea of death. As the mother reminds us of our own physical mortality. Contemplation of the death of the mother is related therefore not just the contemplation of death but of the sublime concept of our own physical mortality.

It is Bronfen who raises the idea of “the sublime at the sight of a corpse” and in doing so she touches on an element which I argue is central to the experience of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*.³⁷ The ungraspability of the subject of the work is what intensifies the sublime viewing of the work. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is poetically distanced from us watching a video of Calle's mother, to become for the viewer an intimately public space for mourning. The experience of the sublime at the sight of a corpse is, I believe, glimpsed in *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* and the reason it holds such a unique place in her body of work. Calle sets up the situation with such bland reality, an almost unchanging video. However, the structure of the composition in the video, the body/corpse framed in close proximity a bland gallery space, is such that the experience is pushed back onto the viewer forcing them to contemplate the idea of death and their own mortality. The spectator is invited to search for the physical moment of death. The search is itself philosophical. This

moment is of course cannot be located, or captured; it is an experience we are distant from. It is an inaccessible private experience that is at once detached and intimate; something that is personal to Calle's mother that we are privy to but removed from. Perhaps this is why Calle's accompanying text in this case is so simple, this is an experience we can only ever view from outside.

The much debated concept of the sublime is often conflated with a moral or ethical dimension. In the Kantian conception of sublime as the contemplation of an idea forces us to realise something that is beyond our physically experience. For Kant the sublime could only be found in nature. The realisation of this contemplation in an aesthetic context produces an intense rush of feeling. Because of the way that Calle has set out *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* we go beyond simply contemplating the physical body or video that we are watching. As Bronfen puts it “images of death substitute the undecidable for the inconceivable, the uncertain for the unknowable. To witness death not only always implies that the observer's consciousness persists beyond the spectacle of death but that he survives as an observer of an image of death.”³⁸

The notion of the sublime in contemporary art has become increasingly popular as an area of theoretical study. The possible roots of the argument regarding the sublime in contemporary art are as a development from a conceptual need to shock the audience or to induce emotions such as fear, awe or horror.³⁹ The idea of the sublime as it is used in art differs in under modernist and postmodern conceptions. As put by Emily Lutzker “According to the modernist understanding, the sublime Thing cannot be represented, but the postmodern paradox is as such: we create a thing in which the sublime feeling is reproduced without the object/image itself being the sublime Thing.”⁴⁰ Lutzker argues that a postmodern understanding of the sublime has shifted to an ethical rather than aesthetic reading. In *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* the physical film is not what creates the sublime effect but the feeling that is experienced by the participant in the installation. The sublime leaves us only with our imagination as it is brought about by the experience which we cannot ever know. The moment of death is something that we can only imagine to understand or experience.

Pas Pu Saisir La Mort is a work which challenges its audience. We are invited to be voyeur to a very intimate moment from Calle's life, the death of her mother. Further to this we are challenged to search for the precise moment of Monique's death. It raises and clarifies in its stark presentation many key themes from throughout Calle's oeuvre. Control, identity and mourning are explored. Our moral and ethical understanding

is explored. Conversely this all extends from a eleven minute tape played on a loop. Calle's work as described by Krauss and Bois uses a process that should deaden the feelings that she starts out exploring but instead intensifies the emotion through the failure to communicate it; this is the paradox of her work. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* does not dull the feeling at all. Calle intensifies it by placing the experience back upon the viewer through its simplicity, both compositionally within the installation and in the static film of the work. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is a unique work from within Calle's oeuvre invoking an experience of the sublime within the everyday.

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- 1 Detail from Sophie Calle, *Pas pu saisir la mort*, 2007, Italian Pavilion, 2007.
 - 2 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Character Study: Sophie Calle' in *Artforum*, April, 2000, p. 128.
 - 3 Calle as quoted in Louise Neri, 'Sophie Calle' in *Interview Magazine*, <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/sophie-calle/> accessed May 30 2009.
 - 4 I have am using the French title for the work as the title in French is particularly important to the conception of the work and loses slight connotations when translated.
 - 5 Thierry De Duve, 'Art in the Face of Radical Evil' in *October*, 125, Summer, 2008, pp. 3-23.
 - 6 I will return to an in depth look at the sublime and ethically free space for public mourning on pages 83 and 84.
 - 7 Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008, p.153.
 - 8 Robert Storr, *Think with the Senses-Feel with the Mind. Art in the Present Tense: Short Guide*, Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2007, p. 3.
 - 9 Monique Sindler is also referred to as Rachel Sindler.
 - 10 Detail from Sophie Calle, *Pas pu saisir la mort* (2007).
 - 11 Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Paper Tigress' in *M'as tu vue*, (ed) Christine Marcel, Munich: Prestel Verlag , p. 32.
 - 12 Detail from Sophie Calle, *Pas pu saisir la mort* (2007).
 - 13 For more on this see Thierry De Duve, *Look, 100 Years of Contemporary Art*, Ludion: Brussels, 2001.
 - 14 Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008, p. 153.
 - 15 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, femininity and the aesthetic*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 118.
 - 16 *Ibid*, p. 103.
 - 17 Geoffrey Gorer, 'The Pornography of Death', *Encounter*, October, 1955, pp.49-52.
 - 18 Walter Benjamin, 'Extracts from *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*' in *The Photography Reader*, (Ed.) Wells, L, London: Routledge, 2003, p.47.
 - 19 *Ibid*, p. 46.
 - 20 Chris Townsend, 'Knowledge as Spectacle' in *Art Monthly*, No. 322, December-January 2008-2009, p. 13.
 - 21 Louise Neri, 'Sophie Calle' in *Interview Magazine*, <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/sophie-calle/> accessed May 30 2009.
 - 22 Rosalind Krauss, 'Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition' in *October*, No. 116, Spring 2006, p. 59.
 - 23 *Ibid*, p. 62.
 - 24 Jessica M Fishman, 'News Norms and Emotions' in *Image Ethics in the Digital Age* (eds.) Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz and Jay Ruby, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 68.
 - 25 *Ibid*, p. 58.
 - 26 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Paper Tigress' in *October*, No. 116, Spring 2006, p. 39.
 - 27 Jessica M Fishman, 'News Norms and Emotions' in *Image Ethics in the Digital Age* (eds.) Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz and Jay Ruby, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 58.
 - 28 Louise Neri, 'Sophie Calle' in *Interview Magazine*, <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/sophie-calle/> accessed May 30 2009.
 - 29 Sophie Calle, detail from *Take Care of Yourself* (2007).
 - 30 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Character Study: Sophie Calle' in *Artforum*, April, 2000, p. 128.
 - 31 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Character Study: Sophie Calle' in *Artforum*, April, 2000, p. 127.
 - 32 Lorna Collins, 'In extremis: an "insaisissable" sense of the threshold', unpublished M.Phil thesis, University of

Cambridge, 2008 p. 36.

33 Ibid.

34 Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008, p. 88.

35 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, femininity and the aesthetic*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 60.

36 Ibid, p. 98.

37 Ibid, p. 60.

38 Ibid, p. 102.

39 Laura Wixley, Brooks, "Damien Hirst and the Sensibility of Shock." *The Contemporary Sublime: Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock*. Ed. Paul Crowther. Art and Design; V.10. London: Academy Editions, 1995. 54-67.

40 Emily Lutzker, 'Ethics of the Sublime in Postmodern Culture' a talk from the International Conference Aesthetics and Ethics, March 18th, 1997, <http://www.egs.edu/mediaphi/Vol2/Sublime.html> .

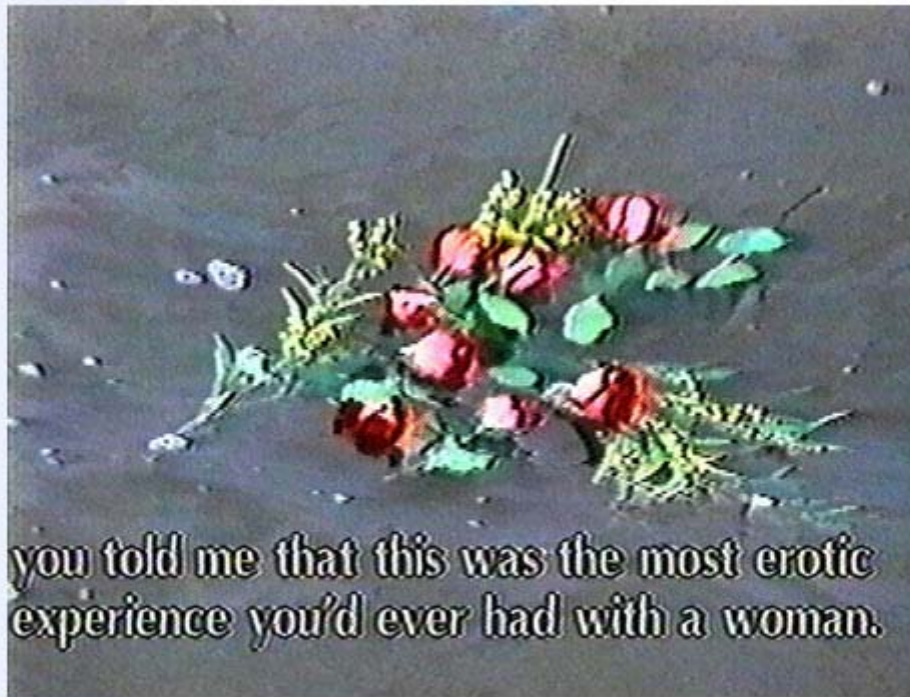


Figure 4.1 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *No Sex Last Night*, 1992, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 328.

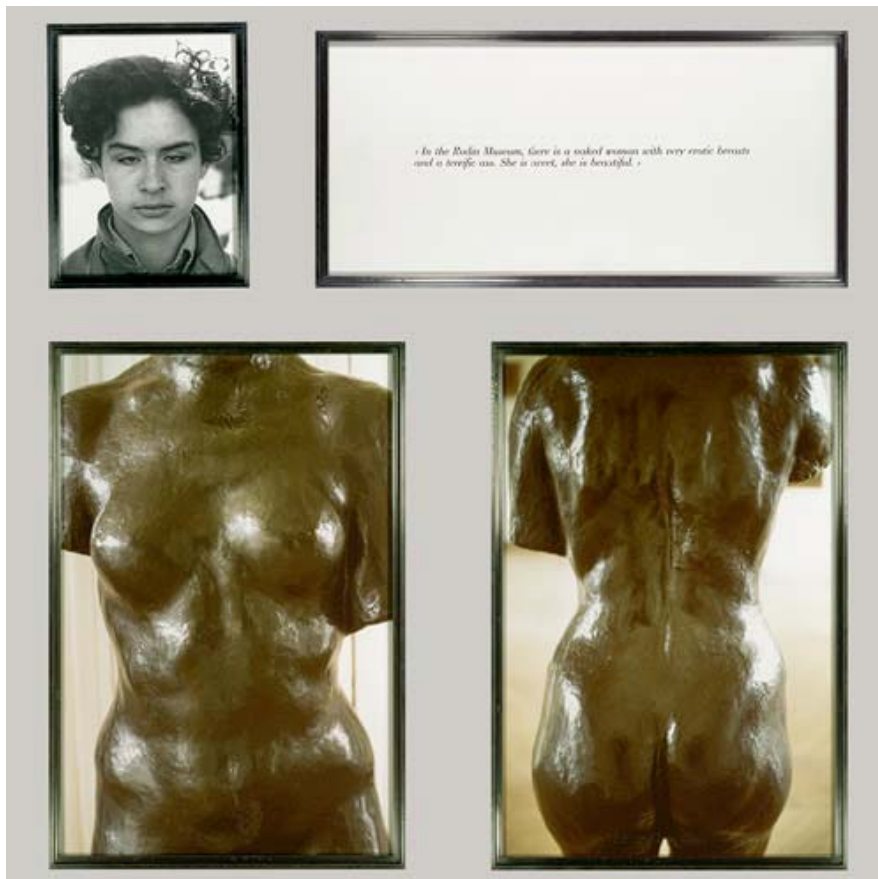


Figure 4.2 **Sophie Calle**, *Rodin* detail from *The Blind*, 1986, Sophie Calle, *M'as tu vue*, (ed.) Christine Marcel, Editions du Centre Pompidou: Paris, 2003, p. 379.



Figure 4.3 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *The Striptease*, 1979, Sophie Calle and Paul Auster, *Double Game*, London: Violette Editions, 1999.



Figure 4.4 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, 1999, Sophie Calle, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2005, pp. I-ii.



Figure 4.5 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, 2007, Italian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2007.



Figure 4.6 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, 2007, Italian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2007.



Figure 4.7 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, 2007, Italian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2007.



Figure 4.8 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, 2007, Italian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2007.

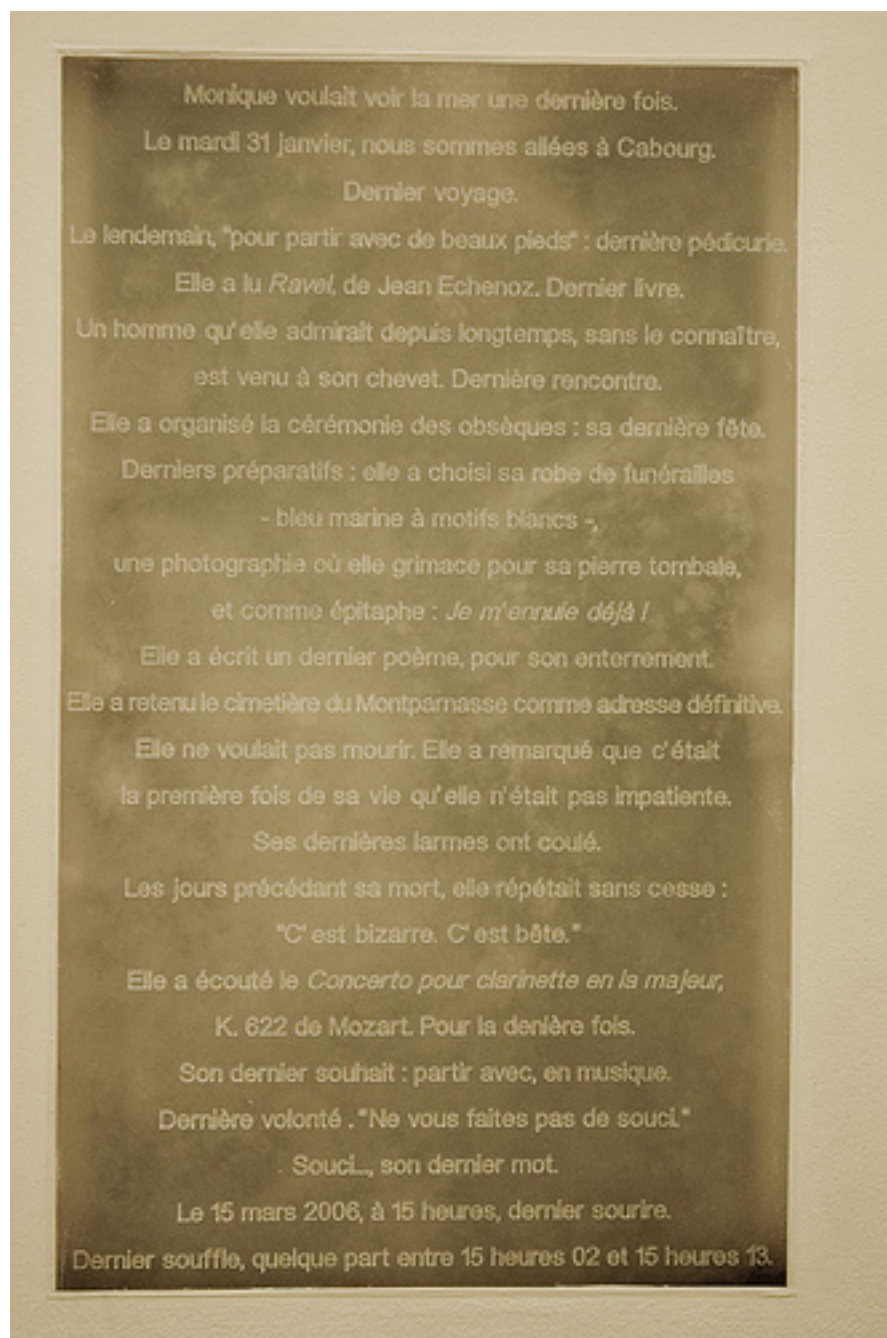


Figure 4.9 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, 2007, Italian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2007.

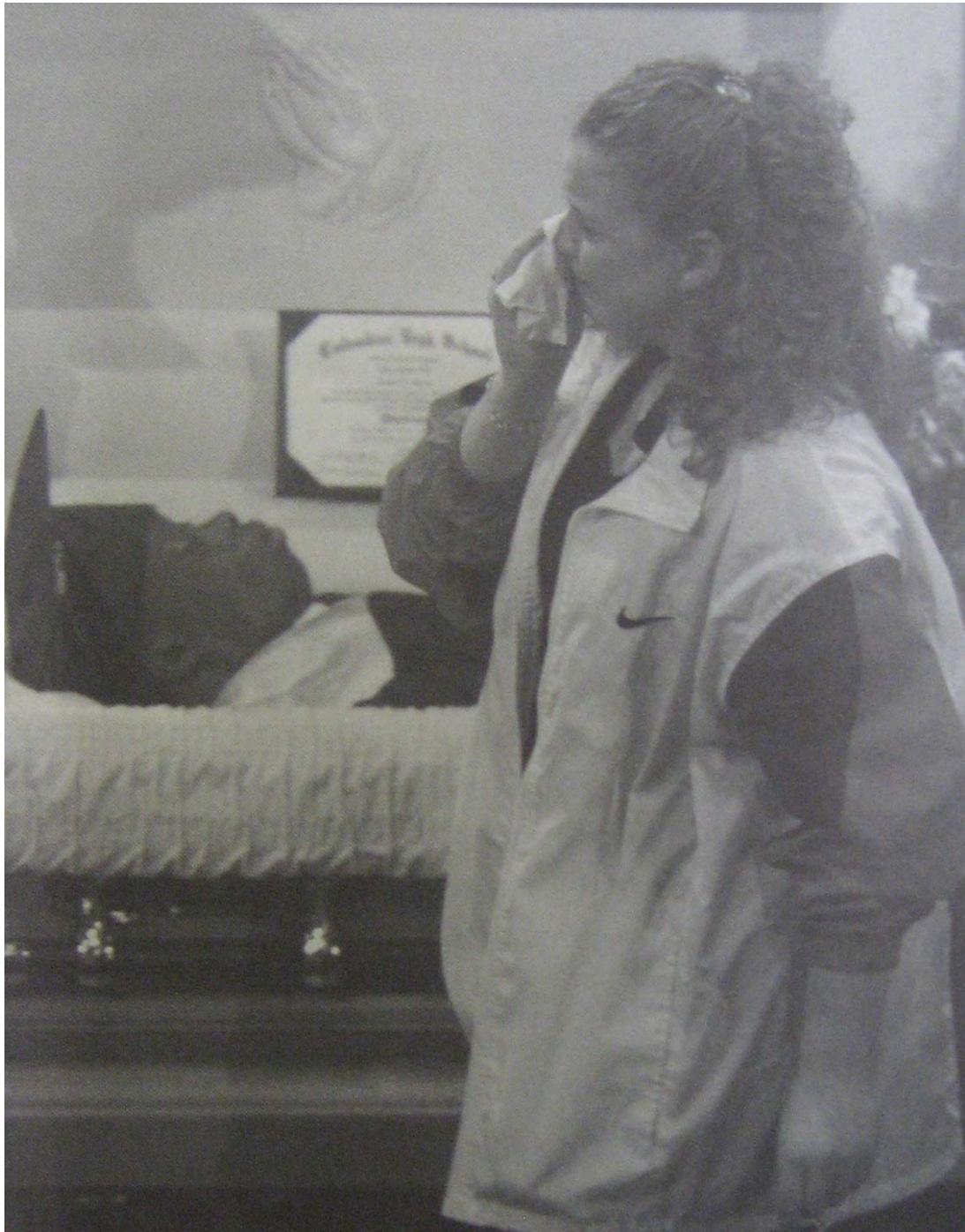


Figure 4.10 **Rick Wilking/ Reuters**, as published in Jessica M Fishman, 'News Norms and Emotions' in *Image Ethics in the Digital Age* (eds.) Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz and Jay Ruby, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 59.



Figure 4.11 **Rick Wilking/ Reuters**, as published in Jessica M Fishman, 'News Norms and Emotions' in *Image Ethics in the Digital Age* (eds.) Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz and Jay Ruby, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 60.



Figure 4.12 **Rick Wilking/ Reuters**, as published in Jessica M Fishman, 'News Norms and Emotions' in *Image Ethics in the Digital Age* (eds.) Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz and Jay Ruby, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 61.



Figure 4.13 **Rick Wilking/ Reuters**, as published in Jessica M Fishman, 'News Norms and Emotions' in *Image Ethics in the Digital Age* (eds.) Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz and Jay Ruby, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 64.



Figure 4.14 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, 2007, Italian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2007.



Figure 4.15 **Sophie Calle**, detail from *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, 2007, Italian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2007.

Conclusion

“... and her epitaph, ‘I’m getting bored already’ ...”¹

Pas Pu Saisir La Mort questions many of the key themes commonly dealt with by Sophie Calle in her wider body of work. It deals with ideas of identity, mourning and control, through showing an intimately private moment in the public sphere. Seen in the above excerpt from the work, with Calle quoting Monique, is the way that *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is marked with moments of poignancy and humour; it appeals to inextricably human emotions which are deeply personal but made starkly public by Calle. The work draws on a much greater experience through the contemplation of our own mortality in the light of the death of not just her mother but 'a mother'. This contemplation can be further explored when linked to the idea of the sublime in art. The idea of the sublime as seen in *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* is a detailed area of study that this thesis only manages to touch on briefly.

Calle's mother is a presence throughout her oeuvre. The poignant tribute of *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* effects the artistic identity that Calle has created. The role of identity in Calle's work as developed in chapter one is a central concern in the production of her work. Each work builds upon and adds to the elaborately constructed identity which, like a simulacrum, references the simulation of reality through her self reflectively created artistic identity. The audience knows everything but very little about Sophie Calle. For Bois and Baudrillard it is this production of identity and the subject matter, which informs Calle's use of medium.

The fictionality of identity, the play between reality and narrative, between Calle and the other and between Calle and herself, is critically intriguing in Calle's work. Calle it seems wants us to believe in universals and subjectivity. Her work harks back to ideas of modernity without losing the knowledge that modernity as it was once known is dead. This notion of the universal is present again in *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* in the way we are invited to be voyeur and experience what Calle experienced in this it feeds into the concept of the sublime that the work contains.

Pas Pu Saisir La Mort returns to a comment by Yve-Alain Bois, which is drawn on for the title of this thesis, that Calle believes photography is “the abuse of power and indiscretion.”² The awareness

contained within this comment characterises the way that Calle's work plays with particular themes. Calle is self aware that the medium which she often chooses to work in contains an integral element of invasiveness and using it toes a line of power and control in the way it reproduces reality. Video as used by Calle in *Pas pu saisir la mort* and *No Sex Last Night* (1992) captures a similar element to photography in the play of power between artist subject and voyeur.

Calle's work, as addressed in chapter two, contains an element of chance or uncertainty according to Luc Sante and Nicolas Bourriaud. They both, however, focus on different elements in the production of Calle's work. This element of uncertainty is contained within Calle's use of reality or performance as the basis for her documentary style productions. This use of reality as characterised by Calle's use of autofictional techniques and understood through her relationship to identity discussed in chapter one is compelling. For Calle the process is an important part of the finished product.

Chapter three explored Calle's work in light of psychoanalytic ideas to gain an understanding of the processes that lead to the creation of Calle's work. The themes in Calle's work of power, control and mourning are not just artistic themes but as a way of living for Calle. For Darian Leader Calle's work is an example of mourning in all its public and private senses. This use of art as a way of obsessively working through pain is something that Calle does in all her work and as Marina Van Zuylen recognises not simply a part of her artistic strategy but a way of life. In particular a way of controlling and perfecting life through monomania. However, Calle's work is more than simply therapeutic. There is a drive from Calle to be seen, and to look, a drive for both exhibitionism and voyeurism. These psychological drives are connected to Calle's obsessive tendencies.

Rosalind Krauss identifies an emotional intensity in Calle's work. This intensity should be deadened by the over saturation of information which the audience is provided but it is paradoxically intensified. Chapter three addresses the importance of chance and paradoxical emotional investigation as raised in chapter two. Calle emphasises chance and the actions of others as impetus for her work. However, the scopophilic way that Calle herself looks or empowers her viewers to look plays off the need for control. The rules to the rituals that Calle performs are of her own invention not chance; they are strategies for dealing with chance. The ritualistic nature of Calle's work bestows her work with power and control as the artist and

subversively as also the subject of the work because of her reliance or submission to the rules of the game. The freedom that Calle is granted through her use of ritual, grants her freedom not only from the rules but also from pain and responsibility for deciding her actions, all the while retaining her authoritarian power as artist. Control, authority and responsibility are decisive themes in the production of Calle's work. Tightly phrased text of concluded events ensure the emotion is not raw but inquisitively broken down and finished or static. Calle's successful use of power and control to subvert authority within her own life that is on display.

Pas pu saisir la mort encapsulates many of these tendencies but also moves beyond them. Calle displays a very intimate moment to deal with the pain of that moment to subvert and control the situation. However, the work which developed from this was raw and simple. *Pas pu saisir la mort* through the element of the sublime involves a very different element of aesthetic interest in comparison to much of her other work. In *Pas pu saisir la mort* Calle found a way to communicate a universal emotion, through the simple contemplation of our own mortality, without need for searching or investigation only the raw footage of the event. It is this connection which questions in *Pas pu saisir la mort* our own personal, and subjective, morality against a universal truth, and inevitability, of our own mortality.

1 Sophie Calle, excerpt from text contained in *Pas pu saisir la mort*, 2007, Italian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2007.
2 Sophie Calle as quoted by Yve-Alain Bois in 'Character Study' in *Artforum*, April, 2000, p. 129.

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