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The Sleepers *Sophie Calle*

Translated into English for the first time, a novella-like chronicle of the sleepers Calle invited into her bed

In one of Sophie Calle's first artistic experiments, she invited friends, acquaintances, and strangers to sleep in her bed. Twenty-seven people agreed, among them a baker, a babysitter, an actor, a journalist, a seamstress, a trumpet player, and several painters. Calle photographed them awake and asleep, secretly recording any private conversations once the door closed. She served each a meal, and, if they agreed, subjected them to a questionnaire that probed their personal predilections, habits and dreams, as well as their interpretations of the act of sleeping in her bed: was it a curiosity, a game, a seduction, an artwork, a job?

The result, comprising her first exhibition in 1979, was a grid of 198 photographs and brief texts.

Unlike the original installation, this artist's book iteration of *The Sleepers* contains not only all the photographs and captions but also her engrossing, novella-like narrative, untranslated until now. Clothbound and pillow-like, the book unfolds as it opens, inviting the reader to join the others in Calle's bed.

From the single, liminal *mise-en-scène* of her bedroom, Calle chronicles the sleepers in text and photos, as if in real time, as they inhabit the bed. Their acute and sometimes startling, sometimes endearing particularities accumulate: *The Sleepers* is as much an *outré* report on the nature and act of sleeping as it is something like an eight-day-long dream.

Many seeds of Calle's subsequent works are embedded in *The Sleepers*: her exacting and transgressive methods of investigation, her cultivation of intimacy and remove, and her generative and unrelenting curiosity. But in this work, as she observes the sleepers, they observe her too: they speak with reciprocal candor, presaging her insouciance and resolve as she detonates boundaries in the works that follow.

Translated into English by Emma Ramadan.

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I asked people to give me eight hours of their sleep. To come and sleep in my bed. For eight days, my room was to be a constantly occupied space. Twenty-seven people agreed. The occupation of the bed began on Sunday, April 1, 1979 at 5 p.m. and ended on Monday, April 9 at 10 a.m. Sleepers came and went. Some crossed paths. Everyone was offered breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Clean bedding was provided. To establish a neutral relationship, I asked a few questions. I took photographs every hour. I watched my guests sleep.

Sophie Calle (b. 1953) is an internationally renowned artist whose work often fuses conceptual art and Oulipian-like constraints, investigatory methods and fictional constructs, the plundering of autobiography and the artful composition of self. Using a range of media—books, photography, film, writing, performance, and installation—Calle explores the tensions between the observed, the reported, the secret, and the unsaid. Desire and voyeurism are often agents to expose the multiplicity of truth as well as its absence. Most recently, she was invited to occupy the Musée national Picasso-Paris where in 2023 she staged the large-scale, multifarious solo exhibition *À toi de faire, ma mignonme*. A limited retrospective *Overshare* opens at the Walker Art Center in October.