

6. intimacy

(A thin layer of deception between us)



Please call Lynn 244-2730

6.1 *intriguingly intimate* 186

(Please call Lynn at 244-2730)

6.1 intriguingly intimate

“When is close too close?” the New Gallery in Alberta, Canada asked in May 1992. The question was printed in white type on a black background at the bottom of their invitation to the exhibition *Intimacies. A three day investigation into the nature of, desire for and boundaries of intimacy in 1992*. “Artists Janet Cardiff, Charles Cousins, Nelson Henricks and John Winet are asking you to help them explore intimacy by participating in a one-on-one, twenty minute private and confidential conversation. [...] For additional information, and to schedule an appointment, please call Lynn at 244-2730.”¹

JANET When you’re with someone constantly you don’t really see them. It’s only when they go away that you feel their absence like a hole in your chest.

From *A Large Slow River*,
Gairloch Gardens, Oakville Gallery,
Ontario, Canada (2000)

In Janet Cardiff’s walks, certain basic characteristics suggest intimacy from the outset: breathing, footsteps, and the character and proximity of the voice. The objective of establishing closeness casually plays with what **RICHARD SENNETT** denounces as the “tyranny of intimacy” in his book *The Fall of Public Man*. In the modern present, he writes, “to know oneself” is no longer “a means through which one knows the world.” Instead, “[w]e have tried to make the fact of being in private, alone with ourselves and with family and intimate friends, an end in itself.”² Sennett maintains that it is not intimacy per se that is the problem. The **desire for warmth, affection, and trust** that is characteristic of intimacy, as well as the wish to reveal our innermost feelings to other people and enjoy anxiety- and sanction-free encounters, only begin to cause difficulties when “these psychological benefits”² are sought in more public realms of experience and inevitably lead to disappointment.³

¹ RICHARD SENNETT, *The Fall of Public Man* (London: Penguin Books, 2002) 4

² SENNETT 5

“The 1970s were right for the 1970s not right for now.”³

³ LINDA MONTANO, *Chakra Story*.
www.bobsart.org/montano/story/text3.html (accessed April 29, 2005)
⁴ SENNETT 9

Curiously, at the same time when Sennett published his broad critique of culture and society that “denies even to Eros a public dimension,”⁴ a movement was developing in the art scenes of New York and Paris, in which artists began to reveal the aesthetic dimension of intimacy. Long before reality TV gave Sennett’s claims a certain notoriety, artists were trying to move the bounds of social acceptability and exploring a new everyday life. The boundaries of social conformity had previously ensured that the **everyday life that was regarded as dull and uninteresting did not have a place in the discourses of science and art**. These artists focused on the privatization of the public and the public exposure of the private. The movement grew quietly with more women artists becoming involved, yet it met little response for a long time. Two of the most colorful personalities, **SOPHIE CALLE** and **LINDA MONTANO**, are taken as representatives.⁵

“Without consistent emotional cleansing and maintenance we are often blind to or incapable of healthy intimacy.”⁵

⁵ MONTANO, *Chakra Story*

Since the 1960s, the endurance artist Linda Montano has consistently sought to erase distinctions between art and life in her performances. She has created over 50 major performances, written six books amongst them, *Art in Everyday Life*, and established the *Life/Art Institute* in Kingston, New York. In 1974 Montano began giving walking tours of San Francisco and they became a work that was later entitled *The Rose Mountain Walking Club*. Janet Cardiff describes Montano as a **source of inspiration**. Today Montano is most famous for her marathon performances, such as the 1983–84 *Rope Piece*, which entailed that she and Tehching Hsieh being tied together by an 8-foot-long rope for an entire year without touching each other. However, it was probably Montano’s early and comparatively unspectacular pieces which influenced Cardiff. These works deal with the development of an ‘individual voice,’ which affects the entire body. The following is a small list of some of her works with brief descriptions.⁶

a 12-hour event consisting of sitting, walking, and singing all her

Listening to the '80s, Inside and Out (1980), sings from the balcony of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.↵

a video piece from 1976, in which Montano explores her person-

Learning to Talk, alities as “a chance to learn how to talk.”↵

from the same year, in which Montano and Nina Wise

Drum Event drummed for 6 hours a day for 6 days, with the aim of changing their awareness using sound.↵

in which a hypnotist asked Montano **questions about her sex**

Talking about Sex While Under Hypnosis (1974), **life** and she answered under hypnosis.

The tape was first shown at the University of California, Davis.↵

Here Montano walked on a treadmill for three hours while tell-

The Story of My Life (1973), ing the story of her life. “A smile device kept me smiling.” (San Francisco Art Institute)↵ “Intuition is a good friend. Irony is sometimes better.”⁶↵



6 MONTANO

JANET Sometimes I take pictures of my husband when he's sleeping. It's the one-sided gaze that attracts me, the freedom for me to digest his naked body, from whatever angle, his helpless being at the mercy of my lens. It's also the attraction of watching someone be unconscious, lost in another world. It's like I'm trying to get back to the safety and vulnerability of sleep through him. It's hard to explain. Words are so pathetic sometimes.

From *Her Long Black Hair*,
Public Art Fund, Central Park,
New York, USA (2004)

Many of Sophie Calle's artworks function similarly as social interventions disguised as personal experiments. They attempt to breach the boundary between public and private, ^{shame and shamelessness} sensitivity and insensitivity with targeted, media-based interventions. Some examples include following strangers with a camera or publishing interviews with people listed in a stranger's address book in the *Libération* newspaper. Like few other artists, Calle has transformed the museum into a place where the intimate and the private are involuntarily exposed to the public. In 1979, from around 5 p.m. on Sunday, April 1, until around 9 a.m. on Tuesday, April 9, the artist invited friends, but also strangers, in total 28 different *dormeurs*, to come to her home, sleep in her bed, and be photographed by her while they slept. As compensation she made them breakfast.↵



What is everyone trying to do when they are photographing? Perhaps it's about connection to a place or a person, but it's also our separation from them. I think that is one

of our goals in life, isn't it, to somehow get connected. What I found in the art world that frustrated me so much, when I was producing photographs and prints, was that there's something very cold about it, there's a way of looking at it that's just about the visual, it's so flat, impenetrable. When I started working with audio, I really liked the way it included your whole body. It really created this physical connection. Also if you are walking with someone's voice and the sound of their body, even if they're saying silly things they become human. And if you're walking for 15 or 20 minutes, it creates a relationship, it creates a one-on-one relationship—that's one major aspect that has interested me a lot about the walks.↵

Calle composed short narratives to accompany each image before displaying the black-and-white photographs in the series *Les dormeurs/The Sleepers*. It seemed as if the narratives were meant to fill the chasm left by churned-up emotions. ‘Retrospective narration’ is a technique employed by the artist throughout her oeuvre. “Fabrice Luchini, fifteenth sleeper. I don’t know him. A mutual friend advised me to phone him. The idea amuses him. [...] He keeps his clothes on. He refuses to sleep. He had warned me he wouldn’t be able to. When I ask him what he thinks he is doing in my bed he answers: ‘Sex.’” Or: “Daniel D., nineteenth sleeper. I know him. He agrees to come on Friday April 6, from 5 p.m. to 12 p.m. [...] Daniel D. rebels. He says my presence in the room is too intrusive.”⁷ For the series *The Hotel* (1983), Sophie Calle posed as a chambermaid in a hotel in Venice for a whole month and **used the opportunity to photograph the closets, suitcases, and trashcans in the 12 rooms assigned to her.** “I examined the personal belongings of the hotel guests and the way this succession of people staying in the same room set up their temporary homes.”⁸ Where does this desire to get a glimpse of the authentic life of another person come from? The life of someone who feels unobserved? We describe a person’s behavior as authentic if they behave in front of others as if they are not constantly being observed. They show or have no visible superego, no self-correction, no metapsychology. Are we so controlled that we cannot escape into an unconscious? Where we can escape ^{a realm without objectification} the comfort of a ‘solitary inner life’ without an opposite number? Perhaps part of the secret to the success of Cardiff’s works, ^{a dialogue with ourselves} that they make us feel like we are participating in an almost-^{a dialogue with ourselves} tonic conversation, taking place under the instructions of a voice that doesn’t bother us with its physical manifestation. According to the operation of Sophie Calle’s interventions, **privacy is the**

7 SOPHIE CALLE, *M’as-tu vue? Did You See Me?*, eds., Christine Macel et al. (Munich: Prestel, 2003) 149, 151

8 SOPHIE CALLE quoted in LUC SANTE, “Sophie Calle’s Uncertainty Principle,” *Parkett*, no. 36 (1993) 74

^(precarious) **right to give one’s own books, bags, clothes, perfume bottles, and belongings a visible order.** This order remains ‘unconscious’ and thus **invisible to us** until a foreign, external gaze falls upon it. Privacy is the paradox of invisibility in the midst of visibility. While Sophie Calle uses words, photography, and other devices to reveal and observe the nature of intimacy, Cardiff is more concerned with facilitating a ^(if temporary) genuine sense of intimacy between artist and viewer. Irony, wit, and a suspicion ^{situational humor} of possible contradiction enliven Cardiff’s soundtracks and give her listeners the freedom to make up their own minds about what they hear. Due to the speaker’s somewhat indifferent tone of voice, a sense of intimacy is created within a few steps. She appeals to our powers of imagination, which are linked to both our fears as well as our desires. **Voices that have no physical counterpart are ideal for all kinds of projections.** “It’s like the friend you hope will be your friend, someone you can be confessional to ... you can talk about those innermost things and you feel there’s no sense of judgment. I’m not Catholic but it is part of what I imagine it would be like to go to a confessional. Or vice versa, to be the priest on the other side listening to someone who is going to tell you the secrets of their soul, their life, their sins and transgressions. There’s a sense that you will be told something you didn’t know before. The possibility of a revelation that might change your life. It’s the tone of her voice, that sense of secrets being shared.”⁹ In the mid-1960s, a pioneer of artificial intelligence research, Joseph Weizenbaum, arranged for his stressed employees to be counseled by a **psychotherapist named Eliza.** Every evening they told her all their troubles, and she responded with wonderful phrases like: “I am sorry to hear you are depressed. Tell me more about your family. What would it mean to you if you got some help?” Eliza was, in fact, nothing more than a simple computer soft-

9 Interview with GARY GARRELS, April 2004, Berlin

designed for an IBM 7094
 ware program, which responded at random with a number of
 set therapeutic phrases. These phrases did actually achieve their
 psychotherapeutic goal; with each passing day the employees
 confided more intimate details of their lives to Eliza, at least
 until they discovered her true identity.→ I always thought the
 story about Eliza was a bit bizarre, so I was quite surprised
 when I was introduced to Eliza – A friend you could never have
 before on the web.→ ELIZA – Hello. I am Eliza. How can I
 help you? MS – Is Eliza Doolittle one of your ancestors? ELIZA –
 What about your own ancestors? MS – They are Huguenots,
 exiled Protestants from France. ELIZA – Would you like it if they
 weren't? MS – No, I am pretty proud of their history. ELIZA –
 You are being a bit negative.→ At least three things can be
 deduced from this. A good therapist requires endless patience,
the uncommitted stoicism of a machine. Second, ^{like Narcissus} we love
 to look at ourselves, but only on the condition that we encoun-
 ter this 'self' as an Other. Lastly, technological media are better
 able to function as this 'other self' when they are more invisible
 and transparent. Questions related to media feature both
 directly and indirectly in Cardiff's narratives.→

In my walks you often have the situation where two
 people are separated by media. This leads to a sort
 of dislocation through time and space. *Drogan's
 Nightmare* is very much a love story, about my voice
 and George's voice. Probably a lot of the pieces are
 love stories, about George's and my love story. About
 the separation between people and using media as
 a metaphor for that separation, and how our ability
 to completely immerse ourselves in each other echoes
 as a perfect analogy for how we are immersed in but
 separated by media. Also, it gets echoed in this person
 you're listening to, who is part of you, but separate
 from you, so there is this continual cyclical repetition
 and layering.→

The comic poet, Aristophanes, appears in **PLATO'S** *Symposium*
 in order to explain why the human desire that is generated by
 separation is so strong. He claims that originally, humans had
 a different shape, namely, they appeared **as a round, ball-like
 form.** They moved around either by walking upright or rolling.
The sexes had not yet been separated. Instead, each ball either
 contained both sexes or were same-sex beings, and it made it
 possible for the two sexes to gaze upon, embrace and penetrate
 one another constantly. In the end, Zeus found the ball-shaped
 beings too insolent, and he separated them "as you might divide
 an egg with a hair."¹⁰ Since then, according to Aristophanes,
 every person is looking for his other half.→ "After the divi-
 sion the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came
 together, and throwing their arms about one another, entwined
 in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one, they were on
 the point of dying from hunger and self-neglect, because they
 did not like to do anything apart [...]. [S]o ancient is the desire
 of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original
 nature, making one of two [...]. Each of us when separated
 [...] is always looking for his other half."¹¹→ In addition to the
 feeling of loneliness that grows out of a crowd of competing
 voices, there is a specific form of attentiveness, ^{an eroticism of distance} which grows out
 of the **experience of being separated by media.**→

10 PLATO, *Symposium*, trans. BENJAMIN
 JOWETT, quotation from [http://classics.
 mit.edu/Plato/symposium.html](http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/symposium.html) (accessed
 April 29, 2005)

11 PLATO, *Symposium*

The intimacy created by the walks is a safe intimacy
 because of the separation through media. I see it as
 a cyborg relationship, like the Borgs in Star Trek,
 where the Discman and headset are a part of you.
 The voice gives you instructions but makes you feel
 like a part of another person with another person's
 memories. But the question for me is, where is this
 voice? It's in the listener's mind and in the digital
 information, but it also creates a third person, a third
 world, a mixture between listener and my voice.→

*sfx of banging door then it opens.
person walks up behind you. you don't see
him on screen*

LARS *from behind* Why are you so afraid of me. I wouldn't hurt you. *sfx of him moving slightly behind you*

LARS The simplest happiness in this world is loving someone. But if that someone disappears then that love or the energy that forms that love must search everywhere, trying to find its object, searching through the air, through brick and stone, through time ... It was you that told them where I was, ... wasn't it?

*beep sfx. camera image falls down then
image cuts to blue, sound of turning it off*

JANET I turned the camera off. There's a door in front of us. *no video, only sound*

From *Ghost Machine*, Hebbel Theater,
Berlin, Germany (2005)



From the attic scene of *Ghost Machine*

Is a minimal amount of mediated separation required to create a **tolerable** proximity? "A thin layer of deception between us," as it is termed in the *Louisiana Walk*? It is a closeness that does not aim to completely close the natural gap between bodies and sexes, but rather, it is an evanescent form of closeness that engages our imagination and preserves a minimal degree of freedom and distance. Because only the voice is present in Cardiff's works, it not only unleashes the imagination in accordance with the **pleasure principle**, it also suspends our consciousness of reality. It enables a form of closeness that goes beyond the traditional game of one-on-one, that expectant state of gazing into one another's eyes interminably, comparable only to the dreamy, somnambulistic state in which the approaching presence of another person can be felt even with eyes closed. Just to be able to close your eyes and open your ears, to follow the game of light and shadow through finely veined eyelids.

Simple things like this constitute Cardiff's particular form of minimalism. From the very beginning, her approach has demonstrated an astute and highly dialectical understanding of the **first distinct natural media, namely, our five senses**. They must be addressed separately in order to broaden the scope and heighten the experience they provide. Separation is a necessary step towards this new shared experience. – This might help explain the **wonderful simplicity** of Cardiff's works as well as **their authentic feel**. The use of complex technology and their artificiality do not lead to the impression of artificiality. On the contrary, the resulting effect appears ^{and matter-of-fact} natural, because it is based upon the natural dissimilarity of two bodies, two senses that ^{two minds} only interact harmoniously if one body, mind or sense is subordinate to the other. Like Eliza's therapy, Cardiff's walks function because the participants willingly and unquestioningly submit to someone else's suggestions. –

JANET I remember my first trip to NYC when I was a student. It was in the winter. There were people standing in front of fires, all bundled in rags and blankets. It was like out of some post-apocalyptic science fiction movie. I wonder where they all went? *sfx of children on rock up high. one is yelling at other to get down*

JANET I remember dancing with a young businessman from the midwest, and then him taking me to his hotel room so he could show me his vibrator bed. He showed me his bed then he walked me back to my hotel. That was all. I guess he was pretty disappointed. I can't believe how naïve I was. She seems like a different person then but somehow I have her memories.

From *Her Long Black Hair*

By the way, the night-time conversation with Eliza didn't end there. – MS – Eliza, are you sleepless at night? ELIZA – Would you prefer if I were not sleepless at night? MS – Hmm. ELIZA – Please go on. MS – With what shall I go on, Eliza? ELIZA – Why the uncertain tone? MS – Good night, Eliza. ELIZA – Are you sure? MS – Have a good night. I have to go on working now. ELIZA – Can you elaborate on that? MS – Do you know by any chance Janet Cardiff? ELIZA – Oh, I know by any chance Janet Cardiff. –