

ソフィ・カルの自伝的映像作品

—自己の癒しとしての芸術的実践—

Autobiographical Video Works of Sophie Calle:

Art Practice as Self-Therapy

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要旨

ソフィ・カル (Sophie Calle, 1953-) は、絵画や彫刻といった伝統的な美術の形式によらず、テキストと写真、あるいは、映像を組み合わせた調査報告書や日記といった形式で自伝的美術作品を発表し続けているフランスの現代アーティストである。これまで、ソフィ・カルは、見ず知らずの他人の尾行や睡眠調査、自身の失恋体験を作品のテーマとしてきたのだが、その動機については、自身のあいまいな記憶と、人物や出来事の不在を留めるため、あるいは、それは失恋の痛手から立ち直るための癒し的手段であると、作品やインタビューを通じて繰り返し述べている。こうした美術作品の形式は、アート・ドキュメンテーションやアート・プラクティスと呼ばれているのだが、なかでも、初期の映像作品《ノーセックス・ラストナイト》から、《限局性激痛》、《どうか元気で》に至る過去三度にわたる自身の失恋体験を綴った自伝的作品群は、ロマンフォトやフォトジャーナリズムの形式を作品の支持体としながら、真正性と虚構の入り混じった親密な苦痛の物語を紡ぎ出している。本稿は、カルの苦痛を扱った作品群より、自伝的映像作品をとりあげ、自己の苦痛の映像化と、その美学的価値について検討する。

●キーワード：ソフィ・カル (Sophie Calle) / 現代美術 (contemporary art) / 自伝 (autobiography)

I. Introduction

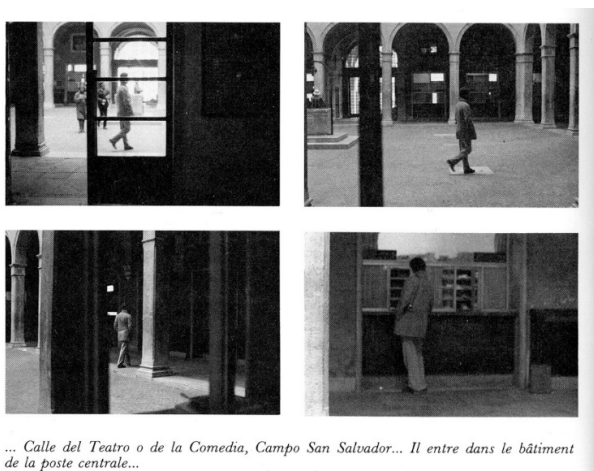
Sophie Calle, a French writer, photographer and conceptual artist, was born in Paris on the 9th of October 1953. The major format of Calle's work might be described as "art documentation" derived from photo-journals and survey reports and consisting of texts, photos, videos and voices. In some cases, she exhibits intimate objects such as clothes, stuffed animals or a bed, among other things, as proof of the authenticity of her work. Calle often works almost as an investigative journalist, doing a kind of documentary research that Rosalind Krauss has called "technical support." Krauss specifically distinguishes this term from the traditional sorts of support used by artists, such as oil on canvas, marble, or wood¹. One might say that Sophie Calle has redefined the terms and parameters of subject/object, presence/absence, and even self/other through the application of techniques from investigative journalism. Her pursuits have led her to investigate her own behavior so that her life, both as lived and as imagined,

has informed many of her most fascinating works.

The daughter of Robert Calle, an oncologist, renowned art collector, and the former director of Nimes' Carre d'Art, Sophie Calle never went to art school. Perhaps because of this, her approach to her work is unconventional. For example, she keeps no sketchbook, and in interviews she has repeatedly said that she had never been to a museum until her first exhibition was set up in one. She also insists that the question of whether her practice has something to do with art or not is none of her business. That, she claims, is a matter for the art critics to decide.

Her personal history provides some clues about how she arrived at this unique approach to her work. After completing her schooling, Calle wandered about the world for seven years, visiting Lebanon, London, Crete and California. She returned to Paris in 1979 without any career prospects or any professional skills. Nor did she have any friends. She was completely at a loss for what to do with herself. As a last resort, almost

in desperation, she decided to follow strangers in the street in order to give her walks a direction and to discover places and restaurants in Paris unfamiliar to her. As evidence of her tailing of perfect strangers, Calle started taking snapshots of these people from behind and jotting down notes about where they went. One day, she chose a gentleman at random and ended up following him all the way from Paris to Venice. The first documentation of this shadowing of strangers around the streets of Paris became her first artistic work: « Suite Vénitienne² » [Fig. 1].



[Fig. 1] Sophie Calle, *Suite Vénitienne*, 1980, b/w photography, 17.1x23.6cm (each), Paris, Éditions de l'Etoile, 1980

Sophie Calle has by this point in time accumulated a significant body of work, and it includes the trilogy on suffering: « Exquisite Pain³ » (1999), « Take Care of Yourself⁴ » (2007), and « Rachel, Monique...⁵ » (2007). This trilogy confronts us with the 'pain of the self' and of others and, given that, it seems apposite to consider the extent to which Calle's art practice is an exploration not of what art 'means,' but rather of what art can 'do.' Calle's projects, with their suggestions of intimacy, also question the role of the spectator; viewers often feel a sense of sympathy/empathy as they become collaborators in the construction of the narratives. Moreover, the deliberately re-constructed, and thus in one sense artificial, nature of the narratives used in Calle's work raises the question of how to respond empathetically to images of the suffering of the self and

others.

In the present article I examine « Take Care of Yourself » and « Couldn't Capture Death », a part of « Rachel, Monique... », focusing on moving images and their relationship to Calle's own pain as well as the pain of others. « Take Care of Yourself » was originally produced for the French Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007. Simultaneously « Couldn't Capture Death » was exhibited at the Italian Pavilion at the Biennale. As the title of this article suggests, my question arises from a consideration of Susan Sontag's final book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*⁷. Sontag described a media landscape saturated with images documenting the physical pain of others, including tragic but ultimately formulaic pictures of wartime horrors. Sontag tackled the difficult question of how this shapes the viewer's ability to respond empathetically to that pain. The work of Sophie Calle, in contrast, includes art practices such as documentation, installation and video art based not on the pain of others but rather on her very own personal psychological pain and her attempts to recover from it. Interestingly, however, the documentation of her personal pain is mediated by others and in various ways. As such her work offers an opportunity to consider within the art world the function and circulation of "the pain of the self" as understood by others.

II. Take Care of Yourself

On April 24th, 2004, Sophie Calle received by email a break-up letter from her boyfriend. She was heartbroken and completely at a loss as to what to do. Subsequently, though, as is often the case with her, she conceived a way to utilize art, which Calle refers to as a "ritual" or a "game," as the source of her recovery. By distributing that breakup email to 107 female professionals and inviting them to analyze it in every possible way, Sophie Calle essentially duplicated herself, creating doubles that stand in for herself in some way or another, and each of these doubles utilized in their analysis of the email whatever mode of technical support was appropriate: text, drawing, photo, and video. The grammar and syntax in the letter have been parsed by a proof-reader [Fig. 2], an etiquette consultant despised

The next year, another exhibition was also organized by Daniel Buren at the Labrouste reading room in The Bibliothèque national de France (BnF) [Fig. 6].



[Fig. 6] Sophie Calle, « Take Care of Yourself » installation view at The Bibliothèque national de France, 2008

This work not only stands on its own, but also circulates within different networks in Calle's art practices dealing with her suffering. Most important among these are her other break-up stories with her boyfriends, along with the film « No sex last night⁸ » (1992) and « Exquisite Pain » (1999). In her works, the scenario functions under the "auto/biographical pact," which Calle calls the 'rules of the game,' and in many cases this is prescribed in advance. Particularly, in the filmic work « No Sex Last Night », originally titled « Double Blind » the cinematographic autobiographical pact is inserted both in the subtitle, accompanied with her real voiceover, for the screen version and through her personal narration in the live performance version, as though this autobiographical pact proves the authenticity of the narrative.

The following preface is Calle's autobiographical pact placed at the beginning of « Take Care of Yourself », Acte Sud edition [Fig. 7].

J'ai reçu un mail de rupture. Je n'ai pas su répondre.
C'était comme s'il ne m'était pas destiné.
Il se terminait par les mots : Prenez soin de vous.
J'ai pris cette recommandation au pied de la lettre.
J'ai demandé à 107 femmes – dont une à plumes
et deux en bois –, choisies pour leur métier, leur talent,
d'interpréter la lettre sous un angle professionnel.
L'analyser, la commenter, la jouer, la danser, la chanter.
La disséquer. L'épuiser. Comprendre pour moi.
Parler à ma place.
Une façon de prendre le temps de rompre.
A mon rythme.
Prendre soin de moi.

[Fig. 7] Sophie Calle, *op.cit.*, préface de « Prenez soin de vous »

I received an email telling me it was over.
I didn't know how to respond.
It was almost as if it hadn't been meant for me.
It ended with the words, "Take care of yourself,"
And so I did.
I asked 107 women (including two made from wood
and one with feathers), chosen for their profession
or skills,
to interpret this letter:
To analyze it, comment on it, dance it, sing it.
Dissect it. Exhaust it. Understand it for me.
Answer for me.
It was a way of taking the time to break up.
A way of taking care of myself.

This preface serves to define herself as a first-person narrator in this art documentation, and this position is in stark contrast to the third-person approach to her boyfriend that Calle solicits from her professionals. The dynamics of this structure may be usefully juxtaposed with Philippe Lejeune's concept of the autobiographical pact. Although revised after theoretical problems were pointed out and critical arguments were launched, Lejeune's first autobiographical pact, found in *The Autobiography in France* (1971), used the metaphor of a 'musical score' (of which an autobiographical pact is but one form of clef indicating the pitch of the notes following it). To build on the metaphor, we might say that in « Take Care of Yourself », Sophie Calle composed a kind of 'Break-up Letter Variations' and modulated the

key by making 107 professionals act as first-person. Finally, she orchestrates a virtual chorus of women's interpretations and assessments of her own pain.

From a formalistic point of view, the variations of artistic form in « Take Care of Yourself » might also be compared to the formalism in Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style*¹⁰, where the same inconsequential episode is repeated ninety-nine times with only minimal variations in tone and style. Sophie Calle often integrates occasional elements of Oulipo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle) into her works¹¹ as the 'rules of the game' or 'ritual' [Fig. 8], that whimsical methodology developed in 1960 's by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais, in which literary works and word play are created through the imposition of altogether arbitrary impediments, limitations, and mandates.

Wou le Souvenir d'enfance, de Georges Perec, en poche, et munie d'un billet de train de la compagnie des Wagons-lits, je me suis rendue ce Week-end, en Wagon restaurant, à Liège, en Wallonie. J'ai feuilleté à la lumière d'une ampoule de 20 Watts un recueil sur l'histoire du Western, en sirotant un Whisky. Inévitablement, je me suis rendue durant le voyage aux W-C. J'avais emmené mon Walkman, et j'ai même fait du zèle en emportant également *La Walkyrie* de Wagner, un ordinateur pour consulter le World Wide Web, des ouvrages sur les photographes Weegee et William Wegman ainsi qu'un livre de Walt Whitman.

[Fig. 8] Sophie Calle, W comme « Week-end en Wallonie », *Double-jeux*, 1998, Actes sud

Sophie Calle repeats, "In my work, it is the text that has counted most. And yet the image was the beginning of everything. [...] Then there was « Take Care of Yourself ». For the project, I asked women to speak my words for me. However, by entrusting the text to others I lost it in a way. I had to find my place. And so, I went back to the image and it was at that point that it became the priority¹²."

In this work, Calle explores not the "pain of others" but rather her own pain. In doing so, however, she does not

work introspectively. That is to say, for Calle, it is a usage of a moving image representing her suffering that is more essential than what the image represents. Rather than understanding her own pain, she commissions an external engagement with the source of her pain in order to solicit the regard of others.

Through that gesture her pain is no longer hers. At least it is no longer hers alone, and the conventional subject/object dichotomy is reconfigured as she considers her pain through representations constructed by others. Ironically, Calle does not really follow the advice of her ex-boyfriend that gives the work its title: "Take care of yourself." While that advice suggests a personal, individual process for regarding pain, Calle "crowd-sources" therapeutic approaches to her team of professionals. This, too, redefines the conventional categories of self/other and subject/object. Finally, by entrusting others with her own pain, and also by regarding it back by herself, the art practice come to an end. the pain of self has no longer stayed.

III. Couldn't Capture Death



[Fig. 9] Sophie Calle, « Pas pu saisir la mort », Colour 16/9 film, sound, approximate running time, 12min, 2007

« Couldn't Capture Death » [Fig. 9] is a part of the main exhibition « Rachel Monique... » that starts with an auto/biographical pact as follows.

She was called successively Rachel, Monique, Szyndler, Calle, Pagliero, Gonthier, Sindler. My mother liked to be the object of discussion. Her life did not appear in my work, and that annoyed her.

When I set up my camera at the foot of the bed where she was dying - I wanted to be present to hear her last words, and was afraid that she would pass away in my absence - she exclaimed, "At last!"

« Couldn't Capture Death » is a multimedia installation that combines video, text, music, and photography presented in an intimate setting in some venue: the basement of a museum, a church or a Japanese tea room. The 13-minutes video loop projects her mother on her deathbed. Having heard that the dying sometimes wait for loved ones to leave the room before taking their last breath, Sophie Calle put a video camera in the hospital room so that she did not run the risk of not being present at the very moment of death.

The trajectory of thought I would like to consider is this: if Calle's early practice investigates what text and image, in other words, autobiography and auto-portrait could do for her, if she was at that time exploring the therapeutic possibilities of text and image, then her later work examines what she can do with text and image, particularly the moving image and its emotional capacity to generate in others empathy for our lived realities. The spectator has gotten used to depictions of agony and death, in literature, painting, and even in the still image. Yet a moving image seems to function differently as it represents in an aesthetic context the pain of others, even during this exposure to one of the most intimate events imaginable: the death of an unfamiliar person, one with whom we have no personal relationship. As Susan Sontag has written:

Harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they are not much help if the task is to understand. Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us¹³.

Susan Sontag pointed out that the photographic image, whilst producing an emotional reaction in the viewer, does not relate a story, or offer 'understanding.' Photography as an index requires supplemental references and an explanation by caption. Nonetheless,

surely one 'texturizes' the image just as one 'images' a text, and neither has any innate advantage in understanding one's own pain or that of others. Moreover, even the text by itself cannot offer an adequate interpretation, especially when we compare it to moving images, so rich in both context and form. With a moving image, we have not only sub-titles and voice-overs but also a tone of voice, eye contact and the atmosphere prevailing in the relationships. That is, the privileging of textual narrative assumes 'understanding' to be a linguistic effect, eliding those pathways to apprehension that can be generated through non-linguistic sensory mechanisms that, quite literally, tell us so much 'regarding' the pain of others. These non-linguistic sensory mechanisms would include not only the visual and the aural, but the gestural, olfactory, tactile, and so forth. Hence, what matters are the relations and formations.

Nicholas Bourriaud explains in his book *Esthétique Relationnelle*¹⁴, 1998, a sort of (con)fusion between style and content and an inventive compatibility of the former with the latter; it is not a matter of subject and/or object, not a matter of "what does the image mean?" The fundamental premise is that, far from being autonomous, the human sense of itself is formed from the outset in and through relations with an other. For Calle, it is the 'other' that establishes the image of her own pain to regard.

This issue is particularly pertinent when considering Sophie Calle's moving images in her works, in which her own voice-over and sub-titles are explanatory and constative, whilst most of 107 female professionals are rather affective in « Take Care of Yourself ». This is the case in so far as emotional narratives are either absent, or at best alluded to in the titles in « Couldn't Capture Death ». This does not mean that regarding the image sequences one cannot come to some understanding — this is possible in the case of « Double Blind » and « Couldn't Capture Death », but where a prescription for the pain isn't supplied, it is the responsibility of the viewer to reconstruct it.

In this work, Sophie Calle tried to capture the death of her mother in the making through the recording

of a moving image. As Sontag pointed out, although photography could not relate a story, nor make one understand the pain of others, the duration of time in the videography could capture her mother's pain, both in life and in death. In the video, the mother is dying, lying perfectly still in bed with her eyes closed all the while. Therefore, ironically, the "moving" image on the video hardly moves at all; it looks like time-lapse photography counting down the moments leading to death. This video work is synchronized with a photo-journal counting down Calle's other pain in « Exquisite Pain ». Thus, Sophie Calle confronts us with the moving image of her mother's death, the pain of the other conflated with her own pain, which Calle could not capture sufficiently by photography itself. The viewer is tasked with deciding whose pain is really on display: is it that of the dying mother? Or that of Calle as the daughter watching her mother's final hours? Or that of Calle's double as the heartbroken ex-girlfriend? This conundrum produces an active engagement with the represented pains, transferring them partly to the viewer. Here again the conventional categories of viewing subject and viewed object, of self and other, are recalibrated.

IV . Conclusion

For Sophie Calle, the exemplary model is 'game and ritual' in the form of investigative research. Following the lead of Sontag, "Although narratives can make us understand, images are not much help if the task is to understand", we might say that not only photography but also video images do something else. They haunt us—otherwise is it only a video recording or a descriptive report; it is not an image in the most powerful sense of the word. What touches us is something born out of intimacy. Where the image regarding the pain of self/others crops up in Calle's work, it is anything but an 'investigative' image; rather, it is produced in the relationship between the artist and others, the *dramatis personae* and spectators, and in the formation and usage of images as a perpetual series of transactions with the subjectivity of others that solicits an empathetic response. Her work presents a moving image that

demands "regarding," an image that is as certain as its form. Sometimes it takes an image created by others to illuminate the pain of the self and to generate empathy for it. In these cases compassion for the pain of others may open a pathway to an apprehension of the vulnerability of the pain of self, or vice versa.

The following passage is from Jean Baudrillard's *Please follow me* (1983), post scripted for « Suite Vénitienne »:

You seduce yourself by being absent, by being no more than a mirror for the other who is unaware — as with Kiekegaard's mirror, hanging on the opposite wall: The young girl doesn't think of it, but the mirror does. You seduce yourself into the other's destiny, the double of his path, which, for him, has meaning, but when repeated, does not¹⁵.

« Take Care of Yourself » also comes to an end with Calle's closing remark, "This was all about a letter. Not the man who wrote it...". In Sophie Calle's art practice, images reach beyond a regard for her own pain to arrive at somewhere in the middle of auto/biography and auto/portrait, a perspective that will intensify her art not only for herself but also both participants and spectators. The images draw to and from themselves a sense of an other, and to which we are compelled to respond emotionally through the aesthetic experience.

Videographies

- Sophie Calle, « Prenez soin de vous » composé de trente-trois vidéos, paris, Acte Sud, 2007
- Sophie Calle, « Pas pu saisir la mort », Film 16/9 couleur, son, durée approximative 12', 2007
- Sophie Calle et Greg Shephard, « No Sex Last Night », Film couleur, son, partiellement sous-titré, 35mm, 72min, 1992

Notes

1. Rosalind E. Krauss, *Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition*, October, No.116, 2006, pp. 55-62
2. Sophie Calle, *Suite Vénitienne*, paris, Éditions de l'Etoile, 1980. Autobiographical pact in the preface: "Depuis des mois, je suivais des inconnus dans la rue. Pour le plaisir de les suivre et non parce que ils m'intéressaient. Je les photographiais à leur insu, notais leurs déplacements, puis finalement les perdais de vue et les oubliais. A la fin du mois de janvier 1980, dans les rues de Paris, je suivis un homme que je perdis quelques minutes plus tard dans la foule. Le soir même tout à fait par hasard, il me fut présenté. Je lui dis que je l'avais suivi dans l'après-midi et lui racontai pourquoi. Au cours de la conversation, il me parla d'un projet imminent de voyage à Venise."
3. Sophie Calle, *Douleur exquise*, paris, Actes Sud, 1999. Calle's Autobiographical pact in the preface as follows: "Avant la douleur, En 1984, le ministère des Affaires étrangères m'a accordé une bourse d'études de trois mois au Japon. Je suis partie le 25 octobre sans savoir que cette date marquait le début d'un compte à rebours de quatre-vingt-douze jours qui allait aboutir à une rupture, banale, mais que j'ai vécue alors comme le moment le plus douloureux de ma vie. J'en ai tenu ce voyage pour responsable."
"Après la douleur, De retour en France, le 28 janvier 1985, j'ai choisi, par conjuration, de raconter ma souffrance plutôt que mon périple. En contrepartie, j'ai demandé à mes interlocuteurs, amis ou rencontres de fortune: "Quand avez-vous le plus souffert?" Cet échange cesserait quand j'aurais épuisé ma propre histoire à force de la raconter, ou bien relativise ma peine face à celle des autres. La méthode a été radicale: en trois mois j'étais guérie. L'exorcisme réussi, dans la crainte d'une rechute, j'ai délaissé mon projet. Pour l'exhumer quinze ans plus tard."
4. Sophie Calle, *Prenez soin de vous*, paris, Actes Sud, 2007
5. Sophie Calle, *Rachel, Monique...*, Paris, Éditions Xavier Barral, 2012
6. Sophie Calle, « Pas pu saisir la mort », Film/16/9 couleur, son, durée 12 min, 2007
7. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York, Picador, 2003
8. Sophie Calle, Greg Shephard « No Sex Last Night », Film, couleur, sound, partly subtitled, 35mm, 72min, 1992
9. Philippe Lejeune, *L'Autobiographie en France*, Paris, A.Colin, 1971, p72: "Ecrire un pacte autobiographique (quel qu'en soit le contenu), c'est d'abord poser sa voix, choisir le ton, le registre dans lequel on va parler, définir son lecteur, les relations qu'on entend avoir avec lui: c'est comme la clef, les dièses ou les bémols en tête de la portée: tout le reste de discours en dépend. C'est choisir son rôle."
10. Raymond Queneau, *Exercices de Style*, paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1947
11. Cf. Sophie Calle « Double-jeu », 1999, « Ou et quand? », 2009, « Douleur exquise », 1999
12. The guardian.com (9 Januuary, 2011), Art & Design, Retrieved october 16, 2017 from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jan/09/sophie-calle>
13. Susan Sontag, op.cit., p.89
14. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle*, paris, Les Presses du réel, 1998, pp. 17-19
15. Jean Baudrillard, « Please Follow Me » 1983, *Sophie Calle: The Reader*, London, Whitechapel Gallery, 2009, pp.18-26: "Vous vous séduisez d'être absent, de n'être plus que le miroir de l'autre qui ne le sait pas-tout - comme celui de Kierkegaard, suspendu au mur opposé : la jeune fille n'y pense pas, mais le miroir y pense. Vous vous séduisez d'être le destin de l'autre, le double de son parcours qui, pour lui, a un sens, mais qui, redoublé, n'en a plus."