

BOOK REVIEW: EXQUISITE PAIN

BY SOPHIE CALLE (2005)

BY CAROLYN SHAPIRO

"*The time is out of joint*" - so sayeth the Ghost of Hamlet's father and the theorist Jacques Derrida in their deconstructive forays into the break-up of Presence. The artist Sophie Calle similarly deconstructs the joined-ness of Presence when she realises the future as present hope from hindsight in her 2005 photographic installation and accompanying book *Exquisite Pain*.

The narrative of this piece ostensibly thematises a sense of Present Hope. The narrator is travelling across Japan to meet her lover in India, collecting material souvenirs, taking photographs, recording dialogue--but we are "presented" with this story of the future as Present Hope from the position of the end point of the narrative: the cataclysmic Break-Up. Each day's record bears the intervention of a red passport-like stamp which counts down the successive days leading up to the Event. This event is signified through the subtitles of the two sections, "Before Happiness" and "After Happiness." One exemplary journal entry of the 92 days counted down with the emphatic red stamp, comprises a black and white photo of a nondescript door, with the sans-serif word in white, "*Jetée*," underneath which is the red stamp, seemingly haphazardly placed, announcing, "47 DAYS TO UNHAPPINESS."

The word "*Jetée*" is pregnant. It comes from the French verb *jeter*, to throw. Following Heidegger, Calle's journey is a jettison; she's been thrown, abandoned, from the very start. Her visual narrative structure performs *Dasein*, that is, Being [that is out of] itself. Writes Heidegger, "And as thrown, Dasein is thrown into the kind of Being which we call 'projecting'." Projecting has nothing to do with comporting oneself towards a plan that has been thought out, and in accordance with which Dasein arranges its Being. On the contrary any Dasein has, as Dasein, already projected itself; and as long as it is, it is projecting." (*Being and Time*, 185) Calle's disjuncture of Presence, then, works on several levels, complicating what is (always) already an ongoing projection of presence out of "itself" into a hopeful future (of marriage to her lover), with the wedge-like deconstructive positioning of hindsight. The visual impact of the red-stamp across the beautiful images materialises the seismological trauma which awaited the hopeful narrator, but the event is framed, through the construction of narrative, as an inevitable shock which throws her from the very outset. (see figures 1-3) Marking temporality, Calle theorises the Heideggerian Dasein. Like Jacques Derrida and particularly like Martin Heidegger before him, Calle theorizes a temporality that is "fugitive" (*flüchtig*)— where Being (as Presence) flees itself, what Heidegger describes as "[t]his phenomenon of Dasein's fleeing *in the face of itself* and in the face of its authenticity." (*Being and Time*, 229)

Part 2 of *Exquisite Pain*—obsessively reiterates the telephone call which imparts the news of the Break-Up. The image: double spread, across two panels/pages; a bed, white sheets, wood headboard; an Indian-flowered wall papered panel above the bed; and, on the right hand side, in the foreground, a red dial-up telephone. The small red text, bottom left, reads: "January 25, 1985, 2 a.m, room 261, Imperial Hotel, New Delhi." Next panel, next page, in tiny red print, right-hand side, center: "After unhappiness." She has received the call. As we've learned from Jacques Lacan, also a reader of Heidegger, happiness is the Encounter (*Tuché*) which (never) happens. (Lacan, J., *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, 13). But I digress, just a bit. Back to the call, the narrator's call, Sophie('s) Calle... the image of the red telephone re-occurs with each successive entry, beginning with that of "5 Days Ago" all the way up until "99 days ago." Working through the trauma of the phone call, she acknowledges the need for obsessive repetition. As for us, we too are on the other end of The Call, working through it, with it, Being-With it. The Time is out of Joint. We are to live the disjunction, and are not permitted to settle within the Present, or even within Present Hope. As Heidegger noted, "But the Self, which the appeal has robbed of this lodgement and hiding-place, gets brought to itself by the call." (*Being and Time*, 317) Being-With or Exquisite Pain? Sophie Calle's countdown throws off lodged presence, mortal coils, futures without hindsight.