



*Monday, February 11, 1980.*

10:00 p.m. Gare de Lyon. Platform H. Venice boarding area. My father accompanies me to the platform. He waves his hand.

In my suitcase: a make-up kit so I can disguise myself; a blond, bobbed wig; hats, veils, gloves, sunglasses; a Leica and a Squintar (a lens attachment equipped with a set of mirrors so I can take photos without aiming at the subject).

I photograph the occupants of the other berths and then go to sleep.

Tomorrow I will see Venice for the first time.

*Missed Connections*

In a page spread from her book, *Suite Venitienne* (1980), Sophie Calle pairs a black-and-white photograph from her travels with text which reads like a diary entry. The photo is of two pairs of feet, the left likely belonging to a man and the right to a woman. The feet dangle from opposite bunks in the car of a sleeper train, with a luggage rack visible in the background. From the text, we know that Calle took this photo at 10:00 PM, just before going to sleep, of strangers in a different berth. It appears to be a simple photo and yet was taken with a special lens attachment that allowed Calle to take photos without aiming at her subject. In the entry she writes that she travels with a suitcase of disguises, which also contradicts the ordinary

first impression of the image. By taking note of the aspects of this image that make it slightly unusual, as well as what information is included and what is obscured, we find it demonstrates that a relationship can even arise between strangers.

Details in the image give it a casual quality. It pictures the inside of a train car, a public space that many people have experience with. Trains are often associated with impermanence, in that they temporarily bring together a community of strangers who will disperse as soon as they reach their destination. The ubiquitous “no smoking” sign in the background is a symbol of normalcy. The way the two people’s feet are captured feels very candid; the diagonal lines formed by the two pairs of legs create movement and imply that this was a simple passing moment. Imperfections such as slightly wrinkled trousers and creased shoes make the subjects feel raw and human. With a representational subject and candid feel, the image seems almost like a documentary photograph which allows us to witness a coincidental encounter between strangers. Calle’s text also supports the idea of a subject by chance as she writes that she took pictures of strangers who happened to be on the same train as her. In forming a sense of transience, the photograph highlights the fact that the subjects are strangers meeting accidentally.

The casual nature of the photo is juxtaposed with the intimacy of the encounter it depicts. The most striking aspect of the photo is the cropping, which makes the subjects fill the frame and feel close together. It pictures an unguarded moment, in the evening as the occupants of the train are ready to go to sleep. The bare foot on the right and the coat hanging in the background communicate the idea of being undressed, contrasting with the public setting and contributing to the overall intimate mood. Yet at the same time, the other empty hooks suggest that these people may be alone in the car, not in a crowded area. The proximity between the feet of the subjects

implies safety and comfort, and the fact that the lines formed by their legs point toward each other further establishes a relationship between them. The legs face each other, indicating that each person is exhibiting an open body posture and a similar openness to interact with the other. Horizontal lines formed by the ladder and luggage rack in the background create a sense of peace and also literally connect the legs of the two figures, which adds to the idea of a relationship. There is an asymmetrical balance in the composition of the photo, with both pairs of legs taking up approximately the same amount of space. Such a visual balance elicits thoughts of balance within a relationship and gives the apparent connection between the two people pictured a more good-natured connotation.

The close crop of the photo also prevents it from telling the whole story of the moment it captures, and so creates a narrative through the information it fails to disclose. It is abstract, depicting only feet and not the whole train car or even the faces of the people to easily understand how they may be feeling. This requires more meaning to be derived by the viewer than by the content of the image itself. The soft shadows that dominate much of the image, especially around the edges, give it a feeling of mystery. The two subjects become the main characters of a story we are forced to fill in from the minimal information provided. Based on the feet, we can assume certain things: the person on the left in trousers and dress shoes is a man, while the person on the right with delicate feet and smooth skin is a woman. Because the man's legs extend towards the center of the image, we imagine him to be leaning back, relaxed. The woman, meanwhile, seems to be leaning forward, as her legs angle inwards toward her. The diagonal lines convey a sense of movement, which in turn implies that this image is part of a greater moment. The feet are a symbol of travel, indicating that the subjects are embarking on a

journey in this train car. A corner of a newspaper visible in the top left represents the stories of these people, which are just as indiscernible but interesting as the text. The image obscures as much as it knows, and in doing so creates a story from a still image. The strong narrative present in the image suggests that the man and woman are bound by their shared experience.

Consideration of our role in the photo complicates its meaning of this relationship between strangers. One of the feet on the left exits the focal plane and extends into the foreground as if inviting us. However, we also feel almost as though we are spying on the subjects of the photo. The unusual angle, from a lower perspective, feels sneaky. The secrecy of Calle's method in taking the picture as understood through the text she pairs with it adds to the effect of witnessing a private moment. Her description of a lens attachment to allow her to take photos without aiming at the subject and suitcase of items to disguise herself feel almost like that of a secret agent. But though the idea of spying may evoke discomfort, we keep looking because of our inherent and slightly voyeuristic interest in the lives of others. We feel inexplicably drawn to these people simply because they are people. The photo becomes a secret shared with the viewers, trusting us with an impression of the true selves of the subjects.

This photograph represents the intangible humanity that allows even strangers to form bonds. The image raises questions: why can strangers share such intimacy? Why do we feel drawn to the people pictured? People seem to have the ability to form relationships even without knowing each other, indicating that there is something else that brings them together. We as humans are all inherently linked because we are all people. Even those who may be existing on their own terms, such as strangers on a train, are at the same time together in the world. Calle's page spread reveals the quality present in all people to connect with one another.