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**Artist, detective, criminal: Sophie Calle as haunting flâneur in urban  
spaces**



Calle, Sophie. *Les Fantômes d'Orsay*. 2022. Photo taken by Ellie Bulloch.

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ABSTRACT

Sophie Calle is a globally renowned figure in contemporary art, and yet she evades definition. Critics have struggled to define Calle's artworks and artistic process since the 1970s, linking her to movements such as Conceptualism, Surrealism, and Situationism, yet falling short of an all-encompassing description. She is often connected to ideas of female madness, and contradicts what is deemed acceptable of women in art; such labels are narrow and short-sighted. I argue that it is in fact *flânerie*, first coined by Charles Baudelaire in 1863, which most aptly defines Calle's artworks. When looking back on Calle's career, it becomes apparent that she acts as a *flâneur* in her pieces involving movement through urban environments, following individuals as a means through which to interact with space. Calle highlights that space derives meaning from its relationship to people, but that this is also mirrored in how space can bring meaning to us. My reflection on Calle's earlier works has stemmed from a pattern of returning and revisiting evident in her artistic process. Her engagement with *flânerie* highlights a desire to rediscover spaces after the passage of time, which reveals a haunting element within the role of the *flâneur*. This thesis seeks to situate Calle's artistic process within the practice of *flânerie*, as well as conducting an analysis of the haunting nature of the *flâneur*. Calle's artworks which involve movement through space and time are discussed in the thesis, such as her newest work, *Les Fantômes d'Orsay* (2022).

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## INTRODUCTION

Sophie Calle has developed a career based on sometimes notorious practices through her engaging and provocative artworks, and has become a globally renowned figure in contemporary art. Rising to fame in the late 1970s and early 1980s, her pieces ignored and crossed accepted boundaries, featuring controversial subjects which often invaded the privacy of strangers. Kemp (2013, 313) describes Calle's work as 'voyeuristic, predatory and solipsistic', which can be seen through her desire to observe and photograph strangers, whether on the streets of Paris like in *Préambule* (1978) or in her own bed as in *Les dormeurs* (1979). She has taken on many different roles throughout her career, often shrouding her identity through disguises. This has included becoming a stripper in the Pigalle area of Paris (*The Striptease*, 1979), taking employment as a maid in Venetian hotels (*L'Hôtel*, 1981), and playing a detective-like role as she tracked a man for two weeks (*Suite vénitienne*, 1980). This often enables her to get closer to her subjects, and to document her interactions with strangers without revealing her identity. Calle's interest in strangers forms part of her concern with the everyday, including subjects such as loss, absence, and heartbreak in her artwork. This is also reflected in her rather ordinary settings: hotels and city streets are two of Calle's most favoured and reoccurring locations in her art. However, Calle's seemingly banal subjects often hide uncomfortable undertones of intrusion: 'a sense of violation and ethereal danger' is present in her work (Bennett 1990, 31). One of Calle's

artworks, *Le carnet d'adresses* (1983), in which Calle interviewed people from a found address book in order to develop an image of the book's owner, led to threats of court action.

This element of criminality extends to her artworks involving following, too, as this evokes imagery of stalking. Calle's work is rich with themes of following, identity, and transgression of public and private spheres. In her projects, walking becomes an active exchange with urban spaces, with ambiguous motivations. She has become famous for work which blurs the lines between acceptability and criminality, epitomised by her first major piece, *Suite vénitienne* (1980). In this piece, Calle takes an interest in a new acquaintance and pursues him, following him all the way to Venice. She followed him for two weeks, tracking his every move without his knowledge or consent, and subsequently presented the documentation of her escapade in both exhibition and book format. This documentation included close-up photography of the subject, maps of Venice, and images of the routes taken throughout the project. Calle interspersed these with diary entries from this time, where she detailed her thoughts and feelings about the experience. This behaviour would typically be deemed inappropriate, evoking, or perhaps even glorifying, stalking. And yet, it launched her career. Despite her preference for such uncomfortable subjects, Calle's artworks have been widely successful, landing her accolades and awards such as exhibiting her work at the 2007 Venice Biennale, and receiving a Centenary Medal from the Royal Photographic Society in 2019 (RPS 2022).

However, this active transgression of boundaries has led to a particular perception of Calle and her artwork. Reviews from a shared exhibition titled *Seven Obsessions* (1990) at the Whitechapel Gallery in London highlight the controversial and unconventional nature of Calle's work. James Hall (1990) describes Calle as a 'fruitcake', arguing that she 'is so keen to touch on every single taboo... [that] it is titillation rather than trauma.' This is reiterated by the Arts Review in the *Tribune London* (1990), which states Calle 'construct[s] an autobiography of sexual threat and excitement.' David Lillington (1990) suggests that the exhibition 'operates on the borders between aesthetics, sociology and psychology', but does not go into more depth about what this means. These reviews, collated from a visit to the Whitechapel Gallery Archive, convey a preoccupation and particular concern with the subject of Calle's work, but do little in the way of discussing her process or artistic choices. It seems that the critics are perhaps distracted or taken aback by her controversial topics, and therefore struggle to define or categorize Calle's work. This is a trend that has continued to prevail when discussing Calle and her artwork. She is often described with limited, and perhaps gendered, labels, such as 'stalker, stripper, sleeper, spy' and 'mad' (Jeffries 2009; Duguid 2009).

Although discussion about the controversial nature of Calle's artworks has its place, narrow labels can be reductive and lessen the complexity of her art. Certain descriptions of Calle's work are not conducive to an in-depth discussion of her process and choices, limiting readings of her artwork. It seems

contradictory that the work of such a famous and revered artist can be reduced to unhelpful and outdated ideas of female madness. There is much more to Calle's work that deserves discussion and analysis, and this is what I seek to achieve in this thesis. I have found that Calle's artistic process mirrors the practice of flânerie closely. Her interest in strangers, the everyday, and urban spaces reflects the flâneur's desire to observe the city through movement. Rather than engaging in criminal pursuits such as stalking, Calle is in fact interacting with the modern fabric of urban spaces. Her focus on strangers is a means of understanding our relationship with space; intrusion and immoral transgressions are not necessarily Calle's aims. They are, perhaps, by-products of her aims, which is why the labels of detective and criminal have been identified in the title of this thesis; these roles are also misconceptions about the flâneur. However, this thesis will prioritise focusing on active processes evident throughout Calle's artworks. Movement through and interaction with urban spaces is a trend prevalent across Calle's career. It is important to consider this pattern in depth in order to gain a fuller understanding of Calle's artworks.

Thus, this thesis will analyse five artworks by Sophie Calle which convey a theme of flânerie: *Préambule/Paris Shadows* (1978), *Les Fantômes d'Orsay* (2022), *Suite vénitienne* (1980), *La Filature/The Shadow* (1981), and

*Vingt ans après/Twenty Years Later* (2001).<sup>1</sup> It is now important to return to Calle's earlier pieces, to shed light on her role as a flâneur, but also to consider Calle's own process of returning. Her active involvement in flânerie portrays a desire to rediscover spaces after the passage of time, evoking a sense of haunting as Calle retraces her past, and alludes to the future, through her continuous engagement with space. Calle's artworks will be analysed in relation to the flâneur and questions of space, time, history, and identity. The thesis begins by discussing the context and development of the flâneur, linking this role to Calle, before moving on to analyse each of the artworks in depth. The chapters take a semi-chronological approach in order to understand and contextualise the pattern which emerges across Calle's artworks. *Les Fantômes d'Orsay* may seem out of place in this way, as it is the most recent of Calle's pieces. However, this artwork is based on a sense of return: Calle revisits Orsay in 2022, as her first engagement with this space was in 1978. This structure is therefore also in reference to Calle's process of haunting, and returning to spaces through her flânerie. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to situate Calle within the practice of flânerie and haunting, understood as a kind of haunting that engages with the

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<sup>1</sup> Calle's artworks often feature both French and English titles. I use the French titles throughout this thesis, which are the official titles and not my own translations.



past, present and future of spaces, moving past narrow definitions previously attributed to her artwork.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Paris 1863: The flâneur

Following as artistic process became a defining feature of Calle's work in the 1980s and 1990s. While it may seem controversial, Calle is accepted, famous, and revered. This, I argue, derives from her engagement with flânerie: the accepted artistic practice of wandering or following in others in urban spaces. Derived from the French verb flâner (to wander aimlessly), Charles Baudelaire coined the term flâneur in the 1860s to describe an individual who observes modern life through strolling. Flânerie is a key feature in many of Calle's early works, including but not limited to *Préambule* (1979), *La Filature* (1981), and *Suite vénitienne* (1980), all of which will be discussed in this thesis. However, Calle's most recent work, *Les Fantômes d'Orsay* (2022), also depicts aspects of her practice as a flâneur. Flânerie is a wandering exploration of space, often urban environments, which involves re-visiting, returning to, and rediscovering spaces. In this particular piece, Calle returns to a place she once called home, forty years later. It can be argued that flânerie is a process of haunting as much as it is of moving, as old spaces and traces are continually revisited. Calle's chosen subject and exhibition location in *Fantômes*, her previous squat, reveals that her role as a flâneur is often one of returning to spaces, reinforcing the haunting nature of flânerie. This discovery allows a new lens through which to analyse Calle's earlier works. This chapter will explore

the defining features of *flânerie*, such as following, concern with the everyday, and interest in the ephemeral, in relation to Calle and her artworks.

Situating Calle within this tradition enables an understanding of why she chooses to return to artworks and locations, and facilitates the exploration of her pieces beyond broad labels such as Conceptualism. Calle is often labelled as a conceptual artist, known famously as a ‘candid, provocative French conceptualist’ (Kastner 2017, 81). Many critics choose to identify Calle and her artworks with Conceptualism, but as Pincus (1989, 29) argues, this label does not fully encapsulate Calle’s works. Although the form of her artworks ‘reveals an obvious debt to Conceptual art’, her priorities differ from other conceptualists (Pincus 1989, 29). For example, she is not concerned with ‘dramatizing the problematic status of the art object’ (Pincus 1989, 29). Considering her work in relation to the practice of *flânerie*, however, allows us to see the intricacies and complexities of her artworks while also highlighting a pattern in her artistic process which emerges over the course of her career. Understanding the meaning of *flânerie* in more detail is crucial to exploring Calle’s work in relation to this process. It is also necessary to consider the history and past perceptions of *flânerie* – the *flâneur* is typically described as a male character, and the definition of the word is rarely expanded to include women. It is therefore important to explore the meaning of *flânerie* in more depth in order to challenge this gendered framework. This will also hopefully encourage discussion about Calle and her work beyond the typical genre labels

– conceptualist, surrealist, situationist. More importantly, this enables a perception of Calle which considers the different layers of her work which overlap across her career, therefore distancing her artwork from restrictive definitions.

In 1863, Charles Baudelaire linked flânerie, and the character of the flâneur, explicitly to art. The flâneur could be found as a literary character in works such as *The Man of the Crowd* (1840) by Edgar Allan Poe, which Baudelaire took a particular interest in. Poe's ([1840] 2018, 1) seminal work begins with an epigraph from *Les Caractères* (1688) by Jean de la Bruyère: '*Ce grand malheur, de ne pouvoir être seul.*' This quotation is reflective of Poe's narrator, who is unable to remain peacefully in his own company, and the character of the old man, who does not leave the crowd. In Poe's *The Man of the Crowd*, an unnamed narrator becomes fascinated by the crowd he sees out of the window of a coffee shop. He decides to follow one man who particularly piques his interest, keeping his distance so as not to be seen. Despite following the old man for a full day, the narrator ends his journey no wiser than he began it – he feels he was unable to learn anything about the man. Baudelaire suggests that this narrator contemplated '*la foule avec jouissance*' from the safe distance '*derrière la vitre d'un café*', taking meaning and pleasure from these fleeting observations (Baudelaire [1863] 2010, 12). However, he '*se mêle par la pensée à toutes les pensées qui s'agitent autour de lui*', and is therefore never alone, perhaps agitated into movement through his curiosity (Baudelaire [1863] 2010,

12). Curiosity becomes ‘une passion fatale’ and ‘irrésistible’, spurring the character to follow the individuals of interest to him (Baudelaire [1863] 2010, 12). Calle’s most famous following piece, *Suite vénitienne*, reflects the experience of Poe’s unnamed narrator. Unable to forget Henri B., and taking an interest in his upcoming trip, she is moved to follow him by her curiosity. Yet, despite pursuing her subject for almost two weeks, she is no wiser about his character nor his life. Although Calle was unable to discern much about this man’s life, she still chose to publish the documentation compiled on her journey. Thus, Calle clearly takes meaning from these interactions, and suggests that they are worthwhile and of interest, even if they do not culminate in knowledge of the subject. This is reflected in Calle’s struggle to forget her man in the crowd long after the act of following had taken place.

The inability of both Calle and Poe’s narrator to keep their curiosity at bay conveys that the flâneur could also be seen as a figure of haunting. They are haunted by the faces and spaces they see in the crowd, desperate to begin following again. They also become a haunting presence, as they wander the streets of city spaces and weave in amongst urban crowds. All at once, they are a haunting of the past, present, and future, as they continuously move through the spaces they know so well. They tread paths walked in the past, while also setting in motion new journeys for the future. As they walk they engage with previous uses and experiences of the space around them, whilst also leaving behind traces for future wanderers. The flâneur may inspire others to take

similar routes in the future, but also takes note of interesting aspects of the city to explore themselves at a later date. They feed into a constant engagement with urban space which transcends timelines, as they take interest in traces from the past, and create traces to be found in the future. They become an echo of the city and the crowd, as they are always present, always wandering. To move through the same spaces again and again creates this echo, a repeated refrain, which can be noticed by flâneurs in the future. For example, in *Les Fantômes d'Orsay* (2022), Calle follows the traces left decades earlier by a hotel handyman named Oddo, as she finds his name written repeatedly on documents in the old building. Thus, the flâneur is affected by echoes left by others as much as they are an echo themselves.

They also exist as a witness to the changing urban environment and moving crowd. Just as the unnamed narrator of Poe's book is intrigued by the man in the crowd, so too is he intrigued by every individual person and street. As argued by Walter Benjamin ([1935] 2002, 434-435), 'un nom de rue exerce une attraction toujours plus irrésistible'; there is always something new to find, explore, and become interested in if you look hard enough. Thus, the flâneur is both a haunting character, and someone who follows the traces left behind by others. They witness the seemingly banal and ordinary movements and traces of and in the city, which would otherwise be left unseen. The relationship between the flâneur, the city, and the crowd is therefore a cyclical one, dependant on the haunting traces left by themselves and others. This is reflected

in many of Calle's works, including her relationship with Oddo in *Les Fantômes d'Orsay* and Henri B. in *Suite vénitienne*, however it is seen most clearly in her pieces concerned with private detection. In *La Filature* (1981) Calle retraces the steps of her past as she leads a private investigator (who is unaware of her plans) through her memories of Paris, stopping in areas such as the Jardin de Luxembourg where she had her first kiss. This journey set in motion a future project, *Vingt ans après* (2001), where Calle attempted to recreate the experience of being followed, and of leading someone, through Paris. Both of these projects were dependent on the previous wanderings of Calle herself, on the urban spaces of Paris, and on members of the crowd (in this instance, private detectives). This therefore creates a cycle of following and wandering, and highlights how memories of space can influence future journeys.

Baudelaire developed the idea of the flâneur by linking it to real artistic practices. In his essay *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* (1863), he enabled the character of the flâneur to move from the literary sphere into the real world, according the role a degree of legitimacy and social acceptance in the process. According to Baudelaire ([1863] 2010, 9), flânerie is found through the prism of artistic interactions: the flâneur is an artist who privileges 'la circonstance et de tout ce qu'elle suggère d'éternel' in their work. Thus, chance encounters and observations play a large part in the practice of flânerie. These artistic methods have also inspired movements such as Surrealism and Situationism, with the idea of the Situationist *dérive* mirroring the practice of flânerie quite closely.

The *dérive* was a way of ‘engaging with and observing urban environments’ (McLaughlin & Fry 2001, 59). However, on a deeper level, it was concerned with highlighting, challenging, and changing the narrow ‘social organization of space’ (Pinder 2018, 19-21). Practising the *dérive* involved wandering through and immersing oneself in urban spaces, ignoring the ‘usual reasons for moving and acting, including those tied to working and leisure’, in order to challenge ‘capitalist urbanism’ (Pinder 2018, 20, 23). Individuals who took part in this practice aimed to disrupt traditional ways of moving in and interacting with cities, highlighting new ways of seeing ‘familiar’ spaces (Pinder 2018, 22). Some Situationists chose to record this through maps, similar to the inclusion of maps in Calle’s artworks. Some practitioners, such as Ivan Chtcheglov, chose to present ‘multiple coexisting realities’ by overlaying different maps on top of each other (Pinder 2018, 22). *Flânerie* is also present in Surrealism, with chance encounters as one of the fundamental practices in the movement. Surrealism was intrinsically linked to ideas of the unconscious and the dream state, however Chilvers and Glaves-Smith (2015) suggest that Surrealism was also practiced physically through walking. He argues that ‘French Surrealism was uncompromisingly urban in its vision’, as practitioners would wander through the city of Paris to spark Surrealist thought (Chilvers and Glaves-Smith 2015). In addition, photography became a key tool through which to express Surrealist thought, reflecting the journalistic and media-based origins of *flânerie* (Chilvers and Glaves-Smith 2015; Benjamin [1935] 2002, 463). The influence of *flânerie* in both of these artistic movements demonstrates a preference for



documentation after the act of wandering is complete. The practice of documenting *flânerie* in photographic form, or otherwise, makes physical a process that is in some ways quite abstract. It also allows for a visual return to ideas and spaces encountered while engaging with urban space. Blazwick (2009, 10) suggests that Calle's interest in chance in her work 'reiterates a preoccupation that runs from Surrealism through the psychogeographic derives of the Situationists.' It is perhaps why so many critics have linked Calle's own dealings with photography and chance encounters with the practice of Surrealism, thus highlighting the artistic nature of *flânerie*. This highlights that it is not possible to use either Situationist or Surrealist movements in isolation to define Calle and her artworks. Calle does not engage with politics in the direct manner of the Situationists, and she is not concerned with some of the core values of Surrealism, such as interacting with dream states. Her link to both movements is, in fact, her engagement with *flânerie*, as this practice was inspiration for both movements. This renders the exploration of *flânerie* in relation to Calle's work even more relevant.

Moreover, in *flânerie*, traditional conceptions of beauty typically found in fine art are rejected for the pleasure of the everyday, visible from inside the urban crowd (Baudelaire [1863] 2010, 14). This is a painter of modernity, who has no interest in upholding the artistic tradition of 'héroïques ou religieuses' scenes; they are aware that there is also value to be had in the depiction of our constantly changing reality, which requires 'une égale vélocité d'exécution'

(Baudelaire [1863] 2010, 9). Movements and spaces that would perhaps be considered ordinary, and therefore not worthy of artistic attention, are crucial to this practice. In this way, *flânerie* conveys the interest to be found in the everyday, and the endless possibilities available through the practice of following. Even when walking a path they have come across before, there are always new traces to be found. Space continually changes in tandem with the people who use it; thus *flânerie* becomes a never-ending pursuit. It is therefore unsurprising that the everyday, or *le quotidien*, became a prevalent theme in twentieth century art and artistic circles. Artistic movements which focus on and incorporate the everyday are often less concerned with the aesthetics of their pieces. For example, the political message and challenge to capitalism was of higher importance to Situationists than the fine art aesthetics or beauty of their artworks. This is also true of Surrealist art, which was seen as a means through which to engage the dream state and the unconscious mind. It was therefore initially popularised as a process, rather than a particular aesthetic. Both of these movements privilege the spontaneous nature of the everyday, and process over aesthetics. This interest in the everyday has continued into the modern day, with Calle's artworks as a prime example. Although Calle is concerned by the presentation of her artworks, often following a particular aesthetic evoking detection and evidence, she prioritises the fleeting moments of the everyday, and the process of following these moments. This is particularly true of her Paris-based artworks, such as *Préambule* (1979), in which she follows strangers chosen at random through the city. The artwork is the act of following,

compounded by elements such as photographs and written diary entries created during the journey. Thus, while Calle's artworks are reflective of aspects of Situationism and Surrealism, both movements take inspiration from *flânerie*, and it is this practice which describes Calle's artworks more fully.

Although placed in the busy centre of modern urban life, the *flâneur* benefits from the same anonymity as Poe's unnamed characters, their true identities remaining hidden from the crowd as they 'jouit partout de son incognito' (Baudelaire [1863] 2010, 14). This suggests that the *flâneur* is an individual in a constant state of flux; they are both an outsider observing the crowd, and an insider who belongs and thrives in this chaotic urban environment. The *flâneur* feels at home in the crowd, yet is detached from it due to their observation and interest in the crowd's movement. Although they physically move as one with the crowd, they do not occupy the same mind frame with regards to the purpose and use of the city. Wilson (1992, 109) has suggested that this 'anonymity annihilates' the *flâneur*, removing their traditional societal power. This can be seen clearly in the power struggles that Calle faces, and to some extent stages, in her artworks. In both *Suite vénitienne* and *La Filature*, Calle contends with her ambiguous position. She claims to feel submissive to the whims and movements of the men she interacts with in these works, stating that her actions are 'pour "lui"' – she becomes consumed by these men (Calle 2019, 114). However, she also plays a role steeped in power, controlling the narrative in both pieces, as well as the route taken in *La Filature*.

This is also evident in *Les Fantômes d'Orsay* as Calle is yet again consumed by the idea of a man, and yet she is in complete control of how she interacts with the space as Oddo is physically no longer there. This power struggle is perhaps unique to flânerie – although both Situationism and Surrealism can be said to contend with power dynamics, they are often more political in nature. Calle, as the flâneur, is instead concerned with the power of space and movement.

Baudelaire claims to have based the character of the flâneur on his friend, artist Constantin Guys, although some writers dispute this. Pollock (2003, 99) has suggested that this was a 'pretext' to 'weave an elaborate and impossible image of his ideal artist'. Additionally, Solnit (2001, 237) argues that the flâneur remained a literary conception, and that there is 'no actual individual who qualifies as or was known as a flâneur'. This suggests that the creation of the flâneur stemmed from idealism, as Baudelaire felt disdain towards the traditional aesthetics of the art world at the time. Following this argument, *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* becomes a manifesto for the changes Baudelaire wants to see in the art world: his perception of the ideal artist. It perhaps makes sense then that Baudelaire chooses to base the foundations of his flâneur character on Poe's literary counterpart, as this fictional character epitomises the ideal traits of Baudelaire's artist of the everyday. Moreover, the artist engaged in flânerie is one who has managed to merge art and life together, given the seemingly ordinary interests and pursuits of the character, such as walking. They act in ways that do not seem to be art at all, perhaps highlighting

Baudelaire's idealism, as this does not necessarily seem realistic. Calle has achieved this, with her artworks seeming rather ordinary to critics such as Brian Sewell, who commented on the 'grey' and 'grainy' standard of Calle's photography, which is deemed 'meaningless without her texts' (Sewell 1990, 23). Calle's photographic style can be seen as 'amateurish' given her lack of interest in fine art aesthetics, giving her photographs a seemingly ordinary quality, and thus further linking her practice to the everyday (Rowlands 2021).

Despite this, I think that whether de Guys was, or was not, a flâneur is completely irrelevant. The fact that Baudelaire linked the character of the flâneur to a real person is of much more significance, as it legitimised flânerie as an artistic practice, allowing flânerie to move from a literary sphere to an artistic one. The flâneur had featured heavily in literary works, with fictional detectives often engaging in flânerie, however had not yet been linked to the art world. Baudelaire's description of the flâneur as an artist is therefore of great significance, as it encouraged the adoption of a new artistic technique, but also reframed the character through an artistic lens. The flâneur has since become an accepted artistic symbol, and a recognised part of art critics' vocabulary. This definition of flânerie as a legitimate artistic practice has facilitated its continuation throughout the years, and enables artists to engage with previously taboo subjects, such as following and the everyday. Flânerie now has a long history in the art world, linked to notable artists from the Situationists in the late 1950s under Guy Debord to modern creatives such as Laura Grace Ford, and of

course, Sophie Calle. By linking *flânerie* to a real person, Baudelaire highlighted that these practices could transgress into reality, and therefore encouraged the adoption of this artistic technique.

German philosopher Walter Benjamin developed the concept of the *flâneur* further in his work *Paris, Capitale du XIXe siècle* (1935), where he reinforces Baudelaire's assertion that *flânerie* exists as a real-world practice. Benjamin ([1935] 2002, 459, 463) links the *flâneur* to a range of societal roles and professions, stating that *flânerie* is the origin of modern-day journalism, and the precursor to the role of the detective. He argues that 'la base sociale de la *flânerie* est le journalisme', linking the process of following to recording journeys and experiences for others to engage with (Benjamin ([1935] 2002, 463). Thus, while Baudelaire ensconced the *flâneur* in art, Benjamin's argument explicitly links *flânerie* with practices of documentation. Both detectives and journalists are concerned with evidence and fact; looking for stories and interesting individuals is the nature of their jobs, albeit in different ways. They are also deeply involved with the everyday, much like Baudelaire's artist. Although they may come across extraordinary stories, all of these are rooted within society and everyday life. This further legitimises the everyday as an important subject, allowing the transition from a past aesthetic of tradition to a more modern concern with society. Furthermore, media such as photography is often essential to the work of the journalist and detective, as they gather evidence and bring life to their stories. This link to mediation firmly situates

flânerie in creative spaces that transgress the boundaries of fine art, while also highlighting the practical manifestations of this practice. Calle's artwork reflects Benjamin's definition of the flâneur clearly through her forensic approach to following, as she obsessively collates her documentation as an investigative journalist might collect evidence. She is particularly invested in writing down her thoughts as she moves through the process of flânerie, and this written narrative ultimately consolidates her practice. Calle has been likened to a detective by critics such as Morrison-Bell (2013, 40), who argues that Calle is a 'private detective or spy in pursuit of knowing more about a person than they do themselves.' Moreover, some of her projects which feature a more social focus, such as *The Bronx* (1980), resemble photojournalism. This indicates that flânerie is a more suitable way to define Calle's practice, as she closely reflects the complexities of this character within her artworks.

In addition, Benjamin ([1935] 2002, 435) cites the city of Paris as fundamental to the existence of the flâneur, arguing that flânerie would not be possible in any other space. The key to Paris as the home of the flâneur, Benjamin ([1935] 2002, 440) contends, is Parisian culture. Benjamin suggests that Parisians '*habitent leurs rues*', thus transforming '*la rue en intérieur*'. This creates a dynamic between inhabitants and the city that facilitates a flânerie, or aimless wandering, as the outdoor, public, urban space of Paris is accepted as '*l'appartement du collectif*' (Benjamin [1935] 2002, 441). The city becomes '*un paysage dépourvu de seuils*', and boundaries between the public and private

spheres are blurred (Benjamin [1935] 2002, 440). Benjamin's assertion that Paris is essential to the flâneur is indicative of their crucial relationship to space. Although the flâneur may follow individuals of interest to them, this is facilitated by the city, and the city itself can often be the subject of their pursuit. Paris, then, becomes a blueprint for the flâneur. Its many winding streets and culture of walking the city easily facilitates the practice of flânerie. It is here, modelled upon the public activity and culture around her, that Calle developed her flânerie. Just as Benjamin places the origins of flânerie in Paris, so too did Calle begin her role as a flâneur in the city. The level of ease and understanding with which Parisians move through their city became the framework for Calle's own practice. It is not insignificant that Calle practiced her flânerie in Paris before moving to other cities. Although she has engaged with a variety of urban spaces throughout her career (most notably Venice in *Suite vénitienne*), Calle continually returns to Paris and often revisits her old haunts through her artworks. Paris is the location for both the first and most recent of Calle's works. *Les Fantômes d'Orsay* (2022) epitomises this, as Calle, having wandered the halls of an abandoned hotel and train station in Paris in the 1970s, returns to the location to walk through it again. Calle's practice reflects a desire to follow and leave traces throughout spaces, and to commit to rediscovering locations across the passage of time. Calle, therefore, models the flâneur in every aspect, encompassing the definitions set out by both Baudelaire and Benjamin.



### The Flâneuse

Having established the context for flânerie, and the reflection of this practice in Calle's own artistic process, it is now important to consider the role of gender in relation to the character of the flâneur. Although flânerie is now widely accepted as an artistic practice, the idea of the flâneur as a female character is the subject of debate, particularly in the field of feminist theory. The flâneur was initially described as a man, 'un *prince*' who moves through urban spaces with ease (Baudelaire [1863] 2010, 14). This is in keeping with other descriptions of the flâneur at this time; Edgar Allan Poe and Walter Benjamin both write of the flâneur as a male character. Thus, it can be challenging when trying to use the term to describe Sophie Calle. This necessitates a more in-depth consideration of the gender politics at play in flânerie, in order to consolidate Calle's position as flâneur. The original gendered depiction of the flâneur was reinforced by Baudelaire's ([1863] 2010, 46) portrayal of women, who 'existent bien plutôt pour le plaisir de l'observateur que pour leur plaisir propre'. The division of men and women in this way was common in nineteenth-century society, particularly with regards to the public and private spheres. Women were effectively constrained to the private sphere unless in the company of acceptable men and chaperones such as husbands and fathers, therefore seen as "other" when present in the public sphere, as Baudelaire demonstrates. Those women who did engage with the public sphere more overtly were deemed less respectable, and often categorised as working women and prostitutes. Wolff

(1985, 37, 45) contends that maintenance of this gender divide throughout society rendered the existence of female flâneurs, or 'flâneuses', impossible. She defines the public sphere as a 'masculine domain', suggesting that even in public spaces where women were not excluded, they were 'practically invisible' (Wolff 1985, 37). This nineteenth-century ideology about gender 'permeated the whole of society', therefore affecting ideas about flânerie as well (Wolff 1985, 37, 45).

Pollock (2003, 112) builds upon Wolff's argument of the gendered division of space, suggesting that the flâneur is not simply defined by the masculine public sphere, but by 'access to a sexual realm' that the public sphere facilitates. According to Pollock (2003, 94, 99), the flâneur 'consum[es] the sights' of the city 'through a controlling' gaze, and Baudelaire's text places women 'as the object of the flâneur's gaze'. Linking flânerie to the male gaze in this way supports the non-existence of flâneuses in the nineteenth century. Mulvey's (1975, 11) male gaze is rooted in the dynamic of men as active consumers, and women as passive sexual objects. In this way, it becomes impossible for women to take the position of the flâneur, as active observation of the city is a key quality of the character. Some nineteenth-century women were able to access 'the life of the flâneur', such as writer George Sand, who dressed in men's clothes in order to wander through the city of Paris freely (Wolff 1984, 41). Similarly, Flora Tristan was able to travel alone as a means through which to understand and document the urban spaces of cities and

poverty, such as in London and Paris (Grogan 2003, 44). The behaviour of these two women is not necessarily representative of wider practices amongst women in the nineteenth century, as their freedom was curbed by the gender norms imposed upon society. Furthermore, using Pollock's theory of *flânerie* and objectification, this means that Sand and Tristan could not be *flâneuses* irrespective of their practices: as women, they were incapable of taking on the role of consumer.

This directly opposes the idea of Calle as *flâneur*, particularly as the traditional and original definition of *flânerie* is quite heavily situated in the nineteenth century. However, gender does not necessarily need to be the defining feature of *flânerie*. Both Wolff's and Pollock's argument prioritise gender when discussing *flânerie*, and while we cannot ignore the importance of gender politics to this debate, it was not the only quality necessary for a nineteenth-century *flâneur*. Gender norms certainly restricted female movement through urban spaces, but being a man was not the only quality needed to gain the title of *flâneur*. Prioritising gender in this way limits the scope of *flânerie*, even for male *flâneurs*. Furthermore, Pollock's use of psychoanalytic models plays into stereotypical representations of gender, and only considers a heterosexual dynamic within *flânerie*. Pollock's use of the male gaze theory highlights a voyeuristic nature of *flânerie*, and the power that can therefore be obtained from this practice. Her implications that the *flâneur*'s power is drawn from their consumption of the environment around them highlights a darker side

to *flânerie*, and conveys a key component of wandering in the nineteenth century. However, her argument implies that *flânerie* is motivated by sexuality, and that women can therefore never be the consumers in this situation. This emphasis on sexual and voyeuristic power dynamics within *flânerie* plays into stereotypical representations of gender, and implies that the act of wandering is implicitly heterosexual in nature. While this was perhaps the norm in nineteenth-century conceptions of *flânerie* and gender, maintaining this definition for modern-day use would limit potential readings of wandering and walking art. Thus, although the nineteenth-century descriptions of *flânerie* are crucial for understanding the role of the *flâneur* in more detail, this highlights the need to adapt the definition.

Wilson (1992, 103) also takes issue with the theories of Wolff and Pollock. She disagrees with their use of psychoanalysis, particularly with their use of Lacanian theories, and their implications of static urban space (Wilson 1992,103). According to Wilson (1992, 105), using theories of the male gaze and psychoanalysis in relation to this topic all too readily accepts the passivity of women. Although she agrees that women were ‘exploited and oppressed’, fundamentally affecting the way they interacted with space, she suggests that constructions of space are ‘contradictory and shifting’, thus the narrative of public and private spaces segregated by gender is an unhelpful one (Wilson 1992, 103). Wilson (1992, 98) contends that in ‘postmodern feminist discourse’, the *flâneur* has become ‘the embodiment of the ‘male gaze’’. This has reinforced

the idea that the city is a masculine space, one which women are unable to enjoy in the same ways as men. Wilson (1992, 104, 105) points out that the perpetuation of this interpretation can lead to ‘the reduction of women to a sign’, highlighting the necessity for a broader definition of *flânerie*.

This makes clear that when engaging with contemporary examples of *flânerie*, it will be important to move away from nineteenth-century conceptions of the practice. Although women continue to face discrimination in certain environments, they are typically not excluded from the public sphere in the same way that they were in the past. As society has progressed, gender norms have also adapted, and are perhaps not as restrictive as they once were. This has facilitated a more diverse female experience when interacting with urban spaces, and this should be acknowledged in the vocabulary used to analyse this movement. The perpetuation of the *flâneur* as a male character removes the possibility of female *flânerie*, therefore limiting the ways in which we can engage with contemporary examples of this practice, and thus Calle’s artwork. As argued by Bourriaud (2002, 7), maintaining a static artistic vocabulary renders contemporary artworks ‘illisible’. A deep consideration of societal transformations is essential to a thorough understanding of art and developing a more effective artistic vocabulary, ‘de saisir ce qui a d’ores et déjà changé et ce qui continue à muer’ (Bourriaud 2002, 11). Thus, it becomes necessary to revise the definition of *flânerie* in consideration of how society has adapted since the nineteenth century, and move away from a restricted gendered definition and

stereotypical heterosexual lens. As argued by Lauren Elkin (2017, 18), to reject the idea of a female flâneur is ‘to limit the ways women have interacted with the city’.

While some critics have argued for an invisibility, or an impossibility, of the flâneuse, Elkin contends that this is because they tried to define women by a gendered, masculine conception. She argues that it is in fact necessary to redefine the concept of flânerie itself, and use a new vocabulary to achieve the goal of incorporating women into the analysis of this practice. Elkin (2017, 288) coins this re-reading of flânerie ‘flâneuserie’. It is apparent that Elkin has made a conscious choice to use this term, rather than subliminally following French grammar rules. Through using this vocabulary, Elkin makes her stance clear; she is acknowledging that while women certainly were and are flâneuses, this is distinctly different from the masculine understanding and conception of the term. She acknowledges that, at the time when Baudelaire coined the term flâneur (and indeed still to an extent today), women were affected by ‘social mores and restrictions’ which impacted their interactions with urban spaces (Elkin 2017, 18). It is her argument that this limited female movement through the city, rather than stopping it completely. As Elkin (2017, 286) argues, ‘space is not neutral’; it is a political and ever-changing arena. A new vocabulary is needed for this reason, as men have not faced the same gendered restrictions to movement through spaces as women. This redefinition would make room for

artists like Calle within *flânerie*, and thus facilitate a new way of looking at their artwork.

Although it is undeniable that gender can influence women's experiences, particularly in an urban environment, I argue that reclaiming the term *flâneur* as gender neutral would be more conducive to this redefinition. Elkin's research is essential in influencing and moving towards this framework. However, using the term *flâneuse* implies a link between all wandering women which does not necessarily exist. It suggests that women's interactions with city spaces are different purely because they are female, yet there is not a 'way of walking specific to women; given that there is no singular 'woman'' (Heddon and Turner 2012, 225). It is possible to consider gender in this debate without reducing all female experience to a singular binary, and redefining *flâneur* as gender neutral widens the practice to consider more than just gender, or rather, removes gender as the only defining feature of female *flânerie*. Space is continually changing, and so it is right that the definitions used are just as adaptable and allow for multi-faceted female experience. This is not to say that the masculine term *flâneur* is inherently neutral: masculinity does not equal neutrality. Rather, in this instance, *flâneur* is being reclaimed as gender-neutral in order to challenge the gendered descriptions of *flânerie*.

It is important to consider other aspects that can impact movement through the city, such as race and social class. The term *flâneuse* prioritises gender above all other identity factors, and gives precedence to gender politics

at the expense of individual experience. This is not to negate the issue of gender within urban spaces, but to suggest that intersectionality needs to be a key consideration when developing the framework to analyse *flânerie*. Solnit (2001, 275) acknowledges this issue of intersectionality in her study of walking, recognizing that women are not the only people to ‘have had their freedom of movement limited’. However, she continues that despite this, restrictions placed upon the movement of women ‘have profoundly shaped the identities of both genders over the millennia in most parts of the world’, suggesting that gender plays a larger role in defining experiences with movement than other identity factors (Solnit 2001, 275). While gender is an important issue, particularly for understanding freedom of movement, it cannot be understood fully in isolation of all other identity factors. For my research in particular, an understanding of intersectionality will be crucial. I prefer to use the term *flâneur* when describing Calle. Although it is undeniable that gender impacts her work in some ways, Calle’s experiences are not restricted by gender; she is in fact propelled forward by her status as a white, middle-class woman, as this facilitates her movement in spaces that are inaccessible to other people. Moreover, I deem that Calle’s movement through urban spaces has not been made more difficult because she is a woman, but easier because she identifies with the traditionally masculine concept of the *flâneur*. It is therefore not possible to maintain an argument of shared *flânerie*, when the experiences of women differ so much depending on their backgrounds. Intersectionality is a key component of developing this framework, and one that seems to be missing from the literature. Thus,



reclaiming the term flâneur as gender neutral is more conducive to the argument that female flânerie exists, and to analysing it further.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Paris 1978: *Préambule*

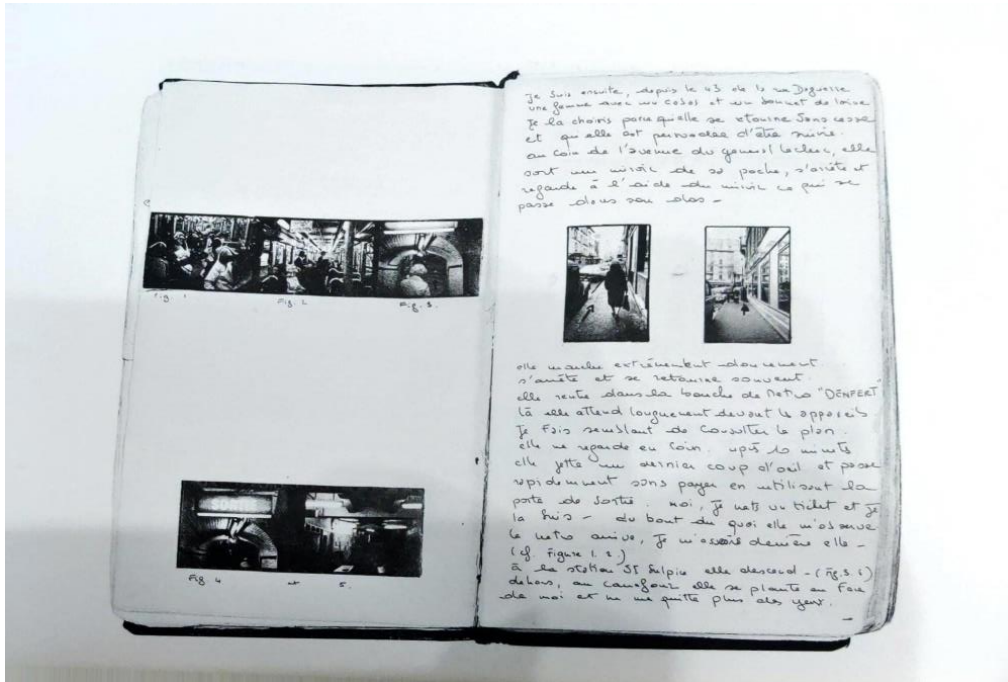


Figure 1: Calle, Sophie. *Préambule*. 1978. In Calle, Sophie. 2019. *À suivre....*

Arles: Actes Sud, 14-15.

It is important to contextualise what was happening in Paris during the 1970s, as this was the starting point for Calle's *flânerie*. This will enable a better understanding of the environment in which Calle was becoming a *flâneur*, including the spatial politics concerning Paris and France at the time. This chapter will also consider Calle's first following piece, *Préambule*, as context for her *flânerie* practice as a whole. Discussion of this context is therefore crucial to setting up an in-depth analysis of Calle as *flâneur* in her artworks.

In the late 1970s, upon her return to Paris after some time travelling, Sophie Calle began following. She would pick strangers on the street to follow ‘pour le plaisir de les suivre et non parce qu’ils m’intéressaient’ (Calle 2019, 11). This was Calle’s main occupation for months; she would follow a stranger until she lost them, all the while taking photographs and notes to fill her notebooks. This was initially intended as a private project, a way to explore Paris and rediscover the city after a period of absence. However, the project has since found itself in many of her art books and catalogues. After the success of her following pieces *Suite vénitienne* (1980) and *La Filature* (1981), Calle published excerpts from the project in books such as *M’as tu-vue* (2003) and *A suivre...* (2016), which is the first volume in her *Doubles-jeux* collection. In *M’as tu-vue* the artwork is titled *Paris Shadows*, but it appears under a different name in *A suivre...: Préambule*. This title, *Préambule*, is perhaps the most fitting. The project is the epitome of the word *Préambule*, as it is the first in a series of artworks concerning following strangers and the exploration of urban spaces; it is essentially a preface to Calle’s chosen practice of *flânerie*.

A preface typically introduces a piece of work, but it can also set out its subject and aims. This is what *Préambule* does for Calle; it is a visual preface, showing Calle’s chosen subject of strangers on the street, and presenting her desire to follow. It is the starting point of Calle’s role as the *flâneur*, as it documents the first time she formally took on this role in an artistic project. *Préambule* also showcases Calle’s influences for future projects and,

retrospectively, depicts the development of her artistic process. Many techniques evident in this project, such as written narrative, were adopted for larger pieces such as *Suite vénitienne*. For example, both artworks feature in-depth descriptions of routes taken by the artist and her subjects. The use of grainy, black and white photography is also maintained in the majority of Calle's following pieces, including *La Filature*. Although her style of photography develops over time, incorporating a more diverse range of framing and scale, she photographs the movement of her subjects in a similar way, focusing on the back of their figures as she follows them. *Préambule* (or *Paris Shadows*) is often featured near the beginning of books or chapters, further reinforcing both the artworks' importance and its place as a formative piece at the start of her career. Therefore, Calle herself clearly situates the beginning of her career and artistic practice in this piece.

The diaries evoke Calle's origins as a flâneur, and highlight the obsessive and compulsive nature of her now famous artistic practice. Each diary entry is dated and timestamped, marking the exact moment that Calle comes across the individuals that she chooses to follow. Photographs of strangers feature alongside descriptions of their itineraries and excerpts or quotations from newspapers and literature. Calle's writing includes both details of her journeys and her thoughts at the time of following – a predecessor for the format of *Suite vénitienne*, which also includes diary-like entries about following and her feelings towards strangers. In one excerpt, Calle describes her experience of

spotting a young man in the Beaubourg district of Paris: ‘Je pouvais le suivre – Transformer ma filature eu [sic] moyen de rencontre ou même de séduction par l'étranger mais je résiste à la tentation’ (Calle 2019, 16. Figure 2). She decides against this possibility as she ‘ne suivrai que des inconnus’, stating that following is and must remain her only motivation (Calle 2019, 16).

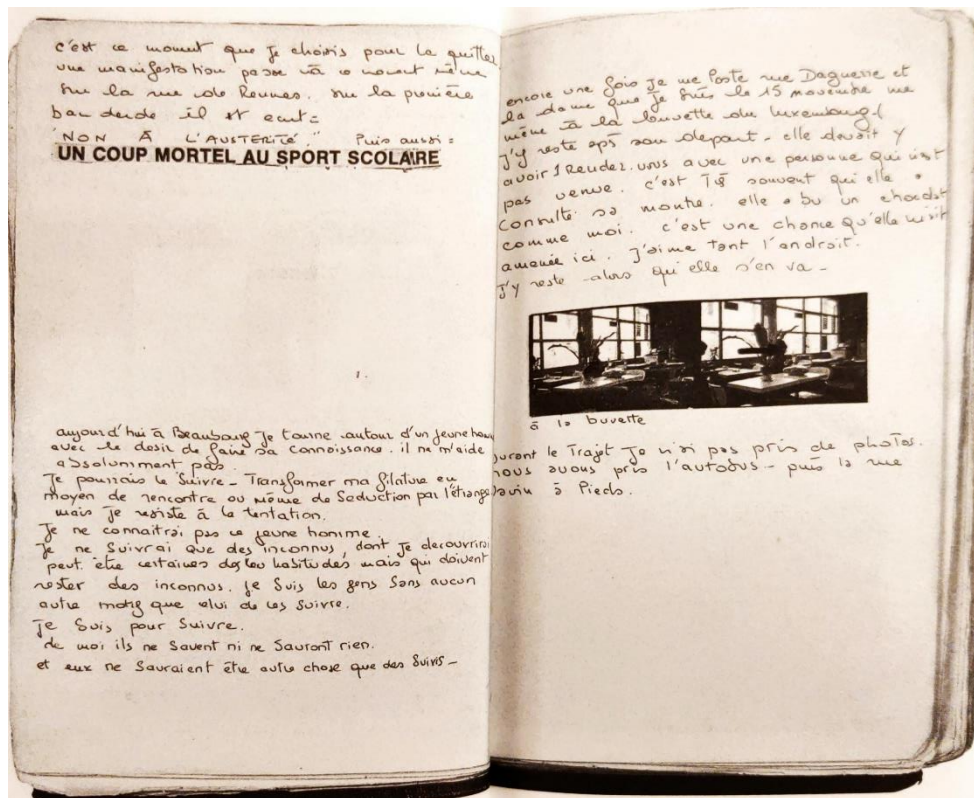


Figure 2: Calle, Sophie. *Préambule*. 1978. In Calle, Sophie. 2019. *À suivre....* Arles: Actes Sud, 16-17.

This is a dynamic that is repeated in her later following pieces, in which she struggles with the submissive dynamic of subjecting herself completely to someone else's movements. Despite her occasional conflicting feelings about the potential outcomes of her wandering, she remains consistent in her promise to maintain her purpose of following for following's sake. This firmly situates

Calle's practice in *flânerie*, as she is captivated by the act of following itself. It is clear that Calle takes purpose from her wandering practice, using it as a means of rediscovering herself and her city at a time where she felt particularly lost. This can be seen in her obsessive documentation and recording of each of the journeys she takes. It is as if writing down the experiences will help her to make more sense of it and of herself. *Flânerie* may be an acknowledged form of artistic expression, but it is not necessarily commonly seen. This can evoke feelings of a transgressive nature as the *flâneur*-artist appears to cross boundaries. Calle's internal conflict at this role features throughout her diary entries. Despite this, the importance of the role to her and her identity takes precedence. This can be seen in the documentary style in which she records her journeys. Her obsessive need to record experiences and collate them together implies that Calle regards *flânerie* quite highly. That is to say, she decides it is worth documenting: it is important to record the spaces and individuals she comes across.

In addition, Calle often finds herself in, or chooses to continue following towards, contentious yet recognizable areas of Paris. For example, the location of her encounter with the young man she is attracted to, in the Beaubourg district, is of significance. It is home to the Centre Pompidou, one of the symbols

of cultural growth and change at this time.<sup>2</sup> The Centre Pompidou is now heralded as a great institution of contemporary art, however it was a controversial plan at the time. Although it redeveloped the area, and had a successful opening attended by five to seven thousand individuals each day, the construction of the building cost 900 million Francs, and it had an operating budget of 130 million Francs (Gallot 1997, 48). Calle's works do not often feature overt political comments, however the inclusion of areas such as Beaubourg reflects Calle's interest in the changing nature of Paris, and are perhaps indicative of her need to follow to reacquaint herself with the city, and to discover the new and changed areas of Paris. Clippings from newspaper articles are included sporadically throughout the diary entries. Calle does not necessarily pass comment on the quotations, but their inclusion alongside descriptions of her pursuits is of interest. They function as context for Calle's journeys through Paris, but are also used as a narrative device to comment upon current ongoings in the city, without directly using her own voice. One such clipping sits alone on the page (Figure 3) and reads: "1979 sera en France une année de stabilité politique" (Calle 2019, 18). This is perhaps some foreshadowing on Calle's part, as 1979 would be the year that her following exploits became more stable in the longer pursuit of Henri B. However, this also

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<sup>2</sup> The Pompidou Centre was opened in 1977 by President Giscard d'Estaing as part of the development plan to reinstate Paris as a place of culture. This was part of a wider changing landscape visible across Paris.

suggests that there is perhaps a political undertone to Calle's practice of flânerie. The juxtaposition of Calle's diary entries and photographs to the harsh journalistic typeface evokes a serious tone. This inclusion of newspaper clippings alongside her own media is reflective of the Situationist *dérive*, which was used as a way to study and critique urban environments, and to develop the practice of psychogeography. Calle's use of juxtaposition implies that her wandering pursuits are linked to the socio-political make-up of the city she is in. This links to Calle's choice of using people as a means to explore urban spaces, rather than focusing completely on the built environment around her. This therefore suggests that Calle's practice of flânerie is invested as much in the social environment as it is in the built environment. As argued by Lefebvre (2000, 88), social space envelopes all things; it is therefore crucial to our understanding of urban environments.



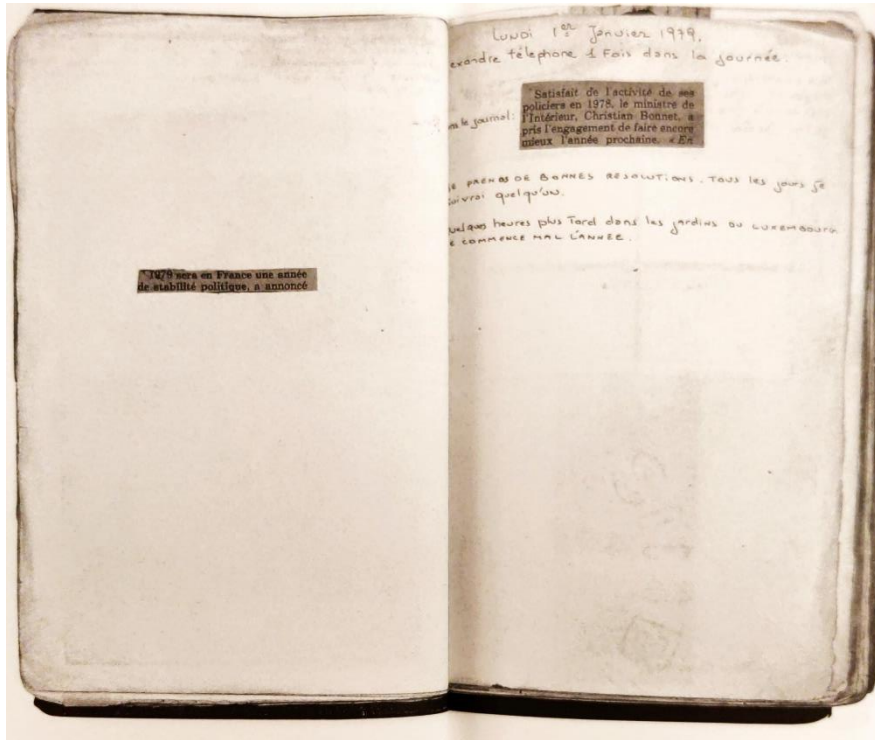


Figure 3: Calle, Sophie. *Préambule*. 1978. In Calle, Sophie. 2019. *À suivre....* Arles: Actes Sud, 18-19.

Calle began her career during a time of great change within spatial politics, a time of intellectual debate and development concerning our relationship with space. Space became a ‘defining theme of philosophical and cultural thought’ during the post-war period, leading to the creation and development of notable groups such as the Situationists (Busbea 2007, 11). Urban space was no longer a place of neutrality, rather ‘a conductive medium’ of physical and intellectual movement and exchange (Busbea 2007, 10). Informed by Lefebvre’s works, Sheringham (2006, 156) suggests that the city came to be viewed as ‘a fundamentally theatrical space’ which ‘reflects the inner as well as the outer aspects of the lives it links’. Thus the city came to be

defined by an active relationship between its spaces and the people who lived in them.

This active relationship between people and the city was especially evident in 1968. May 1968 has become synonymous with civil unrest and revolt, as students protested against an outdated and archaic university system, expressing their frustrations at the situation through demonstration and riot. Forceful university, government, and police responses triggered a general strike as workers across France joined the students, leading to a complete economic standstill. Although the riots did not lead to revolution, or an entire political upheaval, they did influence ‘the relationships of people with institutions’ (Rubin 2018). Furthermore, this is evidence of the relationship between city and people in action. This was a time of reclaiming the streets and using the city in discourse, such as through marches, protest, and barricades. Engagement with urban spaces is central to the narrative of these events, and this is a theme that continued through the following decades. This signified that the intellectual idea that space was no longer neutral had now been solidified in the public’s eyes too. Thus, Paris was redefined as a space that can both shape and be shaped.

The post-war period in France was marked by an evolution of urban spaces, particularly regarding social housing and cultural institutions. The ‘severe housing crisis of the postwar decade’ triggered large housing projects within France, however they did not always have the desired outcome (Heathcott 2013, 287). Between 1953 and 1973, there was a dramatic increase

in social housing units across France: ‘from less than 500,000 to over 3 million’ (Lelévrier & Melic 2018, 313-314). 43% of these estates were built in the Ile-de-France region (Lelévrier & Melic 2018, 314). This push for housing and redevelopment, alongside the demolition of Parisian slums, impacted a significant portion of the city’s ‘buildable surface’, and subsequently changed the urban landscape (Heathcott 2013, 282). Furthermore, the introduction of a home ownership programme in 1977 led to a ‘large-scale departure of middle-class housing estate residents’, therefore a ‘rapid increase in the rate of population loss’ as people moved from the inner city to the suburbs (Lelévrier & Melic 2018, 316; Noin & White 1997, 6). This created space for working families within the housing estates, but resulted in stricter social delineations due to a fracturing between the inner city and the banlieues, and an eventual ‘spatial concentration of poverty’ (Lelévrier & Melic 2018, 314). By the 1980s, housing estates had become synonymous with poverty, violence, and crime, a perception maintained by negative depictions in the media (Lelévrier & Melic 2018, 318).

Despite these growing social issues, the government tried to maintain an impression of cohesion and constancy. Difficulties in Paris resulted in a ‘wistful’ and melancholic focus on the city’s great past (Wakeman 2004, 116). Attention was drawn away from problems such as the disintegration of social housing to the ‘grands projets’ of Giscard d’Estaing and Mitterrand, a continuation of ‘Haussmann’s imperial tradition’ (Wakeman 2004, 116).

Inspired by the construction of the Centre Pompidou in the 1970s, Mitterrand's government focused heavily on promoting culture, and thus ensued the development of a 'French nostalgic modernism' (Wakeman 2004, 143). These projects were paradoxical in their aims, showcasing both progress and a return to the greatness of the past. Such schemes and initiatives were developed in order to try and maintain the 'international reputation of France' and Paris, but in fact highlight a conflicting culture of stasis and change (Noin & White 1997, 12). Rather than looking forward to the future, or attempting to solve the problems of the present, Paris became 'an inward-looking city', fuelled by dreams of regaining past grandiosity (Wakeman 2004, 143). Attempts at maintaining such a façade of stasis and continued glory conflicted with the obvious social change and fragmentation taking place within Paris. Busbea (2007, 109) suggests that there was much discontentment with the changing urban landscape in Paris, stating that 'a massive chorus of voices was being raised against the grands travaux'. This reinforces the idea of the city, and Paris in particular, as a site of contention. It is apparent that this was a time of conflicting narratives surrounding the city, with cultural developments (such as the Pompidou Centre, the Louvre, and the Musée d'Orsay) distracting from the reality of living in Paris.

This is clearly reflected in Calle's newest artwork, *Les Fantômes d'Orsay*, which centres around the evolution of the Musée d'Orsay as an urban space. What was once a grand hotel and train station became an abandoned and

desolate building, a space long forgotten in the centre of Paris. It is at this point, in the late 1970s, that Calle happens upon the building. She explored it for weeks until the redevelopment plan by Giscard d'Estaing meant that renovation would begin in the space. Thus, she found this relic of the past, still full of documents and furniture from its closure in the 1940s, invaded by workmen and architects. The building became what we now know as the Musée d'Orsay, a centre for art and culture in Paris. But Calle did not forget her experience of the space, nor its origins, and thus the *Fantômes* project was born. She was invited back to the museum to explore the space once again, unveiling its hidden history in the meantime. Calle's artwork is testament to the changing nature of space, but also to the tension felt between different realities of Paris. This piece in particular, which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter, highlights the necessity to look past the façade of a city, and reveals that many different realities, versions, and histories of a space can be true all at once.

CHAPTER THREE

Paris 1978/2022: *Les Fantômes d'Orsay*



Figure 4: Calle, Sophie, and Jean-Paul Demoule. *Les Fantômes d'Orsay*.

2022. Photo taken by Ellie Bulloch.

This chapter analyses Calle's newest exhibition, *Les Fantômes d'Orsay*, which showcases objects, documents and photographs taken from the time she lived in the derelict and abandoned Grand Hôtel Palais d'Orsay in the seventies. In 1978, after following people around Paris to regain a sense of the city, Calle happened upon this disused building. She spent weeks exploring the derelict building, and forty years later, has now decided to display her collection. The objects and images on display in *Les Fantômes d'Orsay* are primarily taken

from this time that she spent squatting in the old hotel. The exhibition features a plethora of evidence from Orsay's past as a hotel and subsequent derelict space. Calle includes a wide range of material, such as guest booking cards, written records of water and energy consumption, number plates taken from hotel doors, hotel objects including doorknobs and keys, as well as walls filled with her personal photographs which show the building as it was when Calle lived there. It's quite fitting that this artwork should find itself back in the current Musée d'Orsay, a development and extension of the old train station and hotel. This in itself is evidence of how our spaces are susceptible to change, and are in fact constantly evolving due to the movement of people and development of objects and technologies. It also highlights a relevance to Calle's work in that as the flâneur, she follows change. Furthermore, the use of this particular space gives an insight into the histories that we choose to remember. The exhibition is a response to this changed perception of Parisian spaces, highlighting an aspect of the city's ignored past. It is split across two rooms on the second floor of the museum – one room for the hotel as it was, and one room for the hotel, or museum, as it is now. Calle has developed the exhibition in collaboration with archaeologist Jean-Paul Demoule.

As Calle herself is often the focal point of her pieces, I expected this artwork to recount Calle's days of squatting, an unusual spatial pursuit. Although this plays a part in the multi-faceted exhibition and artwork, she focuses much more heavily on the conversation between space and absence,

rendered all the more poignant by the chosen exhibition location. The exhibition room has been wallpapered in homage to and in replication of the rotting design coating the old hotel, evident in many of the photographs on display. This immediately brings stark contrast to the current state of the Musée d'Orsay, as guests walk from a beautiful, open space filled with sculptures into this dark, enclosed space. It is a reminder of a previous incarnation of the space that has perhaps been forgotten since the *grands projets* of Giscard d'Estaing and Mitterrand.<sup>3</sup> In this first section, Calle explores the space through the experiences of others who used the space before it was abandoned, as the Grand Hôtel Palais d'Orsay. She highlights these past lived experiences through objects and documents collected during her days as a squatter. The images and objects are showcased in her typical documentary style; the exhibition travels around the entire room, featuring photographs and archaeological descriptions alongside found objects displayed behind glass.

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<sup>3</sup> The renovation of the Gare d'Orsay was part of a project led by President Giscard d'Estaing to restore old buildings and the value of heritage in Paris (Marchand 1993, 324). This was one aspect of a series of plans to restore the grandeur and cultural significance of the city (Marchand 1993, 333). Mitterrand continued with a similar policy once he became president in 1981, with projects such as the Louvre Pyramid which aimed to 'carry on Haussmann's imperial tradition' (Wakeman 2004, 116).





Figure 5: Calle, Sophie, and Jean-Paul Demoule. *Les Fantômes d'Orsay*.

2022. Photo taken by Ellie Bulloch.

An interesting dynamic at play within this exhibition is Calle's relationship with archaeologist Jean-Paul Demoule. Calle typically narrates her own artworks, including texts of her thoughts alongside photographs or objects of interest. Yet in this instance, it is Demoule who appears to take charge of the written narrative voice, while Calle focuses on the visual elements of the

exhibition. Demoule interprets objects and images with various archaeological descriptions, including those written as an archaeologist of the distant future, trying to interpret unknown and foreign objects. One such example includes a doorknob in the style of Haussmann, considered an ‘*arme ancienne de provenance inconnue*’ by the future archaeologist (Figure 5; Calle & Demoule 2022). This narrative voice seems at first to be an unusual choice, particularly as this object, as many others, has a seemingly obvious use. However, it is an interesting play on memory. The voice of the future archaeologist reflects our own ignorance of previous incarnations of space, just as they have forgotten the meanings of such objects. This links to Fisher’s (2012) theory of hauntology. He suggests that haunting occurs when ‘a place is stained by time, or when a particular place becomes the site for an encounter with broken time’ (Fisher 2012, 19). Furthermore, hauntology is ‘a feeling evoked by disparate cultural artefacts of a certain time’, much like the objects collected and collated in this exhibition (BBC Archive 2019, 03:36).<sup>4</sup> Calle’s interaction with Orsay is one of broken time: a building found in the 1970s, stuck in the 1940s, and revisited in 2020. Fisher (2012, 16) argues that in the twenty-first century, we have become stuck in an era of failed cultural innovation, which has ultimately led to ‘the disappearance of the future’, or ‘the capacity to conceive of a world

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<sup>4</sup> ‘What is hauntology? And why is it all around us?’,

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/ideas/videos/what-is-hauntology-and-why-is-it-all-around-us/p0729knv>.

radically different from' our own. Demoule's future voice is a comment upon this inability to think of a new future, as well as our ignorance of our past: we have become stuck. Although his "future" descriptions seem strange to the modern-day viewer, this highlights a disconnect in our relationship with space and time, and conveys our perpetual confinement in the present. Using Demoule as the narrative voice, Calle highlights that it is very easy to accept that the current state of a space or location is how it has always been, and suggests the importance of considering our spaces in more depth. This derives from Calle's position as the flâneur; it is through her thorough engagement with the city that she has become witness to these changes rather than stuck in the present, which has subsequently developed her own understanding of space. In this assessment of objects and images from a forgotten, or perhaps ignored, past, Calle highlights that space derives meaning from its relationship to people and objects, and that this is also mirrored in how space can bring meaning to us.



Figure 6: Calle, Sophie, and Jean-Paul Demoule. *Les Fantômes d'Orsay*.

2022. Photo taken by Ellie Bulloch.



Figure 6: Calle, Sophie, and Jean-Paul Demoule. *Les Fantômes d'Orsay*. 2022. Photo taken by Ellie Bulloch.

Calle highlights this in her exploration of the Grand Hôtel Palais d'Orsay, which is not through her experience of squatting, but through the experiences of others who used the space before it was abandoned, as the Grand Hôtel Palais d'Orsay. She highlights these past lived experiences of others through the exploration of objects and documents that she collected during her days as a squatter. While her experience of squatting is not the focus of the piece, this act is the means through which the exhibition has been brought to life. The first section of her exhibition highlights the old use of the space, displaying booking cards of previous guests who stayed in the hotel between 1937 and 1940. The cards are showcased in Calle's typical documentary style,

taking the form of evidence in a case, an imitation of how detectives display their findings on a wall (Figures 5 and 6). It is clear that these are objects of importance to be analysed by the spectator, who then becomes complicit in this spatial investigation. They take an active role in the deciphering of these objects, as they are encouraged to make their own conclusions about the space, using the evidence provided by Calle. Unlike some of Calle's previous works where she dictates the narrative more clearly, thus influencing spectator experience, the spectator is given autonomy in this exhibition, to decipher codes and meanings for themselves. For example, Calle's choice to present the objects and images in this exhibition in such a documentary style heightens the importance of Orsay as a complex space, but also suggests to spectators that there is a puzzle to be solved. Moreover, it implies that the answer to this puzzle cannot be found alone, as Calle is inviting the public into what was once a private and personal space of hers. This plays into the idea of collaborative experience in a shared space, as the audience contributes to the redefinition of Orsay through their findings. Spectators, therefore, might conclude that space is defined collaboratively: we forget together just as we remember together. Although Calle has reintroduced this perspective of Orsay into the public eye, it is a collective effort to maintain the memory of Orsay's past, hence the need for an exhibition of this kind. De Certeau (1990, 162) claims that 'la mémoire, c'est l'anti-musée: elle n'est pas localisable,' as 'les lieux vécus sont comme des présences d'absences.' It is perhaps for this reason that Calle has chosen to decorate the exhibition room in homage to its previous abandoned state as the

old hotel (hence the room number plates and replica wallpaper). It was therefore necessary for Calle to rehabilitate the history of Orsay into a physical shared space, so that it could live on outside of her individual memory, and perhaps become more tangible. This reinforces the fact that there is not one sole author in this experience, rather a shared history ‘formée en fragments de trajectoires et en alterations d’espaces’, that is continually enriched by new perspectives and experiences (de Certeau 1990, 141-144). This creates ‘une histoire multiple’, which is seen in through the past incarnations of Orsay, and the future interpretations that will inevitably follow Calle’s exhibition and rehabilitation (de Certeau 1990, 141-142).

This is further evidence of a presence of haunting which is felt throughout the exhibition. Gordon (2008, 201) argues that ‘haunting is a shared structure of feeling, a shared possession.’ Calle showcases this communal experience through her exhibition, giving it a prominent platform to encourage people to take notice. However, as the Musée d’Orsay is a shared space, so too is the impact of its haunting. Although the development of the museum has had a positive impact on the cultural heritage of Paris, the redefinition of Orsay as a space of culture and intellectualism meant that its previous history was forgotten. Certainly, visiting the museum today, you would never know that it once housed a busy hotel. Through this exhibition, Calle rehabilitates the memory and stories of these people in this space, and gives the building’s history a new life. If it were not for Calle drawing attention to this version of

the past, it would perhaps still be hidden. Thus, this exhibition is a deliberate comment about our society's preoccupation with the present, and presence itself. It becomes clear that it is necessary for us to collectively take note of absence in our everyday spaces. As a flâneur, Calle has been able to follow these ghosts, 'putting life back in where only a vague memory or bare trace was visible' (Gordon 2008, 22).

Within this section of the exhibition, Calle's choice to only display the names of guests which begin with the letter B or D is less obvious. Calle has been known to include patterns and lists within her work. *Suite vénitienne* (1980) included extensive lists which reflected Calle's obsession with the man she was pursuing. When searching for Henri B. in Venice, Calle (1988, 12-15) called 125 of the 180 hotels in the area, and lists them by name. This same structure was repeated physically in *The Birthday Ceremony* (1998), where Calle displayed thirteen years of birthday presents in glass cases, alongside lists of their contents. This could, therefore, signify a return to Calle's previous artistic practices that were more heavily focused on following patterns, or flânerie. Her more recent artworks have included a wide variety of themes, particularly loss and absence (such as *Autobiographies*, 2017, and *Souris Calle*, 2018), however have been less concerned with physical movement through spaces. This return to a previous artistic genre reflects the theory of hauntology, and 'a compulsion to repeat' (Fisher 2014, 35-36). However, this choice to present only specific names is also reminiscent of the archaeological practice of

looking for patterns in order to make sense of the past. This elevates the practice of interrogating space as a quasi-scientific pursuit, as it is made clear that there are patterns to be found within the “data” that Calle has collated.

This method also conveys Calle’s humanistic approach to engaging with spaces. Our understanding of this space is informed by the absence of people that were once there, traces of their ghosts. Communicating through people and lived experiences is an essential element of Calle’s work, and remains consistent throughout her portfolio. It highlights that people are a vital intermediary in the process of *flânerie*, in order to engage thoroughly with spaces. Yet, we are only able to imagine these people in relation to this space – they do not exist outside of being hotel guests. This highlights the cyclical relationship between people and space, and gives an insight into why Calle chooses to explore spaces through strangers in her *flânerie*. Just as the hotel guests enable the spectator to consider the Musée d’Orsay through a new lens, these forgotten people, or ghosts as Calle has described them, are given meaning again through this space.



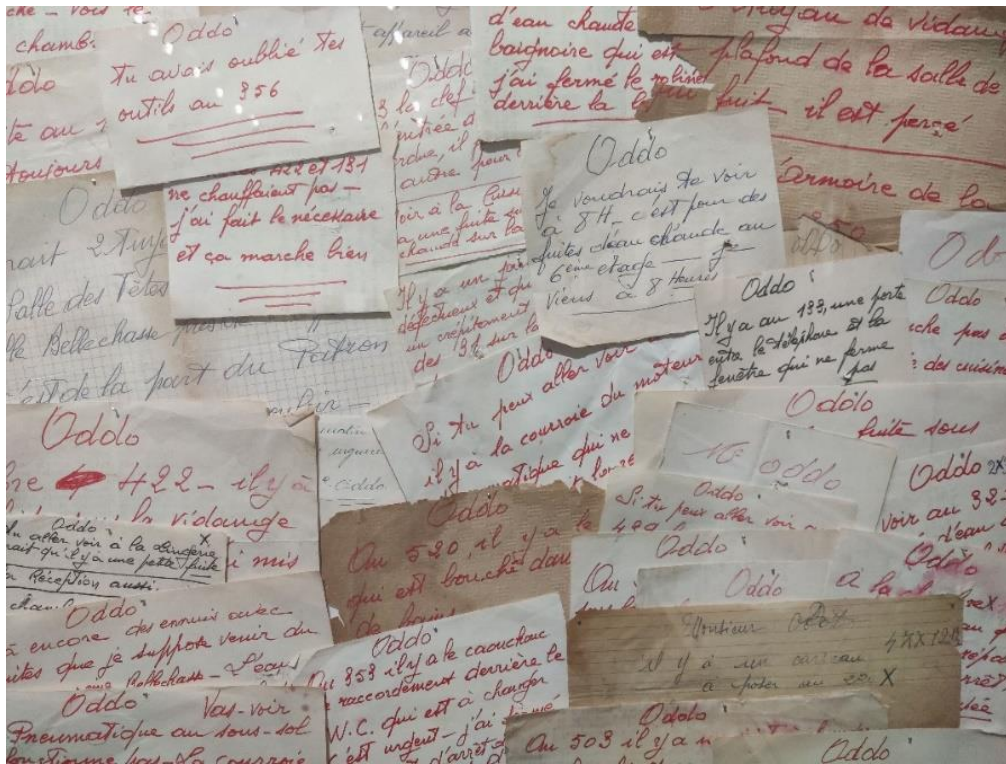


Figure 7: Calle, Sophie, and Jean-Paul Demoule. *Les Fantômes d'Orsay*. 2022. Photo taken by Ellie Bulloch.

This is particularly evident through the character Oddo. Many notes to ‘Oddo’ appear as part of the collection; his name is written over and over again in a variety of different messages (Figure 7). The messages are most commonly written in red ink, and some of them are underlined for emphasis, implying a sense of urgency, as well as the importance of this character. Calle’s presentation of Oddo in this way suggests that he plays a crucial part in understanding this space. Demoule infers that Oddo was the handyman of the hotel, in charge of general maintenance with a specific focus on plumbing (Calle & Demoule 2022). For Demoule, the incessant messages asking for repairs are ‘un peu la préfiguration, sinon la métaphore, de la dégradation terminale et de

l'abandon de l'hôtel' (Calle & Demoule 2022). This depiction of Oddo implies an inextricable link between his presence and the state of this space. Orsay as that specific spatial incarnation, the hotel, becomes defined by Oddo. His presence, and then absence, were determining factors in the outcome of Orsay. The dynamic between Calle's photographs of Orsay in disrepair and Demoule's commentary about Oddo suggests that there is a sense of finality to Oddo. His relationship with the hotel was one of cause and effect, and his absence is seemingly directly tied to the abandoned state of the hotel.

It seems that this character, certainly in Calle's experience, was brought into being by the hotel, or at the very least, assigned a certain level of significance through this role. However, he too is confined to the definition of this space. It is not possible for us to view him outside of his maintenance role in a present day context. We can only view him through the lens that Calle has provided: he existed in and for the hotel. Fisher discusses a similar instance to this which takes place in *The Shining* (1980). He suggests that the main character in the film, a caretaker named Jack, 'belongs to the hotel', 'exists only in a caretaker capacity', and 'insures that the past...will keep repeating' (Fisher 2012, 20). This is another example of a character that is stuck, defined and confined by a specific space, much like Oddo. Oddo's absence from this space therefore rendered it obsolete, and facilitated the dereliction, and then development, of Orsay.

This is challenged by the future archaeological interpretations of Oddo: a quasi-deity, a shapeshifter, ‘un mystérieux esprit’, a king. Although his importance to the space remains unquestioned, this imagined passing of time allows for a more fluid perspective. Oddo is no longer defined by the space, but rather the space by him. The hotel becomes a land under his control, and there is intention behind its derelict state. This suggests a different power dynamic than initially assumed. Oddo does not necessarily bend to the will of the hotel, rather the hotel has changed to suit him. The disarray seen so clearly in Calle’s photography becomes a choice made by Oddo. Demoule’s use of both a present and future archaeological voice highlights space as an essential intermediary in communicating across time. It is space that facilitates an understanding of different people from different times, much as the changing nature of spaces is communicated by people when they reflect on the past. In this way, Oddo becomes something of an enigma. He is both resolved and unresolved – we assume that we know him through his past job and engagement with the hotel, but in fact we only know one side to this person. In this way, Calle highlights both the richness and complexity of space. We are witness to echoes of the past and shadows of previous lives when we engage with urban spaces, which allows us to develop an understanding, but not to possess. Flânerie is therefore a never-ending pursuit, but a valuable one nonetheless.

Calle comments upon the passing of time within the exhibition, by splitting the artwork across two rooms – one for the hotel as it was, one for the

hotel as it is now. She is able to show us this as an active flâneur herself. She has walked this space decades apart, and seen various incarnations both physically and imaginatively through others. The future voice is a comment on how space remains static if there is no one there to affect it. Urban space does not change in and of itself independently; it is entirely reliant on its relationship with people, just as we are also impacted by the spaces we inhabit. As argued by de Certeau (1990, 149), 'le marcheur transforme en autre chose chaque signifiant spatial.' The evolution of space is defined by an active relationship with human life, and it is this process which leads to the complex creation of 'un tissu urbain' (de Certeau 1990, 155). This reciprocal nature of our relationships with space is prevalent throughout Calle's exhibition. In creating this exhibition, Calle acknowledges that she was influenced by the derelict hotel. This can be seen particularly in her engagement with room 501, and the numbers of other hotel rooms which line the wall of the exhibition. Numbers can influence trajectories and haunt walkers long after the physical interaction with the space has passed (de Certeau 1990, 157). Calle's journey began in room 501, and this not only encouraged her exploration of the hotel, but continued to haunt her to such an extent that she has returned, forty years later. The accompanying exhibition book has been named after this number, and it is also the final focal point of the exhibition itself. Simultaneously, the chosen location of her exhibition highlights that she has impacted the space, too. She has dually changed the space in the short-term through the presence of her artwork, while also changing perceptions of the space amongst the public as she highlights a

previous incarnation. It becomes clear that an appreciation of both space, and the presence and absence of people, is needed to engage in flânerie.

The second room of Calle's exhibition initially seems to take a different focus. Gone are the black and white photographs, hotel objects, and gloomy wallpaper. In their place, large, framed, colour photographs fill the walls. Although this appears to be very different tonally to the first room, both sections of the exhibition focus on our relationship with space. As I moved around the room, it became apparent that while the first section focused on the presence of people in the hotel in the past, and what they left behind, the second section focuses on the absence of people, and what meaning it brings to our modern-day spaces. In this way, the exhibition is reflective of Calle's chosen medium: photography. Both presence in the past, and absence in the modern-day, are physically intangible, yet easily demonstrable, through photography. For Barthes (1980, 15), the camera 'répète mécaniquement ce qui ne pourra jamais plus répéter existentiellement.' It highlights these 'dualités que l'on peut concevoir, mais non percevoir' (Barthes 1980, 17).

The second part of the exhibition considers the modern-day Musée d'Orsay in lockdown. Calle was given permission to walk the corridors of the museum, at a time when everyone else was forbidden, and photograph the areas of interest to her. The images lining the walls include a self-portrait of Van Gogh, a Degas sculpture, and various other famous artworks that can still be found in the museum today, arguably some of the most recognisable pieces that

the museum owns. The photos are all dimly lit and evoke an eerie quality reminiscent of the many empty spaces in our cities during the pandemic, which also reflects the hotel in its previous abandoned state. By linking her exploration of the Grand Hôtel Palais d'Orsay to its current state, Calle highlights both the continually evolving nature of spaces, but also how the presence and absence of people continues to bring meaning to spaces. This is reflected in Calle's chosen subjects for the photographs. Her incorporation of certain paintings in this way symbolises the dynamic between presence and absence. Paintings are another medium through which past lives and experiences continue to bring meaning to, and influence, modern spaces. This is clear on a physical level, through the curation of exhibition spaces and placing of certain pieces, as well as on a more abstract level as they inspire perceptions and feelings about the space around them. It is in fact the premise of paintings, as well as photography, that their presence is based on the absence of something else: 'une photo est toujours invisible : ce n'est pas elle qu'on voit' (Barthes 1980, 18). Furthermore, it is significant that Calle chose to photograph paintings which incorporate people or the human experience in some way. It is quite clear that for Calle, *flânerie* is not possible without the contemplation of this human-spatial relationship. It is only through this humanistic assessment that the significance of an empty space can be fully understood.



Figure 8: Calle, Sophie, and Jean-Paul Demoule. *Les Fantômes d'Orsay*. 2022. Photo taken by Ellie Bulloch.

Furthermore, her consideration of ghosts may seem unusually spiritual for her typical style, but it is in fact extremely reflective of the relationship with space presented by Calle. On one wall of the exhibition, Calle has placed a photograph of herself next to the painting *Grand Hiver* (1904) by Cuno Amiet, alongside the text (Figure 8):

« Au détour d'un couloir, un skieur solitaire dans une vaste étendue blanche émerge de l'obscurité. C'est *Grand Hiver*, une peinture monumentale d'Amiet. La conservatrice me révèle que le personnage perdit un jour ses deux compagnons, ensevelis sous la neige par l'artiste, et que, si on retourne la toile, on discerne leur fantômes au dos du tableau. » (Calle & Demoule 2022).

It is Calle's thorough engagement with Orsay that led to the discovery of this detail. It suggests that as we move through life, we too become ghosts in certain spaces. These fantoms in the painting become a symbol for the remnants of people from the past. They remain within these spaces, and their past interactions continue to bring meaning, much like the paintings in the museum. Just as space is continually evolving, which is clear through the many incarnations of the Musée d'Orsay, so too are the meanings we derive from them. When we engage with an urban space, we add to the meaning already brought by others in the past. The nature of our relationship to space is in fact multi-layered, and as demonstrated by Calle, this can be explored through active engagement with the world around us: *flânerie*. The solitary skier in the painting, surrounded by his ghostly friends, is also reflective of Calle herself. Calle's journey through Orsay seems initially to be companionless. In fact, in many of Calle's artworks, although she may contact or engage with people along the way, she is often alone in her wanderings. Orsay, as well as the other spaces she engages with, are initially like the 'vaste étendue blanche' in the painting. Calle's *flânerie* is essential to filling in the gaps, and to bringing life and colour to these spaces that we so often view with blindness. Prior to *Les Fantômes d'Orsay*, it seemed that Calle was always alone in her pursuits. However, this revelation has brought a new dynamic to many of her pieces: haunting. Calle is therefore the skier who initially appears to be alone, but who is in fact followed by the traces of ghosts encountered along the way.



Therefore, this discovery also reflects Calle's relationship with the character Oddo. She likens the phrase 'au dos' to a 'signe d'Oddo' in the modern day. He is one of the ghosts who has followed our solitary skier throughout her entire career, as this project was one of her first major artistic wanderings. It renders Calle's experience cyclical, as her journey both began and ended with this one mysterious character. This links to Derrida's (1993, 15) point of living with ghosts becoming 'une *politique* de la mémoire, de l'héritage et des générations.' Oddo is a key part of Orsay's past, and Calle's actions have rehabilitated him in the building's complex spatial heritage. Who we choose to remember is often a political choice; it could be argued that the ghosts exist as a 'constituent element of modern social life', therefore it is important to explore these hauntings fully (Gordon 2008, 7). This also raises the question: why did Calle choose to remember Oddo? She has had an extensive career, boasts an extremely large portfolio, but has returned to Oddo. It can be argued that Oddo is in fact the original ghost, the first haunting that inspired Calle's continual chase. Was she in fact chasing Oddo when following Henri B.? Was the pursuit of this stranger a projection of her search for ghosts? Is Calle's artistic process 'haunted by its origins' (Gordon 2008, 48)? This compulsion to return corroborates this argument. Whether a conscious decision or not, Calle's *flânerie* has become woven into the experience of haunting.

This could also be why Calle has chosen to revisit spaces and projects throughout her career. For example, her piece *Twenty Years Later* (2001) is

essentially a reproduction of *The Shadow* (1981), when she had her mother hire a private detective to follow her around Paris for a day. This highlights the importance of revisiting spaces in order to understand them and take note of their changes. The whole purpose of flânerie is that it is a continual and active practice – you do not walk to one destination and then stop. It is a process of wandering and subsequent discovery, much like when Calle happened upon the derelict Orsay hotel. The only way to move past a static and narrow view of space, it to revisit spaces after the passing of time.

Calle weaves a contrasting theme of permanence and impermanence throughout the exhibition. The entire artwork seems to comment on the impermanence of objects, buildings, and spaces. It is reflective of the evolution of urban spaces that we find ourselves surrounded by. This is suggested by Calle's engagement with room 501 in particular. This is where the artist lived during her time squatting at the hotel, and it was the inspiration for the title of the accompanying book: *L'ascenseur occupe la 501*. Upon revisiting the museum during the pandemic, Calle discovered a map of the hotel's fifth floor, however 'la 501 est évanouie' (Calle & Demoule 2022). Instead, there were 'deux chambres 502, côte à côte' (Calle & Demoule 2022). If it were not for Calle's exhibition, room 501 would cease to exist. The room becomes a 'chambre fantôme d'un hôtel fantôme' (Calle & Demoule 2022). Calle's language here is significant. Although the room no longer exists physically, or perhaps never did, it remains a permanent feature of Orsay in Calle's memory,

and now in collective memory through the exhibition. Her reference to the room and hotel as 'fantôme' implies permanence in a different form. Furthermore, this is indicative of a type of haunting which ultimately facilitated Calle's interaction with the space. Calle takes great significance from the room numbers of the hotel, displaying them along the wall of her exhibition, as well as dedicating pages to them in her book. This highlights how, as a flâneur, numbers 'aimantent également des trajectoires tout comme ils peuvent hanter des rêves' (de Certeau 1990, 157). Calle began her journey from room 501, and this 'fantôme' room has continued to haunt her throughout the project, taking precedence in her book of the exhibition. This highlights that as our interactions with space are left in the past, shadows still remain. Calle suggests that remnants of remembered space and experience still exist through hauntings, and it is important to notice them. Gordon (2008, 22) argues that noticing hauntings 'is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look', and this is exactly what Calle has achieved. Past interactions with urban space inform future engagement, as is the case with Calle's return to the Musée d'Orsay. Thus, the ghosts of our spatial interactions can remain long after the physical space itself is gone.

This ghostly nature is reflected in Calle's role as the flâneur, as well as her experience as a hotel guest. The long texts about Calle's thoughts and feelings in relation to a project are missing from this artwork. Instead, she is both hotel guest and flâneur. It is up to the spectator to use the space to learn

more about Calle, much like they have done for the other characters presented in this artwork. Calle is the focus of archaeological assessment in some of her photos, as one of the people who gave and took meaning from the space. She usually evades spectator analysis through her adoption of the role of flâneur, and although she does not reveal a great deal about herself during her squatting days, she invites the spectator to create their own interpretations. Photographs of Calle are displayed as evidence in the puzzle of the hotel and its past inhabitants. In this way, she too becomes a ghost of the hotel. Much like the paintings that have come before her, the presence of Calle in the past continues to bring new meaning to this space. This also means that, as with a character in a painting, she is physically detached from the space, but still present. We view her with an analytical eye, as an object to be studied. This links to the theme of temporality that is present throughout Calle's exhibition. As argued by Fisher (2014, 18), 'hauntology explicitly brings into play the question of time', and this features heavily in Calle's Orsay project. It shows that distance in time is necessary for a haunting to occur, but that this distance does not lessen the impact of the ghost. If anything, it makes it feel more prevalent, and necessary to address.

This is emphasised by Calle's role as the flâneur. She haunted the corridors of Orsay both when it was derelict in the 1970s and when it was empty because of the pandemic. Calle's movements through these empty spaces has drawn attention to the fact that her artistic process is itself one of haunting. Both

the flâneur and ghost are intangible characters that float through spaces. The similarities between the two are striking. A flâneur benefits from anonymity, and is invisible to the crowd despite living in the crowd. A ghost is invisible until someone chooses to acknowledge its presence – although hauntings can be present, ignorance and blindness maintains their anonymity. Furthermore, ‘hauntology concerns a crisis of space as well as time’, so engagement with and movement through space is essential to the role of the ghost as well as the flâneur (Fisher 2014, 20).

CHAPTER FOUR

Venice 1980: *Suite vénitienne*

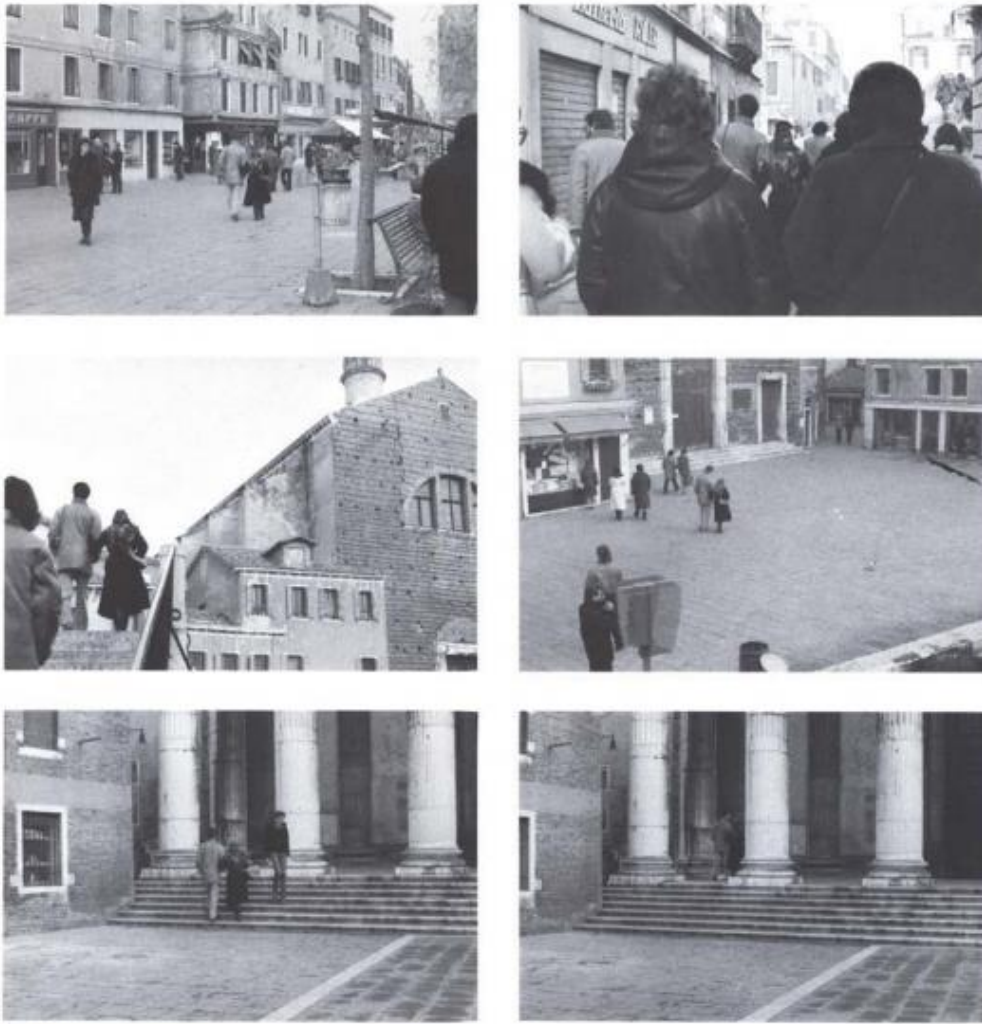


Figure 9: Calle, Sophie. *Suite vénitienne*. 1980. In Calle, Sophie, and Jean Baudrillard. 1988. *Suite vénitienne, Please Follow Me*. Translated by Dany Barash and Danny Hatfield. Seattle: Bay Press, 27.

Calle's haunting role extends to movement through the streets of Venice, where she engaged in an extensive project of following. This chapter will consider Calle's project *Suite vénitienne* (1980), an expansion of her

practice of flânerie which originated in Paris. What was initially a way to pass the time and refamiliarise herself with Paris after a period of absence, became this infamous Venetian journey that would spark, and to some extent, define, Calle's career. Calle's first time in Venice resulted in the artwork *Suite vénitienne* (1980), a compilation of '55 black and white photographs, 23 texts, and 3 maps' (Perrotin n.d., a). The artwork was produced as both a book and a 'sound installation in a confessional booth' in 1983, before being reworked for gallery spaces in 1996 (Taylor 2010). Themes of concealment and detection often feature in Calle's artistic productions, as she evokes feelings of secrecy and voyeurism through her following practice. Calle's chosen method of production, diaries and documentary style photography, suggest intrusion and indulgence as she confesses to her unsavoury practice throughout the first person narrative. It is perhaps for this reason that the format of a confessional booth was chosen for her 1983 exhibition of the artwork, heightening a voyeuristic discomfort within spectators as they intrude upon both Henri B.'s personal trip, and Calle's inner thoughts. Moreover, Calle presents herself as unveiling mysteries and secrets about Henri B.'s trip to Venice, when they are in fact banalities. It is her portrayed obsession with Henri B., and her imitation of detective practices, that create a sense of an unfolding mystery within the artwork. There is, of course, no mystery to be found or solved. Although Calle may present herself in a similar fashion, she is not a detective, and Henri B. is an ordinary man on an ordinary trip. She has stated herself that 'n'importe quelle information, la plus banale, la plus modeste, était pour moi une information

capitale' (*Sophie Calle – La marche, l'art* 1999). However, it is the act of following and wandering through city spaces that interests Calle as the flâneur. She is not necessarily chasing this banal information, rather using it as a means through which to engage in flânerie. In *Suite vénitienne*, she states that she is scared for the story to come to an end, as meeting him may be 'médiocre' and she doesn't want to be 'déçue' (Calle 2019, 61). This directly contradicts her supposed interest in the banal, however this in itself shows that Calle does not care for information about Henri B.; she does not want to meet him because that would signify the end of her journey. This highlights the importance of the process itself in Calle's artworks; she is much less concerned with the finished product of the artwork and documentation that she has collated, than she is with the act of the chase.

As a result of this, this work, particularly as it was the first major work of Calle's career, contributes to the difficulty critics find when trying to define or label Calle's practices. It reflects aspects of the Situationist *dérive*, 'Surrealist chance encounters', the public nature of performance art, and the privileging of process over product in conceptualism (Saint 2011, 126). While these movements could have informed Calle's work, particularly due to their popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, one practice features heavily above all others: flânerie. Although aspects of the above genres are evident in Calle's artwork, they do not fully encapsulate her pieces. Calle's documentary style depends on chance encounters and wandering, which is how she came to meet



Henri B., but it lacks the political intentions and influences which make up both Situationism and Surrealism. Moreover, both performance art and conceptualism are extremely broad terms, and do not do justice to the complexity of Calle's work. While Calle's artwork is often public in nature, this is not always the case, and her practice of wandering initially began as a private activity without intention to display her documentation to an audience. Furthermore, Calle does not attribute a large importance to the aesthetics of her work, like conceptualism, but she still chooses how to present her pieces with careful consideration and meaning. Form often plays a part in the meanings we can derive from her pieces, such as her choice to curate art books that feature alongside her exhibitions. Thus, while Calle can be described by such terms to an extent, they are not in and of themselves enough to define her specific practice.



Figure 10: Acconci, Vito. *Following Piece*. 1969. In

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/146947>.

Her pursuits have been likened to Vito Acconci's work *Following Piece* (1969), in which he also followed unknowing strangers until they entered private spaces which he could not access (Morrison-Bell 2013, 40). However, Kastner (2017, 81) argues that Calle initially used this practice as a type of 'psycho-geographical orienting procedure', which enabled her 'to paradoxically relocate herself existentially by subordinating herself physically to the activities of others.' Subordination and submission to the movements of others feature heavily in Calle's artworks involving movement, and this can be seen in the language she uses to describe her subjects, particularly in *Suite vénitienne* (1980): '*Je suis à sa disposition*' (Calle 2019, 92). Although a similar dynamic is at play in Acconci's *Following Piece*, in that he subjected himself to the movements of others, his relationship to the strangers he followed was more one of dominance. His artwork is also presented in a documentary fashion, but similar to a social or science experiment, rather than a diaristic form like Calle. In this way, he is to some extent still in control of the situation, as he has clearly determined the outline and conditions of his experiment (see Figure 10). Moreover, while Acconci seems to emphasise the process of following rather than the aesthetics and completion of his project, his way of documenting the artwork is focused on method and results. Calle's practice appears much more spontaneous, with less rules and regulations, and this is particularly evident in *Suite vénitienne* (1980).

In January 1979, as Calle continued with her practice of following, she encountered a man now known by the pseudonym Henri B. Henri B. would, later that month, become the subject of Calle's first major artwork: *Suite vénitienne*. Calle initially lost Henri B. in the crowds of Paris, as was often the case with her following pursuits. However, later that evening, Calle was coincidentally introduced to him at the opening of an art gallery. He explained that he was planning a trip to Venice soon after the gallery event, and Calle decided, secretly, that she would follow him – an escalation of her previous Parisian exploits, and a departure from her rule of only following *inconnus*. Thus ensued the trip that would solidify Calle's role as an urban flâneur, a role that she would later go on to reprise for multiple artworks throughout her career.

Calle arrived in Venice on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> February 1979 with little to no information about the whereabouts of Henri B.: she did not even know if he was in the city yet. The following of Henri B. was perhaps the most ambitious project that she had pursued thus far, as it required a much more considerable time commitment than her previous wanderings in Paris. Calle searched extensively in her first few days in the city. Her meticulous practice included tedious but detailed activities such as making lists of the 'cent quatre-vingt-un noms' of Venetian hotels, and calling them 'tous en respectant l'ordre indiqué' (Calle 2019, 52). She took on an almost detective-like role in her search, meticulously recording the details of each day with timestamps and photographs. Calle's practice has often been described as mirroring that of a

detective or spy, particularly with regards to her documentary and evidence-based approach. For example, Clarke (2018, 40) notes her strong preference for ‘forensic, detective-like detail.’ This may suggest a more voyeuristic or sinister motivation to follow Henri B., however this role is still in keeping with the wider practice of *flânerie*. Benjamin ([1935] 2002, 459) suggests that the *flâneur* is actually an early version of the detective. The detective brings a level of social acceptance to the actions and observing practices of the *flâneur* (Benjamin [1935] 2002, 459). Yet unlike a detective, there was in fact no crime nor reason for Calle to pursue this man to such an extent (Elkin 2017, 149). Furthermore, the *flâneur* follows ‘traces and clues left by others’, a practice mirrored by detectives (Gilloch 2002, 46). It is perhaps for this reason that Calle chooses to present her artworks in such a similar way to that of the detective’s report or evidence board; in this way she masks her motivations with the more legitimate and acceptable role of the detective. Although *flânerie* is a fairly accepted practice within the artworld, it can still be shocking to spectators, particularly as Calle is a woman. The role of the *flâneur* is typically one taken by men, as this behaviour is not always deemed socially acceptable for women to take part in. Thus, Calle’s presentation of the artwork as evidence in a detective’s case perhaps makes it more palatable to certain spectators and critics, and affords her a level of freedom and acceptance that she otherwise might not attain.

Calle eventually found Henri B. staying at the Casa de Stefani, ‘à cent mètres environ’ from her hotel, and this led to two weeks of following him from

a short distance (Calle 2019, 53). Armed with ‘un Leica et un Squintar’, as well as a blonde wig to disguise herself, Calle repeated her process of following, photographing, and notetaking that she had begun in Paris (Calle 2019, 43). However, this time she was determined not to lose her subject, and her motivation seemed to consist of more than just ‘the pleasure of following’ (Calle & Baudrillard 1988, 2). While Calle's practice usually consisted of tailing a range of strangers, all of them of equal interest to her, this time she was completely focused on Henri B. Her detective-like documentation process marked a change in Calle's practice, as her collection of photographs and diary entries became more obsessive than in previous followings. As argued by Morrison-Bell (2013, 40), the ambiguous motivations and goals of the artist, alongside her obsessive documentation, are ‘intentionally alarming’. Calle creates a much closer and more intimate relationship with Henri B. than with the strangers she had previously followed, and she describes herself as completely consumed by the movements of this man. This is particularly evident in her more intimate use of photography, capturing close-up images of the nape of his neck and personal trips with his wife, rather than the detached images of dark silhouettes visible in *Préambule* (Figure 11). This highlights the restrictions of defining Calle purely as a detective. Photography has a long history as a tool for detection. For example, in 1879, Alphonse Bertillon contributed to the development of crime scene photography, combining criminology and photography for the first time (Piazza 2011, 12-13). This is reflected in Calle's use of photography to a certain extent, as she seeks out

individuals and identifies their movements. However, her process is less concerned with identification of the individual than it is with the act of following and movement. It is for this reason that Calle's photographs cross the boundaries between public and private – she is not concerned with the law like the detectives that came before her. Thus, while Calle's use of photography is situated in a history of crime and detection, her artwork is much more personal than the typical scientific nature of detective photography.



Figure 11: Calle, Sophie. *Suite vénitienne*. 1980. Calle, Sophie, and Jean Baudrillard. 1988. *Suite vénitienne, Please Follow Me*. Translated by Dany Barash and Danny Hatfield. Seattle: Bay Press, 3.

Moreover, the trip became an in-depth exploration of the city of Venice itself, as she used Henri B. as a means through which to discover this urban space. Benjamin ([1935] 2002, 448) argues that the city is ‘la réalisation du rêve ancien de l’humanité, le labyrinthe’ which the flâneur unknowingly devotes herself to. This is reflected in Calle’s experience in Venice: as she chooses to submit herself to the movements of Henri B., she unknowingly submits herself to Venice. This is evident in her obsession with street names, her collusion with Venetian locals, and her decision to stay in Venice even after she comes face to face with Henri B. She also continues to walk the city streets after her encounter with him, suggesting an inability to leave and a compulsion to wander. In this way, Calle becomes haunted by the city. It has an inexplicable hold on her, which is reflected in her return to Venice for multiple different projects. This new territory for Calle would become a frequent haunt in her later pieces, such as *L’Hôtel* (1981), in which she worked as a chambermaid in a Venetian hotel for three weeks, and *Prenez soin de vous* (2007) which was first exhibited at the Venice Biennale. This is perhaps linked to the labyrinth nature of the city – there is no beginning nor end to wandering here. While Benjamin concentrates on Paris, Lefebvre comments upon Venice multiple times throughout *La production de l’espace*. He describes the space as ‘aussi fortement expressif et significatif, aussi unique et unitaire qu’une peinture ou une sculpture’, which fluctuates in content and meaning depending on the spectator (Lefebvre 2000, 89). Moreover, he argues that social space is continually produced and reproduced in Venice, suggesting that the city is an inexhaustible labyrinth full

of different meanings and discoveries (Lefebvre 2000, 93). Calle is therefore haunted by the city, by its past, present, and future. As argued by Derrida (1993, 16), ghosts can come from the future, and in this instance Venice is representative of Calle's future experiences there. Her compulsion to return to this space is indicative of the haunting that she feels, and that can therefore be felt throughout her Venetian-based artworks.

After taking many photos, enlisting the help of strangers, and following Henri B. for eight days, he became privy to her game, and confronted Calle. According to Calle, Henri B. was not especially offended or upset about this, however she did have to 'restage it and retake the photos using another man' when he would not give her permission to use the photos (McFadden 2014, 148). It was also required that she 'change the year from 1979 to 1980' (Saint 2011, 126). For the rest of the trip, her practice was much less direct, as she chose to try and spot him from windows, and talk to people who had met him. This included conversations with hotel staff, waiters, and an antique dealer that Henri B. had visited earlier in the week. Her journey finally ended after thirteen days, when she arrived back in Paris at the Gare de Lyon, five minutes before him. She photographed Henri B. for a final time as he exited the station, before deciding to stop following him (Calle 2019, 107).

In *Suite vénitienne*, Calle is the epitome of the urban flâneur. Wandering, chance encounters, public spaces, and processes are all elements that are shared with flânerie. Gilloch (2002, 51, 47) links Calle's exploration of Venice to



Benjamin's description of the flâneur; as she is so consumed by 'the pure playfulness of following itself', she mirrors the 'pursuer as detective' who is 'led by curiosity'. In his accompanying essay to *Suite vénitienne*, Baudrillard consolidates Calle's preoccupation with the act of following.<sup>5</sup> Baudrillard (1988, 77) states that 'she expects nothing of him; she does not want to know him.' This may seem counterintuitive; why follow someone if not to find out more information? However, it is this disinterest in answers which situates Calle firmly in flânerie. The act of pursuing an individual without motivation other than to wander is what makes the practice so exciting to those who follow. It is for this reason that Calle laments the potential ending of her pursuit throughout the artwork: '*Sa découverte risque de tout bouleverser, précipite l'échéance. J'ai peur*' (Calle 2019, 53). Calle states that Henri B. is 'consuming' her, however it is the act of exploration, and of not finding him, that haunts her so much. She becomes 'soumise' not to Henri B., but to the routes he takes, and this feeds her passion for wandering (Calle 2019, 44). This is particularly apparent in her use of lists to describe the journeys that Henri B., and subsequently Calle, take. Lists appear throughout the artwork, showcasing the detail and effort Calle puts into her following exploits. Lists concerning Henri B.'s routes in particular appear multiple times throughout the book as Calle

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<sup>5</sup> Baudrillard's essay *Please follow me* accompanies the book form of Calle's artwork *Suite vénitienne*, and can be found in all published copies. It was first published alongside the artwork in 1983.

follows him closely. She is preoccupied with the street names in particular, which has a dual effect of highlighting her obsession with following, and reinforcing her haunting role. Calle's experience in Venice becomes defined by the city itself as she catalogues Henri B.'s journeys.

« Ils empruntent l'itinéraire suivant : calle del Traghetto, campo San Barnaba, ponte dei Pugni, rio Terà Canal – il demande son chemin à un passant –, campo Santa Margherita, ponte San Pantalon, campiello Mosco, salizzata San Pantalon, rio del Gaffaro, fondamenta dei Tolentini, calle de Camai, calle del Chiovere, campo San Rocco, calle Larga – ils jettent un coup d'œil sur la vitrine de la boutique "Photo Renard" –, calle Traghetto, campo San Tomà, ponte San Tomà, calle dei Nomboli, rio Terà dei Nomboli, calle dei Saoneri, ponte San Polo, salizzata San Polo, campo San Polo – il désigne l'église, prend une photo de la place. » (Calle 2019, 64).

Calle's use of lists in this way, on a surface level, is indicative of her interest in wandering through city spaces. She meticulously records the journeys taken throughout Venice, a witness to engagement in city spaces. Not only does she depict how Henri B., and therefore Calle herself, move throughout the city, she also demonstrates an example of engagement with the space. This is perhaps a route that many tourists take through Venice when sightseeing, without fully taking note of their journey as they move between attractions. Calle's choice to record a seemingly banal and otherwise fleeting route highlights that all of our

interactions with space can harbour meaning and meaningful connections. Calle and Henri B. are connected by this journey, but they are also connected to all who have walked the same route before them, and all who will walk it afterwards. It therefore makes sense why Calle chooses to practice *flânerie* through people as much as urban environments, as she makes it clear that we are connected by our use of shared spaces. In addition, Calle's description of the route in this way invites spectators to imagine the journey; they could even plot it themselves if they so wished. This is achieved through the use of street names to define her route, the step-by-step repetition of which is much like the repetition of walking itself. This obsession with recording the journey details reflects the labyrinth nature, in that it protects Calle from getting lost. It also protects her from losing herself in process of wandering and following, as the repetition of her name is a reminder of her presence. In this way, she stops herself from submitting completely to the city.

The repetition of Calle's name, coincidentally also the word for street in Venetian, is suggestive of Calle's engagement with haunting. She is a haunting presence throughout Venice, and both Henri B. and the spectator are continuously reminded of her presence in this way – she is an omnipresent narrator. Traces of Calle are left in the city in this way, as even in her absence, for spectators, and certainly for Henri B., a visit or return to Venice will conjure images of Calle. Gilloch (2002, 48) argues that in *flânerie*, 'it is not the stranger who leaves a trail [...] but the narrator', reflecting the haunting nature of this

practice, as the space is affected long after the flâneur is gone. It becomes apparent that haunting is not just reserved for ghosts, or for those who are absent, but is also reflective of the traces we create in the present. It can be argued, therefore, that the role of the flâneur is ultimately one of haunting. They redefine and rehabilitate city spaces through the act of walking; they are in fact a constant haunting presence so long as their movement continues. This is reinforced in *Suite vénitienne* by Calle's obsession with street names. Calle works in collaboration with the city in her quest to pursue Henri B., and the street names 'articulent une phrase que ses pieds construisent sans qu'il la sache' (de Certeau 1990, 157). Venice becomes the third party in this game of following, aiding the haunting of Calle as her name is repeated everywhere, and as she wanders further into the labyrinth of the city. This is also indicative of Calle's humanistic approach to flânerie. While the typical flâneur is perhaps more focused on the exploration of their urban environment, Calle uses people as a means through which to investigate spaces. Just as Calle collaborates with the city in order to manifest her haunting presence, so too does she use Henri B. as a way of discovering Venice. Calle's relationship with people and spaces therefore becomes one of reciprocity, as people bring meaning to the space, and vice versa. It is also interesting that Calle pursued Henri B. to such an extreme extent, unlike the strangers that she followed in Paris. Derrida (1993, 16) argues that ghosts can 'provient de l'avenir'. Calle's presence in the city was predicted by the haunting of her name. It is perhaps for this reason that the following of

Henri B. was all-consuming – just as Calle was haunting the city through her flânerie, she too was being haunted by her own presence.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Paris 1981/2001: *La Filature* and *Vingt ans après*

After *Suite vénitienne*, Calle continued to engage with the practice of flânerie in her artworks. Calle already had extensive experience in following multiple different individuals, however she had never knowingly been the followed party herself. Despite this, Calle's desire to be followed can be seen in these earlier works. In *Suite vénitienne*, Calle sets up the project so that she can be discovered by her subject. Initially choosing to keep her distance from Henri B., she strays closer and closer to him as the days progress, taking more risks as she becomes consumed by him. For example, after passing close by him on a bridge and hiding in an alcove to wait for him, she becomes impatient and crosses the bridge again (Calle 2019, 85). This careless behaviour leads her to cross paths with him directly in an empty hall, drawing attention to herself, and ultimately facilitating Henri B.'s discovery of the project. Although wandering and chance plays a large part in Calle's flânerie, these particular parts of the project were, to an extent, orchestrated by her. Having avoided discovery by Henri B. for so long, Calle was perfectly capable of continuing this ruse if she so desired. Therefore, her seemingly reckless abandon of her initial rules to maintain distance between herself and the subject perhaps highlight that Calle harboured a desire to be discovered all along. This is perhaps what led her to her next project, *La Filature* (also known as *The Shadow*), in which she decided to invert her original experience as follower, to experience first-hand what it would be

like to be followed herself. By orchestrating her own following, Calle ensures her discovery, but is also in more control of the environment and situations in which it happens. This chapter will consider Calle's experience of being followed, and what this means for her position as the flâneur.

In 1981, after years of being the follower, Calle arranged to be followed by a private detective in order to fulfil this desire of being followed. She had her mother contact the 'agence Duluc' of private detectives and hire an investigator to follow Calle around Paris for approximately twenty four hours (Calle 2019, 111). The detective was unaware of Calle's scheme, and followed her as he would any other suspect. Despite this, Calle was not completely in control, as she did not know which day of the week the following would take place. Therefore, although she knew she would be followed, she did not know who she would be followed by, or when it would happen. This is in some ways reflective of the role of the flâneur, as it accords a level of spontaneity and uncertainty to the experience, as much as possible under the planned circumstances anyway. The aim of this experience was, in Calle's (2003, 101) words, to 'provide photographic evidence of [her] existence', just as she had done previously for strangers on the street. However, yet again the true subject of the piece was the act of following itself. Calle's presence is often fleeting as she wanders through urban environments and photographs others. Although she centres herself in some way in all of her projects, she is never the sole focus of the artworks. The photographs taken of her by the detective, then, are more an

evidence of her own wandering and his following of her – documentary evidence which proves the experience happened. It is a means of showing how the following took place, as well as photographic evidence of her discovery.

We might assume that Calle transfers her role of the flâneur onto the detective, as he becomes the follower. Much like Calle at the beginning of *Suite vénitienne*, the detective has rules which he must follow. He must maintain a suitable distance from his subject, he must not get emotionally invested or involved in her life, and he must produce photographic evidence and documentation in order to prove that the following took place, and to record the journeys taken by the subject. The detective's role is therefore a reflection of Calle's previous role as a follower through Paris and Venice. His role is also similar to that of the flâneur, as his movement through the city is determined by someone else. Despite this, Calle does not accord the detective the same role she had as follower and flâneur in her previous pieces. Calle continues to narrate her journeys in this piece, and uses the experience to carefully select certain areas around Paris to be shown in her project. Unlike a traditional subject in flânerie, Calle chooses her journeys in the city with intention, and knowing that she has an audience. Therefore, the routes she takes are purposeful in order to show the detective something in particular. She controls what he does and does not discover. She therefore creates a paradoxical situation in that the detective's process centres around Calle without bias and takes her as its subject, but she manages to keep her audience at an arm's length, allowing them access to



certain parts of her life but not others. The spontaneity and chance found in the movements and journeys of a traditional subject of *flânerie* cannot be found here. In this way, Calle maintains the role of the *flâneur*, as she facilitates this experience with the detective, and indirectly follows him through his actions.

In addition, with the knowledge that she would be unaware of the day on which the following took place, she set a trap for her detective, in order to ‘garder le souvenir de celui qui allait me suivre’ (Calle 2019, 147). This further reinforces her role as *flâneur*, as she continues to pursue those of interest to her, in this case the detective, albeit in an unconventional way. Calle created her daily route in such a way so that she could catch her follower in the act – she walked past the same point at the same time every day for a week. She had her friend, Francois M., wait in front of the Palais de Découverte every day at 5pm, and photograph anyone who seemed to be surveilling her. This highlights the intention with which Calle planned her route, as she purposely created itineraries that would facilitate her own *flânerie*, and unveil the identity of her follower. Moreover, this suggests the position of haunting in Calle’s artistic process. Calle’s obsession with the identity of her follower implies that the retention of memories is of great significance to her. She wanted to have an idea of what her follower looked like, and physically retain his image through photography. It also becomes clear that Calle wanted to be haunted by this man, as she instigated the whole following, but is not comfortable with a ghost who

has no face. Seeing this man was key to the completion of her journey, and she could now visualize his haunting presence.

Calle's difficulty with faceless ghosts and haunting traces can be seen in her most recent piece, *Les Fantômes d'Orsay* (2022), as she becomes consumed by the invisible presence Oddo. His traces are visible through notes left by others, but he remains faceless and without a clear identity, which Calle focuses on and explores throughout this artwork. Additionally, Calle's desire to see proof of the detective links back to her reason for creating this project in the first place – proof of existence. Images of Calle taken by the detective act as witness to her flânerie as she has been the witness to others' engagement with urban spaces. He too is a witness to her flânerie, and she wonders if she has left a lasting impression on the private investigator, 's'il pensera à moi demain' (Calle 2019, 119). Therefore, photographic evidence of the detective becomes proof of the artwork, and proof that this experience really did take place – for herself and her spectators. This documentation of process is key to Calle's artworks, as she looks for ways to maintain the traces experienced while engaging in flânerie. The photographs act as physical reminders that the act of following took place, but also as physical manifestations of the haunting experienced in this process. It can therefore be argued that Calle's role as the flâneur becomes one through which the hauntings of urban space can be remembered, as she situates herself as witness to the movements of the city.

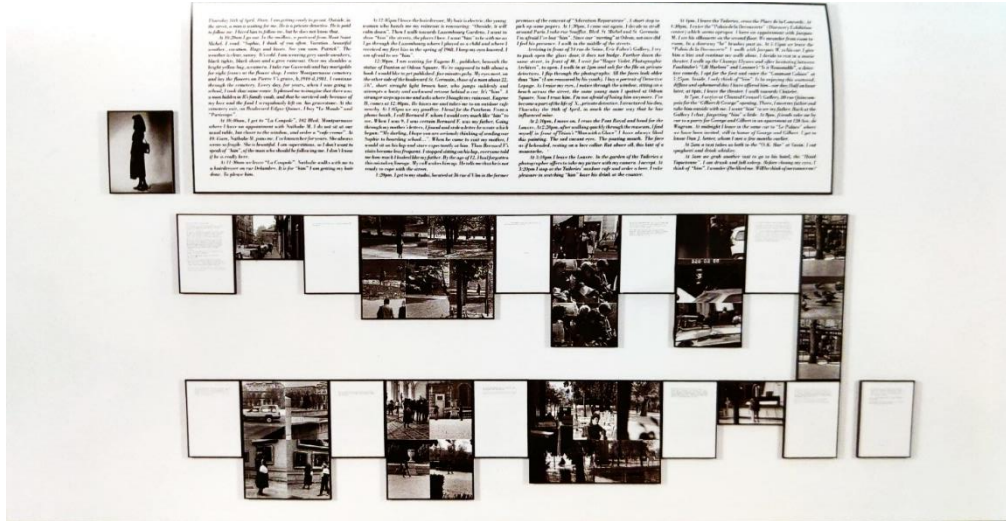


Figure 12: Calle, Sophie. *La Filature*. 1981. In Calle, Sophie. 2003. *M'as-Tu Vue*. Munich: Prestel, 103.

*La Filature* is a collection of twenty nine black and white photographs, as well as one in colour, placed alongside eleven texts which include both Calle's diary entries from the experience, and the detective's notes (Perrotin, n.d., b). It features in a range of her art books, such as the *Doubles Jeux* collection which will be used here for images of the artwork. It's has also been exhibited at galleries such as in 1991 at the Pat Hearn Gallery in New York. In this particular instance, Calle chose to present the images as if they were an open case book used by a detective, reinforcing the investigative process of this piece (Figure 12). The photographs are almost entirely taken by the private investigator as he tailed Calle. They evoke a strong sense of movement and urgency, with some of the photographs appearing blurred and rushed. Calle has also included

photographs taken of the investigator, unbeknownst to him, during the project. These photographs are much calmer, suggesting a controlled and measured approach. This is because Calle's friend was lying in wait to capture the identity of the detective, rather than moving spontaneously with his subject. This heightens the ambiguous dynamic between subject and follower, suggesting that Calle held more control than the piece may initially imply. This is a continuation of the dynamic established in *Suite vénitienne*, as Calle appeared to battle with the power relations between herself and Henri B. The private investigator uses a similar photographic style to Calle, including a range of close-up and distance shots, often focusing on the moving figure of their subject. This is because Calle regularly uses an investigative reportage style typical of detection and surveillance. This reinforces the detective-like quality to *flânerie*, highlighting the parallels between the roles.

In addition, Calle's decision to incorporate both her own and the detective's notes further establishes the relationship between the two individuals. Through the inclusion of this content, Calle creates a dialogue between herself and the detective, one which he was not aware was taking place. Despite taking control of her journey and the end presentation of the piece, the detective is portrayed as a key contributor to this artwork. He of course produced the majority of the images on display, as they were taken by him to complete his commission by Calle's mother. It therefore becomes apparent that Calle has given this man a voice in her piece; he (unknowingly) has a say in the aesthetics of the artwork,

as the whole project depends on his contributions. This highlights that Calle prioritises the sense of fleeting in her artwork. She is not interested in staging or posing for photographs; she wants to capture a moment in time. Despite this, while the photographs may initially look organic due to her chosen aesthetic, they hide a calculated process which Calle controlled through her movements. Calle was fully aware that she was being followed, unlike the usual objects of *flânerie* who are observed unknowingly. Thus, she performed for her audience. She did not necessarily go about her daily life as one might expect. Instead, she carefully chose her activities and locations for the week with the awareness that it would be documented. Therefore, she was able to affect many of the images taken by the private investigator – she had a say in her outfit, poses, and scenery.

Moreover, Calle chose a private investigator for this project because her own personal aesthetic is so firmly rooted in a documentary style. Her own photography clearly mimics journalistic and investigative qualities, using photography as a means of creating evidence of her exploits, rather than as a tool to capture beauty. This is reinforced by her preference for black and white images. They evoke realism and the everyday, allowing the spectator to hone in on key subjects, rather than the distracting detail that colour photography can provide. It is extremely interesting that an artist should have so much control over images that she does not take herself, particularly as she did not know the precise moment they would be taken. This reinforces Calle's role as the *flâneur* of the piece – she remains in control despite being followed. This is a

contradictory quality of the artwork, given that the movements of the follower are typically spontaneous in nature, as they let chance control their routes. However, the spontaneity in this piece remains, as it is provided by the uncontrollable and unpredictable character of the detective. In this way, he takes the role of someone being followed – his actions are natural and organic, part of his daily life. Thus, the traditional dynamic between flâneur and follower remains, even if Calle is the one being followed (and treated like a criminal). In this unusual game of cat and mouse, Calle succeeds in playing both roles.

Calle incorporated many famous Parisian landmarks into this project. She walks through the Montparnasse cemetery, ‘ce trajet que je l’ai quotidiennement répété, des années durant, quand j’allais à l’école’ (Calle 2019, 113). Her journey continues towards the Jardin de Luxembourg, ‘où je joué toute mon enfance et échangé mon premier baiser’ (Calle 2019, 114). Calle then chooses to visit the Louvre to see one of her favourite paintings, *L’Homme au gant* by Titien (Calle 2019, 117). All of these locations are of cultural significance to Paris, and are widely visited by people from all over the world. It could be said that Calle visits these spaces in order to discover how these locations have developed over time. However, it appears that Calle’s reason for choosing these famous monuments is much more personal. Calle (2019, 114) states early on in her diary entry that she ‘désire “lui” montrer les lieux, les lieux que j’aime.’ This suggests that *La Filature* is as much an exploration of Calle as it is the city itself. Her history and identity is woven into the streets of Paris, from her

childhood walk to school, to her first kiss, to her artistic interests. Calle returns to her old haunts, in a semi-chronological order, walking from her childhood to the present day. This establishes flânerie and haunting as an expression of identity as much as it is an exploration of space. It also highlights flânerie as a temporal and historical practice, building meaning through revisiting and re-walking spaces. Calle uses her flânerie as a return to spaces of significance to her, constantly going back as a way of trying to understand herself in the present.

This is reinforced by the fact that Calle is often centred in all of her following pieces, even when she is the follower herself. She often creates a paradox of physically concealing her identity through disguises, such as the wig and sunglasses in *Suite vénitienne*, whilst also laying her identity out for everyone to see through her movements and interactions with urban space. It could be argued, therefore, that Calle defines herself through space. The role of the flâneur is intrinsically linked to her identity, reinforcing flânerie as a defining feature of her artwork. This piece, therefore, depicts the relationship between people and space, as both influence the identity of each other. *La Filature* shows that the interest of space comes down to the individual stories within it, rather than the fame or notoriety of the location. Personal histories and the everyday lived experiences intersect with public space. In fact, the cultural significance of these locations is built up by the small actions, movements, and traces of many.

Calle's practice of returning is also depicted in *Vingt ans après* (2001), a recreation of *La Filature*. Both pieces follow the same format: a private investigator, from the agence Duluc, is hired to follow Sophie Calle around Paris for a day. Both artworks were available in book and exhibition format, and the exhibition seems to follow a similar display which references open case books and evidence. They both begin with a full-length portrait of Calle in similar outfits, although her position differs slightly, as she looks to the left in *La Filature*, and to the right in *Vingt ans après*. She even leaves her house at the same time, and takes a very similar route, incorporating the Montparnasse cemetery, the Louvre, and a cinema into her journey. This may lead to the assumption that both projects progressed and were presented in the same way. However, there are some key differences between the pieces. The first crucial difference is her decision to travel by car. Calle walks very little in this piece, which seems unusual for her artistic process. Her tone in the written excerpts of the artwork seems despondent: 'aujourd'hui, Paris est vide', 'je ne peux rien offrir de plus à mon détective' (Calle 2019, 153, 159). This is a stark change for an artist who has previously enjoyed the process of flânerie so much. In *La Filature/The Shadow*, she is much more engaged in the experience, creating a palpable dynamic between herself and the detective. In this instance, she mentions the detective but does not appear to be particularly interested in him or in her journey. She is in fact more concerned with the outcome of the journey: 'je souhaite que le détective me regarde, qu'il prenne un bon cliché' (Calle 2019, 154). This could be because Calle was asked to create *Vingt ans après* by her



agency, as part of a retrospective on her career. This removes the spontaneous nature of walking which flânerie typically offers, and in turn lessens Calle's autonomy and desire to do the piece. She finds herself in a state of anxiety/worry because she 'ne trouve rien qui résume efficacement les vingt années qui se sont écoulées' (Calle 2019, 156). Flânerie involves following and wandering for the pleasure of it, not as a means to an end or for a particular purpose, and this change to her practice clearly affects Calle. This highlights the necessity of chance when engaging in flânerie.

Moreover, although Calle visits the same locations as her previous project twenty years earlier, her engagement with them is much changed. In *La Filature/The Shadow*, Calle reflects on the personal meanings of each space to her, reminiscing about the past. However in *Vingt ans après*, her focus appears to be on the future. She visits the Montparnasse cemetery, 'pour aller sur ma tombe, ou plutôt lui faire mes adieux' (Calle 2019, 153). What she thought would be her final resting place has changed; the plot owned by her family will no longer be hers, as her father has remarried. This evokes a feeling of nostalgia for a space that Calle has not yet experienced, while also highlighting how much her identity is tied to place. This nostalgic feeling is also apparent when Calle visits the Centre Pompidou, to show her private investigator 'la salle qui m'est actuellement consacrée' (Calle 2019, 157). Being forced to confront her past in this way, rather than through the organic nature of movement and flânerie, has deeply affected Calle. For perhaps the first time, she conveys feelings of

concern and uncertainty for the future. She creates an air of stasis, which is perhaps why she also chooses to drive in this project, feeling unable to walk her past traces. This reference to temporality reflects Derrida's (1993, 16) argument that hauntings are not fixed expressions of the past, but can materialise from the present and future as well. Her decision to drive can also be viewed as a critique on our modern-day movement through the city. Calle feels that Paris is empty, and resigns herself to travel by car rather than wander streets as she always used to. In *Vingt ans après*, Calle's inability to interact with the city as she once did reflects the fast-paced and ignorant use of spaces found today. It is much harder to be a flâneur in an environment where people do not engage with urban space as they once did, constricting their interactions through technology. Calle (2019, 155) finds that she 'n'arrive pas à me renouveler' despite visiting the same spaces as before. Thus, this artwork is a call to return to engagement with city, and to encourage flânerie within us all.

## CONCLUSION

Situating Calle within the practice of flânerie opens up the possibilities of reading her work beyond narrow definitions, moving past limiting and potentially harmful perceptions of what is deemed appropriate for women in art. Although Calle's artworks feature aspects of movement such as Conceptualism, Situationism, Surrealism, and Performance Art, they do not encapsulate her portfolio in the same way as flânerie. Moreover, it is important to move past reductive readings which label Calle as a 'mad' woman – the complexity of her artistic process deserves a more considered approach (Duguid 2009). Calle's engagement with urban spaces has remained consistent throughout her career, in that she finds herself continually drawn back to cities and their inhabitants. Calle is found to be haunted by spaces and individuals within her artworks, as she revisits her past through flânerie. This compulsion to return, alongside Calle's interest in the everyday and the ephemeral, solidifies her role as a flâneur. Calle reflects many of the qualities outlined by Baudelaire when he first coined the term, including a passion for chance and fleeting encounters. Despite this, it has been necessary to develop the original definition of flânerie in order to include female artists, who had initially been excluded from the practice due to nineteenth-century societal structures. Reclaiming the term flâneur as gender neutral has been conducive to this study, and facilitates an analysis of flânerie that is not limited by outdated gender roles.

Calle returns to her artworks regularly, reinterpreting, recreating and reinventing the pieces. This in itself shows the importance of critics and spectators returning to her past artworks, too. This enables a fuller understanding of Calle's works and artistic process, as it allows us to look at her pieces through a new lens, taking temporality into account. Calle accords a great importance to returning to spaces and places after the passage of time, which is shown most clearly through *Les Fantômes d'Orsay* and *Vingt ans après*. Therefore, Calle herself is telling us to go back to her works and reinterpret them with this knowledge. This led to the discovery of a haunting presence throughout Calle's portfolio. Beginning with her following pieces in the late 1970s, I noticed a pattern within Calle's artworks. Her engagement with space is rooted in temporality, and the stories of how those around her have also interacted with urbanity. This includes deep consideration of the personal – Calle is interested in both her own and others' engagement with space on an individual level. She places herself in space and time through these experiences, such as her return to the past life of a space with Oddo, and her apprehension for the future of herself and Paris in *Vingt ans après*. In this way, she is haunted by the traces left by others, by the potential future of spaces, and is herself a haunting individual, continuously moving through urban space.

It is difficult to comprehend the haunting presence in her works when looking only through the present, or at individual artworks. Our own return to Calle's works thus reveals this haunting, and sheds light on the complexity of

the character of the flâneur. In the past, the flâneur was a curious idler. Calle shows that there is much more to this character than may have initially met the eye. They both follow haunting traces through space and are themselves ghostly. They are both in control of their trajectories and decisions, and submissive to the whims of those whom they follow. This character exists outside of temporalities while also drawing attention to the changing nature of space over time. To the flâneur, all of these spaces exist at once, the traces inescapable.

Calle also conveys that flânerie can be a state of mind as much as it can be a physical process. We can figuratively wander through a space in our minds through photography and literature, which Calle facilitates for her spectators through exhibitions and art books. There is scope for this research to be taken further by analysing Calle's pieces that involve less obvious movement and flânerie, such as *Rachel Monique* (2012).<sup>6</sup> This revelation of Sophie Calle as the haunting flâneur will hopefully enable the possibility for future research on Calle and flânerie to be taken further, considering other artworks in her extensive portfolio.

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<sup>6</sup> The full title of this piece is: *Elle s'est appelée successivement Rachel, Monique, Szyndler, Calle, Pagliero, Gonthier, Sindler, ma mère aimait qu'on parle d'elle.*

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