

Unexpected Reflection Collection

Thesis

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By

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Abstract

The *Unexpected Reflection Collection* was an art installation composed of an accumulation of Internet derived images. The images were appropriated from photographs of mirror reflections found on the website, Craigslist.com and contained overlooked and accidental subject matter. The collection of images was integrated into a rotating video sequence and rear-projected through multiple sheets of mirror-like glass. The format of the installation was designed to seduce the viewer through revolving candid images and to ultimately reveal to the viewer his or her own reflection.

This thesis writing addresses the vulnerability of privacy and the unintended public access that is granted with the rapid evolution of Internet technology. Candid photographs and reflections are used in this project to illustrate ideas of exposure and intimacy. This writing explains in detail, the process of determining all aspects of the thesis installation and their relationships to the concepts.

Dedication

Dedicated to Lachlan Sinclair and Lydia Afton

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the faculty and staff in the Department of Art for their energetic support during my education at The Ohio State University. I would also like to thank my thesis committee for their guidance and patience in these past two years. I am additionally grateful for the opportunity that The Ohio State University has provided for my continuing education through the Graduate School.

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Awards

- April 2009..... Fergus Materials Award
- August 2007..... Delaware Artists Guild Member Juried
Exhibition, Delaware, OH
Juror's Award
- July 2007..... High Road Gallery's Digital Salon II,
Worthington, OH
Best of Show
- August 2006..... Delaware Artists Guild Member Juried
Exhibition, Delaware, OH
Best of Show
- May 2006..... Delaware Arts Festival, Delaware, OH
First Place Artist Award

Publications

- May 2009..... "*...Is Now Following You*",
National Graduate Photography Survey
2009, Oculus Photographic Arts Group,
Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, PA,
p. 42 - 43.

Exhibitions

- June 2009..... “The Lonely Sock Project” Solo
Installation, 57 Sandusky Street
Delaware OH
- May 2009..... *Begged, Borrowed, & Stolen: 2009*
The Ohio State University MFA
Exhibition, OSU Urban Arts Space,
Columbus, OH
- December 2008..... Delaware Artists Guild Member Juried
Exhibition, Delaware, OH
- November 2008..... OSU FOTO, The Ohio State University
Photography Area Exhibition,
Marion, OH
- January 2008..... OSU Department of Art First Year
Graduate Exhibition, Columbus, OH
- May 2007..... Ohio Art League Spring Juried
Exhibition, Columbus, OH
- December 2006..... Corner Framing and Gallery Postcard
Exhibition, Delaware, OH
- November 2006..... The Appalachian Landscape Exhibition,
Huntington, WV
- September 2006..... Ohio Art League Fall Juried Exhibition,
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Chapter 1: Unexpected Reflection Collection

My thesis Installation, *Unexpected Reflection Collection*, is centered on the accumulation of internet-derived images and unanticipated reflections. The selected imagery used in this body of work is appropriated photographs of mirror reflections that have been collected from the website: Craigslist.com. The images are displayed in a revolving video sequence which is rear projected through multiple layers of glass. The glass was presented in an exaggerated horizontally linear form that was embedded in the gallery walls. Upon engaging with this piece, the viewer is confronted with both photographic images of my collected accidental mirror reflections as well as unexpected mirror images of themselves reflected in the glass surface (see Figure 1).

This project began with the collecting of images on Craigslist.com that appeared to have subject matter, which was unintended. Craigslist.com is a practical and rudimentarily designed website that is often used as a means for local individuals to exchange their services and possessions. The advertisements that are posted under an array of categories are often very simple with brief text descriptions and typically the inclusion of uploaded digital snapshots of their items for sale. The publicly posted photographs that provided a glimpse into the sellers' private spaces, their kitchens, lawns, and garages, particularly the inclusion of unintentional self-portraits, initiated my curiosity.

I began to concentrate my search specifically on advertisements for which mirrors were for sale. The reflections in these images were rich with narrative potential and became my focus due to the frequently ignored subject matter that inadvertently appeared without much notice. The photographers would often remove clutter from around the mirror, however they overlooked the reflections that revealed details of the opposing spaces. I repeatedly found images of legs and people holding their cameras. Sometimes it was the vacant spaces that were being reflected in an adjacent room. On occasion, the photographer positioned the mirror outdoors in their yard or garden. Nearly every image of a mirror that I discovered had a seemingly unexpected quality, which became the premise of my collection (see Figure 2).

The second chapter of this writing, *Unexpected Revelations and Narrative Possibilities*, expounds on my motivation for approaching the anonymous private moments through the posted photographs and the overwhelming public sphere of the Internet. In this portion of the thesis, I describe more specifically the unexpected content of the imagery that is collected and utilized for the project. The chapter focuses on the possibilities of connecting fragments of photographic “evidence” and constructing identities. This section also begins to discuss how *Unexpected Reflection Collection* relates to self-awareness of both the viewer and of Internet presence.

The idea that these photographs were being created for a very practical purpose was of interest to me. I felt it was significant that these photographs were made for a specific function and yet they had a very different meaning to me, the

collector. I had no intention of buying the objects, but I enjoyed the photographs' characteristic properties of reflecting moments. I was drawn to the accessibility of the private, domestic environments of others, people that I may never know. Even just fragmented glimpses into others' lives, were alluring. The irony was that frozen slices of guarded life were being broadcasted on a public virtual space.

These photographs were likely being deleted as their functions were served. I saved these images through copying them into a digital folder, which I consider to be a repository. This process became a means of collecting and preserving something that perhaps would otherwise be erased.

The action of archiving influenced my decision to employ a glass display for the images. The glass served as a material for containment and safeguard through its common applications as display cases, aquariums, jars, etc. Through experimenting with multiple layers of sheet glass, I decided to project the images through twenty layers of sheet glass. One layer of translucent paper was positioned between the two rear sheets in order to facilitate the effectiveness of the projected images within the glass. The result was that the images appeared to be suspended inside of the glass "container" (see Figure 3).

Chapter three, titled *Collection, Selection, and Projection*, elaborates on the process of accumulating the photographs from the early stages of the project to how the installation developed as a display for the collection. This chapter also reflects on the categories that were established and refined during the course of the project as well as the methods of cropping and assembling of the images.

Chapter three describes more precisely the construction of the structure of the installation and the video sequences that were projected.

The viewer's gaze into the display is at times interrupted with his or her own unexpected reflection. The panes of glass standing upright and pressed together created a mirrored surface. A single sheet of translucent paper obstructs the view through the glass and diffuses the light while the slick façades of the panes echo the opposing environment (see Figure 4). The spectator's reflection becomes evident as the projected images diminish into a silvery dark backdrop during the video sequence. This occurrence increases the level of engagement with the piece beyond simply watching photographs fade in and out of the screen. The viewing dichotomy of seeing one's self and others in an unanticipated context is a central concept for this installation.

The Fourth Chapter in this thesis writing elaborates on the mirror aspect of the *Unexpected Reflection Collection* as it is aptly titled *Reflections*. Self-awareness becomes the focus in this section, concentrating on the experience of the viewer seeing oneself, unexpectedly in the reflective surface. This chapter deals with notions of intimacy and how one engages with the installation, specifically one's own reflection and awareness within the public context of the gallery.

The *Unexpected Reflection Collection* installation is designed to spark self-awareness not only in the public environment of the gallery, but to provoke questions regarding one's visual presence in the digital realm of photography and the Internet. The intention of this project is to question the boundaries of guarded and unguarded presence in the digital age with incomprehensible

access to information. Its purpose is to initiate a dialog about the exposure and vulnerability of posted photographs on the Internet, which may be potentially embedded with intimacy.

Chapter 2: Unexpected Revelations and Narrative Possibilities

At present in 2009, the selective refinement of our own visible personae has become a part of the everyday with social networking and online diaries for many people. Currently, personal imagery, behavior, thoughts, and conversations are widely disclosed with minimal consideration of its potential reach or exposure via the Internet. Each person that utilizes these social networking tools formulates to varying degrees, the perception of their online semblance through selected photographic imagery and text. The public profile is created, fine-tuned, updated, and shared on a comprehensive scope.

A contemporary snapshot of coworkers or holiday family photos ending up filed in a shoebox or kept in a bound album is increasingly becoming less likely. Most photographs taken now may never even become a printed object, and yet the probability of an anonymous stranger accessing someone's personal (digital) photo album is surprisingly high. With rapidly developing technology, the barriers of privacy have also evolved. Personal photographs were once easily safeguarded and have now become accessible and vulnerable to the public through sharing on Internet networking sites (see Figure 5)

Michael Conner, curator of the traveling exhibition, "*The New Normal*", expounds on this privacy evolution in his accompanying essay to of the same name

(2008). He describes the “shifts in the nature of privacy” affected by government and commercial surveillance, merchant profiling, online blogs, social networking and even camera phones. Connor comments on how the works in this exhibition “reflect on the changing social conventions that govern boundaries between public and private spheres”.¹ The art represented in “*The New Normal*” exhibition shares the common thread of addressing the very contemporary phenomenon of how internet and surveillance technology has transformed what was once thought of as guarded into something much more transparent and has granted access to any amount of desired information (see Figure 6). These discussions on privacy raise questions regarding the awareness of the unlimited possibilities of public scrutiny and the lack of control of how and where the information is dispensed. What does one expect to happen to these photographs that are posted on the World Wide Web?

With this project, *Unexpected Reflection Collection*, I have considered Jacques Lacan’s critiques on “the gaze”, specifically, in which he illustrates the subject that not only possesses their own self-reference but is also the object being “looked at from all sides”.² In this thesis work, I investigate the possibilities of a photograph, which is shared online and contains more information than is apparent to the owner. This work attempts to highlight the information that is potentially observed from multiple perspectives and for various purposes by other online viewers, beyond the original perception of the poster. The photographs used in this work contain ignored subject matter that inadvertently appeared online seemingly without consideration of a public audience. My intention with

this project is to elevate the uncertain prospects of one's own photographs that are shared on the Internet.

The photographs that were utilized for this project were collected from the website: Craigslist.com, which functions as a virtual trading post. The website is divided into cities and regions and then each locale has a uniform series of lists of categories such as: *Forums* or *Services* and more specific categories of those. In the collecting process, I had constructed several of my own groupings of photographs, which consistently provided unexpected, exposed views into domestic spaces. These were classified regarding subject matter, such as pets or people. I narrowed my focus to household items for sale and more specifically, posts that were advertising mirrors.

The photographs of mirrors presented my unexpected glimpses more vividly than any other category of my collection. An actual mirror reflection is a moving, transitory image that can easily be ignored or overlooked as a photographer attempts to document the mirror. In many cases with the photographs that I discovered, the photographers would have attempted to isolate the mirrors in considered surroundings in order to photograph them. The mirrors often would be leaning against a wall, clear of clutter, or even sometimes placed on a makeshift backdrop, however, the reflection frequently revealed the untidiness opposite the mirror along with the reflected images of the photographers themselves. The indication of visual disregard is echoed throughout my collection of Craigslist.com mirror photographs and was the point that signaled my decision to employ reflective surfaces as a part of the installation structure.

The photographs of mirrors on Craigslist.com advertisements embodied the very essence of the vernacular photography with unpredictable compositions and subject matter in which I am interested. They were made for a specific function, for the purpose of exchange, not for being collected. The makers of these photographs seem to have been hastily producing a photograph of an object in order to generate some amount of cash flow. However, at the same time, they were unconsciously exposing a fragment of their private lives with the inclusion of the overlooked reflections of the interior of their domestic space. The subject matter of the photographs consists very candidly of the photographers' legs, rooms with furniture and possessions, children, pets, flashing cameras, and the insides of privacy fences among other things. It was the unnoticed and abrupt fragments that I was determined to save. I thought about how the traces of banal moments found in these simple photographs would probably be deleted after some time when the object was sold and the purpose of the photograph was served. Those instants, slivers of time and truths became my concentration. When I mention the "truths" in regards to the imagery that I have collected, I refer to the unexpected images within the mirror reflections in the photographs. Despite the commonly known fact that photography carries only a fallible truth in its very nature, nonetheless, the unintended self-portraiture conveys degrees of honesty and genuineness that considered photography loses in the process. Roland Barthes describes in his book, *Camera Lucida* (1981), the consciousness that occurs to a subject in front of the camera lens and the resulting, delusive depiction. He describes, in the first person, the situation of awareness of having

his own photograph taken, “I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art”. He goes on to point out that he is to some extent “imitating” him self for the camera and therefore he says that he “suffers from a sensation of inauthenticity”.³ The photographs that I have collected from Craigslist.com posts in their very practical nature, do not share the inauthenticity that Barthes describes. The photographs are perhaps staged, but the concentration of the maker is focused on the object that is being captured and seemingly negates the importance of the private spaces that the object itself is revealing. These portrayals in which the subject is unaware of the camera’s exposure reveal the candid and sincere moments. One photograph that sparked the desire to find and collect these Craigslist.com mirror advertisements was an image of an antique wooden dresser set up in front of a cobalt blue fabric background. A man’s reflection is centered inside the square mirror frame that is attached to the top of the dresser. The photograph was carefully cropped vertically so that the upright dresser filled the picture plane, yet it seems that the man ignored that he is so clearly a part of the image. The middle-aged, balding man looks into the viewfinder on the backside of his compact digital camera from a slight distance so his face is in plain view. The room behind the man is white and is well lit with natural light coming from the right side. The small silver camera is attached to a lightweight tripod that appears to be resting on a tabletop. He is wearing a wrinkled plaid shirt and casual trousers as he concentrates on the photograph that he is taking. His right

hand steadies the tripod as the left hovers under the stabilized camera in anticipation of the outcome of the picture.

I found numerous photographs of people with arms out holding their compact digital cameras so that they could monitor their LCD viewfinders. Typically, the faces were covered, but in many cases, the camera was held out slightly to the side, revealing their faces. At times, the subjects would be on their knees or straddling objects and furniture, positioned to get the best shot of the mirror that they are photographing. In one case, there is a woman on her knees on a bed. The wooden mirror is hanging on a wall opposite the bed. The room appears to be fairly small and the photographer had situated herself on the bed, possibly to ensure the most effective shot. In this photograph, the mirror is not so closely cropped as the previous example and is captured in the center of a horizontal picture plane. Two sizeable, artificial saguaro cacti flank the bottom corners of the geometric frame of the mirror and there is Native American inspired décor placed nearby, which are included in the photograph. The woman is centered in the mirror holding a compact digital camera straight out from her face, peering at the viewfinder.

The photographs of people were most interesting to me in the collecting process. Seeing the actual photographers taking pictures in and of their private, domestic spaces intrigued me. Another subject that caught my eye in the collecting was the presence of pets. Several photographs reflected animals. Cats in particular were somewhat prevalent in the photographs that I discovered. In my experience with felines, I have observed that they often prefer to stay near their

owners and participate curiously. Pets are important to the idea of the domestic environment, as they are primarily kept at home and become a part of the family. One photograph that demonstrates the inclusion of the family pet is a horizontally composed image of a wooden mirror resting flat on top of a twin bed. The bed has a cover that has an overwhelming pattern of navy blue plaid with a burgundy and beige floral motif. The photographer is angling the camera down at the mirror that is lying on the bed reflecting upwards, displaying the blades of a ceiling fan against yellow ceiling. The bed is off-center and the hardwood flooring is shown mostly to the right. Sitting on the bed at the edge of the mirror, is a black and white cat. The cat is mostly black from overhead, however the reflection of the underside of the cat's neck reveals a large white patch and more clearly the shape of the head and ears. This photograph illustrates the typical behavior of a domestic cat nonchalantly seeking attention from its owner. This provides a glimpse into the relationship between the photographer and his or her pet (see Figure 7).

Sifting through discarded and overlooked personal photographs is a major component of my artistic process. The photographic elements that suggest the narratives of lives are of particular interest. As I gaze from image to image, informed by the subjects' environments, possessions, and depicted behaviors, I form my assumptions about their personal histories. The leap of conscious from each piece of information to the next is what interests me as much as the photographs themselves. Building the stories to attach to these relics and filling in the gaps becomes my natural response. The optimistic certainty that no one

lives without a purpose spurs my actions to collect and seam together disjointed and abandoned narratives. I am haunted by the possibilities of the multilayered stories of some seemingly anonymous person's existence that will perhaps never be confirmed or disputed. As I carefully cradled pieces of someone's identity in my own hands, I consider what evidence I will leave behind and what history might be invented or lost.

Identities are more accurately defined by the unpredictable situations rather than the instances in which one selectively outlines their own character. The honest, circumstantial, off-guard capture of an intimate twinkling of time often depends on chance. However, I cannot ignore the decision that was made by the camera operator to sustain those particular moments in photographic form, regardless of how photogenic or candid. The scenes showing their best sides no doubt, take precedence over the undesirable angles and glimpses. Particular photographs were kept for sentimentality or perhaps a self-defined history. These editing methods, in which certain objects are protected and others discarded, contrive enhanced representations and modified narratives.

Piecing together the histories and fictions of evidence left behind is an enviable practice of artist, Sophie Calle. Her work has an extensive reoccurring theme of assembling data collected as evidence leading to the establishment of what ends up being a very uncertain story. In some cases, Calle develops a contradiction to the very narrative that she originally proposed, demonstrating the viewer's own inevitable tendencies to connect a story with the available information regardless of interruptions or inconsistencies. For instance, in Calle's Hotel Series, she

worked as a housekeeper in Venice and photographed the tenants' belongings in the rooms in which she had access. The artist also described in writing the artifacts that she observed from each room in addition to her interpretation of the details. These evaluations were based on her own presumptions. Throughout her career, Calle has repeatedly displayed a capability of establishing a savory narrative regarding a subject that is rather elusive. Normally, neither she nor the viewer will ever come face to face with those subjects, but she bases conclusions and assertions on her collected, disjointed evidence (see Figure 8).⁴

Calle's work, in which employs this construction of vague identities through her collection of found "evidence", has significantly informed my work on this project. The *Unexpected Reflection Collection*, similar to Sophie Calle's work, strings together collected images lifted from the original context. This body of work also challenges the viewer to fill in the blanks with the selected imagery as it is assembled in a uniform manner. *Unexpected Reflection Collection* also relies on the tendency of a viewer to attempt to draw connections and to assert conclusions based on fragments of information. For example, within the imagery used in this project, the repeated occurrence of unintended self-portraits using a camera suggests that the person is photographing a mirror and signals to the viewer the likelihood that the other images are also accidental reflections. The unplanned scenes of domestic spaces also contribute to the amateur sensibility that indicates the possibility of fortuitous subject matter. These subtle shreds of evidence, in conjunction, suggest a more expansive account.

Sophie Calle's photographic work is often accompanied with her own writing that explains her perspectives and interpretations. This text is very successful in signaling to the viewer her approach to each project. The use of text was something that I struggled with in the design of the *Unexpected Reflection Collection* installation. It was my aim to give the viewer clarity about my motivations and concepts, as well as the origin of the imagery. However, the articulation was heavily dependant upon the viewers' degree of exposure to Internet and technology. I opted to keep the text to a minimum, with subtle clues in the title and list of materials, which included glass, drywall, steel, and Internet derived photographs. Perhaps in the future, if this project is revisited, I will consider more accessible signals.

A degree of authenticity is established for the viewer with the presumption that the work is the artist's collection. This occurs in Sophie Calle's work, in which the presence of the artist somewhat reassures the actuality of the content to the audience. As in her *Hotel Series*, she includes a description of her process of collecting the pieces of information, which operated as an imperative component in the project. The connection to the artist's method validates the images, liberates the viewer, and encourages the exploration of narrative possibilities.

Chapter 3: Collection, Selection, and Projection

The decision to emphasize the process of collecting and preserving as a component of the *Unexpected Reflection Collection* was not part of my original idea. The collecting was a step in the process, however initially it did not occur to me that it would become such a principal scheme in the project. As I continued to accumulate the photographs and categorize them, I began to realize that the collection and the desire to preserve the photographs were very important and would profoundly influence the form of the installation.

I identified throughout this thesis project with the artist, Gerhard Richter and his use of borrowed imagery. I was familiar with his *Atlas* project, a famous collection of reference images, which was its own entity that was cultivated for over forty years of his career. Much of his organized panels of photographs, sketches, and color studies that make up *Atlas* were in response to the “flood” of imagery that he experienced through media and his own observations of people and places. Lynne Cooke, curator and art historian, addresses Richter’s process of maintaining his compilation in an essay on *Atlas* (2003). Cooke writes, “Faced with the mass of imagery today, Richter asserts that all one can do is try to order it”. The year that Richter passed away, his collection had reached a soaring number of over 780 panels (see Figure 9).

My own collection grew with each time I visited the Craigslist website, which became an obsessive daily routine. The collections of glimpses into the living rooms, lawns, and garages belonging to unknown people grew over a period of more than six months. I related to Richter's desire to order the piling photographs. For my project the photographs were selected and stored into a folder on my computer desktop, labeled "craigslist". Within this folder, there were numerous subfolders for my categories, and often subfolders within those. I made several attempts to organize my collection into grids for studying. I investigated how these photographs related to the others. Lynne Cooke also mentions in her essay that the relationship of the pictures and panels was a significant point that Benjamin Buchloh commented on regarding Richter's assemblages. Buchloh felt that the combinations and juxtapositions greatly affected the meanings and readings.⁵ I considered how the positioning of the photographs could influence the implications and interpretations.

As mentioned in chapter two, people tend to draw narratives with the information given, regardless of how random the information is. As I studied the photographs that I was collecting, I looked at how different groupings of four or nine photographs could potentially be combined to construct to a narrative.

With narrative in mind, I was exploring how the photographs would be displayed in a way that would address the ongoing collection, the rather fragile framework of digital images, and the transient nature of reflections. I began to investigate the use of video to present the images. Video was a medium that could move the images in and out of view, which reinforced the volatile nature of both digital

and reflected images. I found that exhibiting the images in a printed form was static and overly grounded. The challenge was to suggest preservation of something that is not traditionally fixed as a feasible object. The cycling ability of the video also contributed to the illustration of a continuing accumulation of images.

As the collection of photographs grew each day, I became preoccupied with the sorting, categorization, and primarily the concept of the collection itself.

The abundance of photographers' legs became the first category of my collection. Other categories that followed were: curtains and windows, inside spaces, outside, and pets. These categories shifted and merged as I spent time dealing with them, organizing, printing, projecting, cropping and organizing again. For example, I subcategorized photographs of people into "with flashes" and "without". I eventually determined the sequencing of the images in the video, which I referred to as "people", based on the flash factor. For instance this video began with all images of people using a flash. As each of the images rotated in and out, the flashes slowly disappeared and were replaced with images in which the subjects were more clearly visible and not obstructed by a white flash (see Figures 10 and 11).

In the process of ordering my collection, I made the choice of eliminating the parts of the photographs that were not precisely the reflections of the mirrors. I was interested in the photographs as a whole, however this project evolved into dealing specifically with the reflection. I elected a systematic cropping of all the photographs into squares that created a uniform structure. The cropped image

consisted of only the reflection portion of the photograph. This reduced the photograph to more simply an image. Regrettably, much of the intriguing context that these photographs possessed was eliminated. The intention was to focus the viewer on the moment that is occurring through the reflection rather than being distracted by the various mirror frames. The final image was the largest square that could be cropped without including any portion of the frame; therefore shape of the mirror's edge determined the resulting image used in the video sequence (see Figure 12).

In my work, I often resort to the use of the grid as a method of sorting. My first grid formation utilized eighty-one images of mirror reflections, however I found this arrangement to be overwhelming. This outcome seemed to create a visual collapse and I felt that it was not effectively conveying my concept of an ongoing collection of reoccurring photographs. I was still intrigued with the overloaded sensory experience of multiple images stretching beyond the average range of perception. I was also continually interested in the implied narratives that began to emerge within the combinations of photographs. I researched theories of how a narrative could be communicated from various artists' perspectives, which led me to think about linearity.⁶ I started to imagine my collection tied together in exaggerated horizontal strings of images. This was an idea that I could not shake from my vision. I decided that the images would be displayed in a sequence that utilized a wide field of vision, one that slightly exaggerated the viewer's normal perception and push into the viewer's peripheral awareness. The collections of cropped images would softly loop in and out of a seemingly random

video sequence. This sequence, with an approximate duration of one and a half minutes, would be projected through a glass screen that was constructed at a wide ratio of 1:12. The disproportionate horizontal line of images and rotating sequence emphasized the ongoing accumulation of images. The fading in and out of the images would reference the ephemeral nature of a reflection.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I felt as though my collecting process was in some form a preservation of these images that would inevitably be discarded or perhaps deleted. These images were simultaneously trivial and precious, public and intimate, disregarded and collected.

My immediate response to the concept of preservation was to employ glass.

Glass is the material frequently used for display cases and preservation containers such as jars and vitrines. My previous working experience involved hand-cutting large quantities of sheet glass used for picture framing. I recalled the indescribable perception of depth and refracting light that was created by a stack of multiple sheets of glass. With this knowledge, I began to experiment with sheet glass and translucent prints of the mirror reflection images. I was delighted in the reflective quality of ten sheets stacked together and still the depth that it maintained with backlighting. I had been toying with rear projection through suspended translucent paper and then eventually, I fused the two experiments. I discovered that with a single sheet of translucent paper between the rear two sheets of glass in a stack of about twenty sheets, the edges of the projected image echoed back through each sheet, causing the image to appear to be floating or hovering inside of the glass (refer back to Figure 3).

The next challenge was to successfully install twenty sheets of glass that measured eight inches by sixty inches for eye-level viewing. My thoughts returned to the display case or aquarium, I had to determine what form of structure would support the “container” of my collection. In keeping with the dichotomies that surrounded this project, such as interior and exterior or private and public, thoughts about the reoccurring theme of duality became relevant to the choices concerning the configuration of the installation. The idea of creating opposing display screens and embedding them into walls was developed from the implications of walls in relation to privacy and also the practical function of housing the video projectors for rear projection.

The projector required a distance of nearly nine feet to create the accurate size of projection for the sixty-inch wide screen, which necessitated a structure to house the projector. I realized that if the projector needed at least a partitioned space of almost nine feet deep by at least sixty inches wide, a logical solution was to create a uniform structure that was both nine feet wide and deep. The projections illuminated the two screens that were fused with the exterior walls. This use of two screens was a functional decision in one aspect; however, I felt that the focus of the walls related directly to the very barrier that separated inside and out, private and public.

The installation structure was built as two perpendicular partitions, which join at a right angle extending from a corner space in the gallery. A hidden rear entrance enabled the access to the operations of the projectors. The walls were constructed as drywall facades, which concealed the steel frame that supported

the weight of the upright glass at eye level. The outcome was the appearance of extended gallery walls with two identical embedded glass displays. The displays resembled built-in aquariums that contained a collection of floating images rather than living organisms, but also referenced windows in a house. The walls established spaces for the viewer to engage with the work by breaking up that particular area of the gallery into smaller, more intimate sections. The installation created a sense for the viewer of being on the outside looking in as if to peer into a window. At the same time, the constructed partitions disrupted the gallery layout and prompted a sense of enclosed, interior space.

The projected collections of images were presented in a relatively small scale. Individually, the images within the sequence measured a little over five inches square. The “string” of squares reached the horizontal width of nearly sixty inches. The small size of the squares enticed the viewer to encounter the work in close proximity. The scale not only led to an intimate experience with the collection, but also positioned the viewer at a distance that enabled them to experience their own reflection within the piece.

Chapter 4: Reflections

The role of the reflection in *Unexpected Reflection Collection* has been briefly discussed thus far in the previous chapters. The subject matter of the imagery utilized in this project consisted entirely of mirror reflections. The materials used for screens in the installation form a highly reflective surface mirroring the viewer. Reflections repeatedly established significance in the installation, by enabling a second, more transient view into not only others' lives, but into a moment of our own. It was my intention for the viewer to become an unexpected participant, as he or she appears reflected in the glass of the installation.

This installation project created a viewing mechanism that gave the viewer glimpses of anonymous people within their domestic settings through the reflections in their mirrors. These settings, which are typically guarded with walls and obstructed windows, were on display in a gallery space in which uninhibited looking is encouraged. The images capturing the private moments fade in and out in through the video sequence in a fleeting manner, mimicking the ephemeral characteristics of a mirror reflection. As the scenes diminish in the video sequence, the viewer's own reflection becomes evident in the slick surface of the display. The viewer abruptly realizes that the focus has shifted in the absence of the image; he or she is caught for a moment seeing his or her self seeing. The

result is a negotiation of one's self within the environment and the work (see Figure 13).

In developing this installation, I was prompted to revisit Maya Lin's Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C. Her minimalist structure employed a large-scale wall of black granite that not only had the names of all soldiers either missing or killed during the war, but also was polished to be highly reflective. Upon approaching the wall, one might find it difficult to ignore their reflection in the dark stone conjuring sympathy to those lost in the darkness of the Vietnam War.

Despite Lin's work being a public work of art, it has been described as a "discreet monument" in its highly emotive power to impact the observer on a personal level.⁷

I believe the *Unexpected Reflection Collection*, like Maya Lin's memorial, is also an intimate installation. The reflection aspect of this work is intended to enhance the level of engagement as it creates an opportunity for viewer participation. The work is silent and elegant, which seduces the viewer into a moment of self-reflection. However, the acknowledgment of the reflection reminds the viewer of their vulnerability as their gaze is exposed through the reflection for others to see.

Chapter 5. Two Things: In Conclusion

The *Unexpected Reflection Collection* is largely a comment on the evolution of private and public, and the paradox the many seemingly contradictory dualities that coexist in the boundaries between the two. The ambiguity of the perception of private with the onset of the Internet has been the central idea in this project. This work examines the disruption of domestic space generated by digital technology and the Internet. The comprehensive reach of access with shared information is difficult to fathom in the digital age and the boundaries of interior and exterior are increasingly becoming indistinguishable.

Overlapping themes of duality continue throughout this project. The installation sets the stage for a viewing dichotomy of being on the outside, peering in, but at the same time, experiencing both a sense of interior and the vulnerability of being seen. The installation explores the divergent roles of the voyeur's scrutiny and the subject of exposure.

The mirrored surface itself suggests the idea of a twin image: reality and the reflection of the real. The use of the reflection connotes notions of actual and façade, which relates to an Internet profile that is established for social networking. These profiles are selective representations, which influence the reading of personal narrative or history. Again, the contradictions emerge with

the displayed or shared information posing as truthful information. Through careful editing, the self-defined history hovers on the edge of fiction.

As I reflect on the installation of the *Unexpected Reflection Collection* in the past tense, I think of how I might recreate it differently. What did I learn and what would I modify? To answer that, I believe that I would strive to further develop the viewers' experience with the installation. A gallery staff member confided with me during the deconstruction that when she initiated the videos in the morning, she would pause for a moment in the interior of the partitions where the projectors were housed and would watch the video sequence in solitude. She described a feeling of secrecy and intimacy in which she experienced the installation in an isolated state. The staff member also expressed her interest in how the video projection was reflected from the backside of the glass display onto an opposing wall. She explained that her privy knowledge and experience of this enclosed space was something that she would miss. I was struck by this description of her engagement with the installation. I would like to heighten the tension of self-awareness when viewing the *Unexpected Reflection Collection*. Beyond this project, I have continued to collect images that I find on the Internet. I feel that I will continue to appropriate existing, overlooked imagery and also explore creating more tactile methods of experiencing them in a way that also reflects their source and narrative possibilities.

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Appendix: Figures

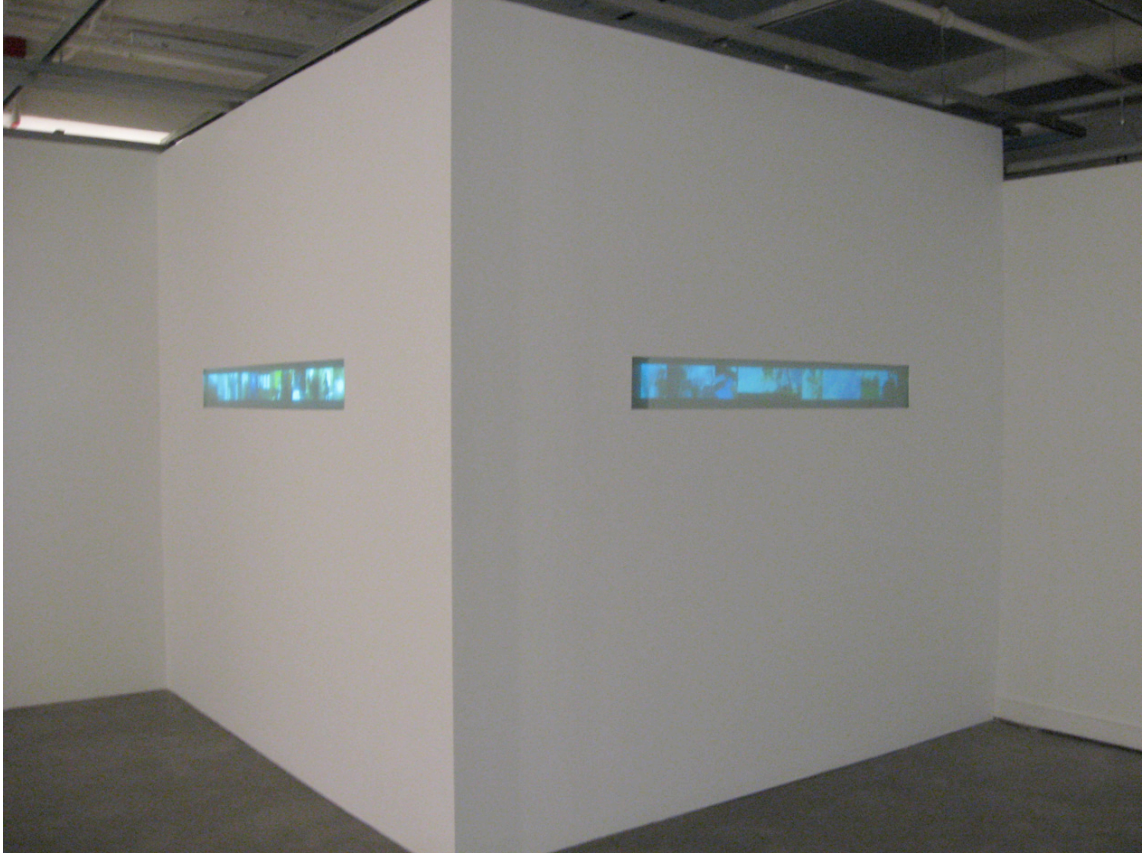


Figure 1. Installation view of *Unexpected Reflection Collection*

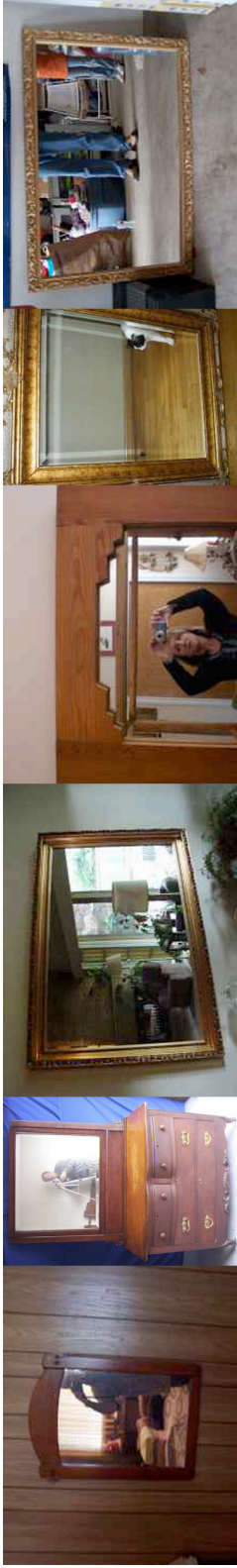


Figure 2. Examples of photographs from Craigslist.com advertisements for mirrors

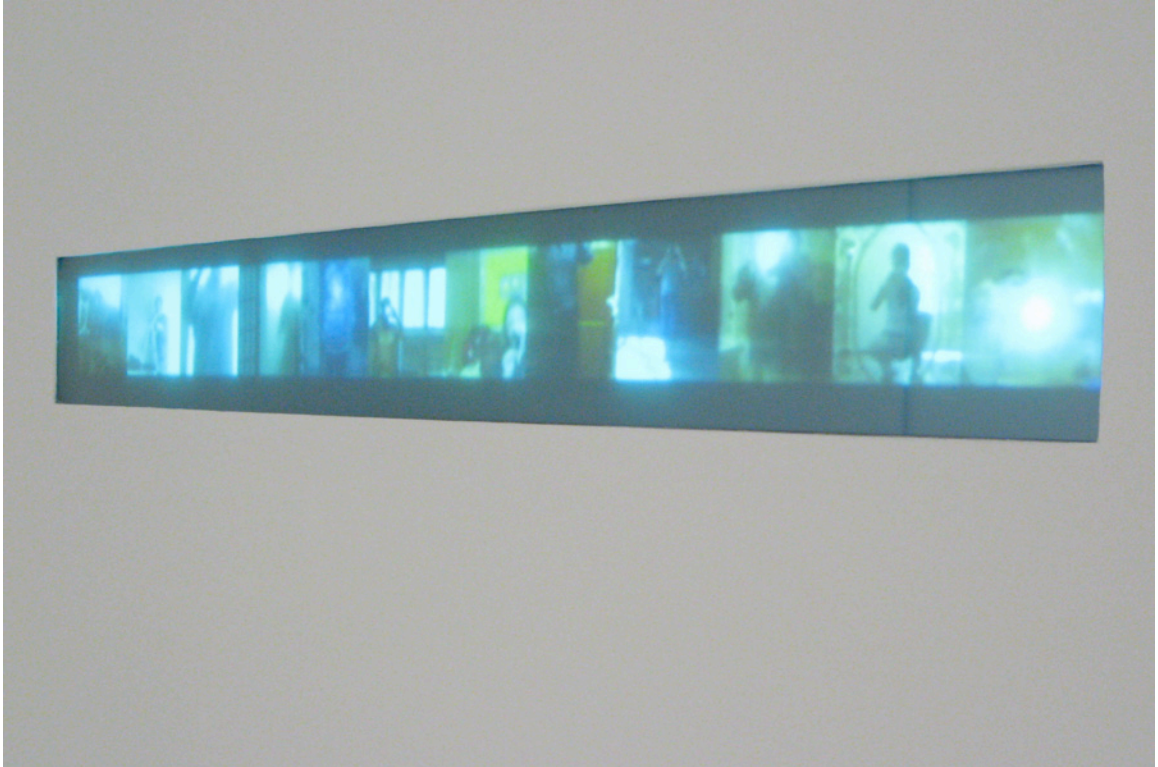


Figure 3. Detail of installation view: images projected through glass

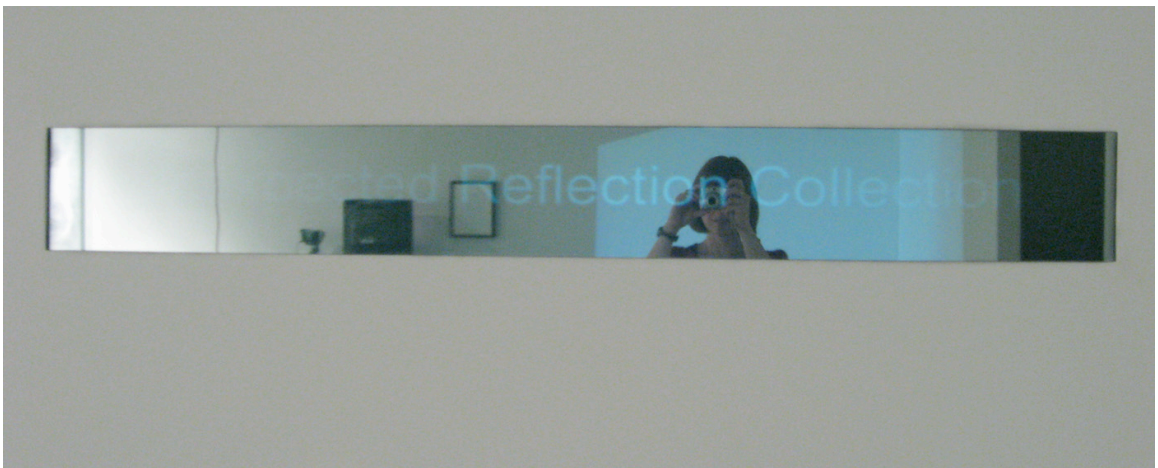


Figure 4. Detail of installation view: reflective surface



Figure 5. Photograph from a personal album on Facebook belonging to someone that I do not know



Figure 6. Sophie Calle, *Unfinished*, 2005



Figure 7. Example of Craigslist.com photographs collected for *Unexpected Reflection Collection*



ROOM 46

Monday February 16, 1981, 11 a.m. I hear a woman's laugh coming from room 46. A quarter of an hour later, the bellboy knocks on the door, brings in breakfast for two and leaves. I go up to the room to listen. She: "Oh, this is lovely." He: "But anybody can make that." She: "This is chocolate the way I like it." (He laughs throatily) My services are wanted elsewhere. When I come back ten minutes later, the subject of conversation is still the same. She: "I really don't know how they made that". 12:30 p.m. — The bellboy knocks on their door, takes the tray and leaves. She: "Oh, those Italians," and "Oh, no, don't do that! I've got problems. I succeed! You're too much!" I hear them kiss. She: "You shouldn't do that! I haven't been to the job this morning"... whereupon she shrieks: "Oh, I forgot to lock the door!" The key turns in the lock. It's 1 p.m. They're loudly making love and I go off my shift.

Tuesday 17, 11:20 a.m. I pass by room 46. I hear the woman say "I told

*you when we left"... followed by silence. By 12:40 p.m., they have gone out. I go in. The first thing to catch the eye is the mind-boggling pair of shoes, under the table, that blocks out everything else. I then find the following items scattered about the room: a carton of Camel cigarettes, a pair of Ray-Ban glasses, a Sony walkman with two sets of earphones, tapes (Bernard Lavilliers, The Doors), books: *Enfance*, *Retour à Brooklyn* by Sella, *Le complot du Caire*, by Gerard de Villiers, *La grande chasse au requin* by Thompson and three comic books: *Les Celiennes* and *Fables Venitiennes* by Hugo Pratt and *A Suivre*, Special John Lennon. A knife and sheath, a book by M.V. Stumza on aerospace medicine, notes on the same subject and stationary with the letterhead of Carcassonne's City Hall. One of them wears striped pyjamas at night, the other a black silk slip and pink leotard jacket. All the clothes are hanging in the closet. In the suitcase are two pairs of women's panties, tampons, a pair of men's briefs, a*

tube and a jar of vaseline. The bathroom is a mess.

Wednesday 18, 10 a.m. The room is empty. They have checked out. On a piece of paper in the wastebasket is the following text, scribbled in pencil: "Ghetto, Cour de Malte et de bouche dorée. Grotte del Maltese, escalier de bois, rue de l'amour, des amis. Le pont des merveilles. Sur le trottoir, vieux ghetto. Escalier fin, Tam nats d'Égypte, riziaste plus. Maisons fenêtres murtes. Cour secrète des arcades. Candelabres. Chausserie. Fiche. Arc. Vaches. Étoiles à six points. Un cercle. Jeune fille nue. Sol. Nous anges déchus: Samuël, Sataël, Anabel. Passage étroit de la nostalgie. Le pont de la nostalgie. Siraël des Hébreux, des belles idées. Chaire-souris dans niche albâtre." They have forgotten a pair of panties and socks that are dripping on the bathroom radiator. The towels are all over the place and the water is still running in the washbasin.

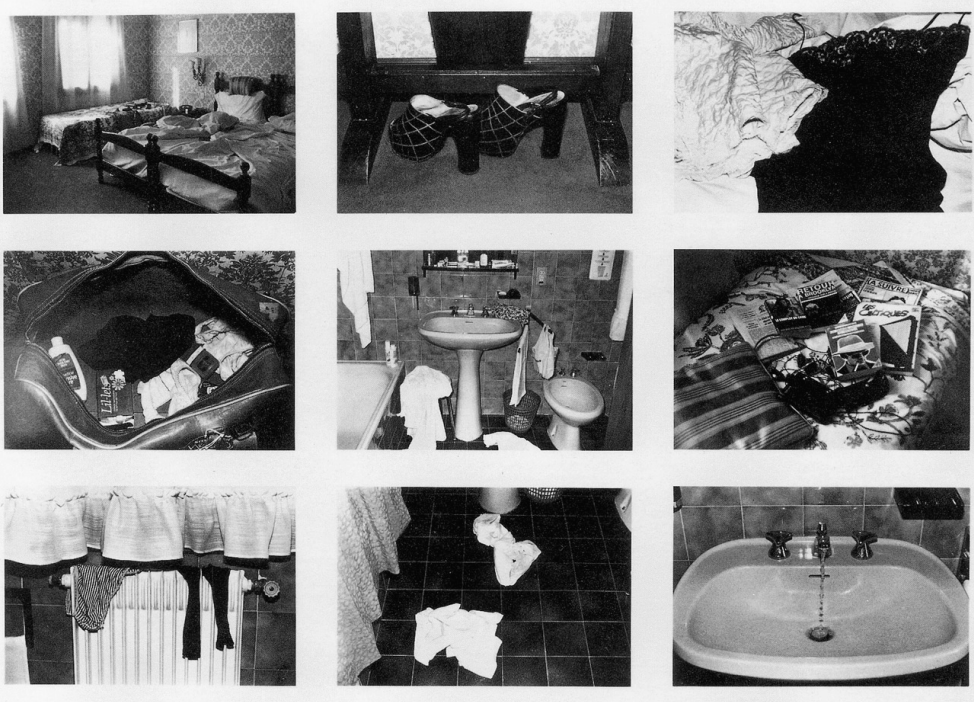


Figure 8. Sophie Calle, *The Hotel, Room 46*, English Edition, 1986

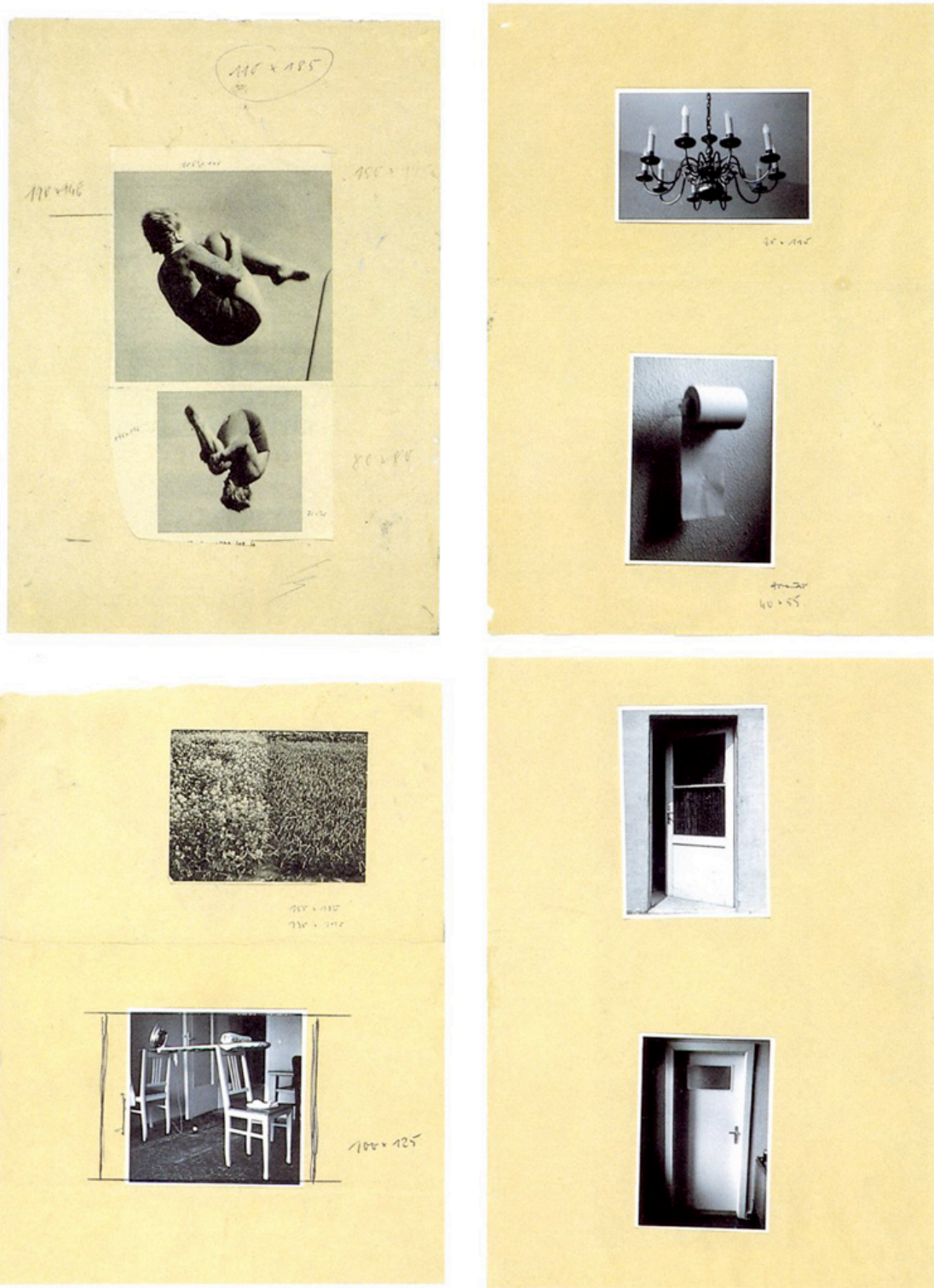


Figure 9. Gerhard Richter, Panel # 14 from *Atlas*, 1964- 67

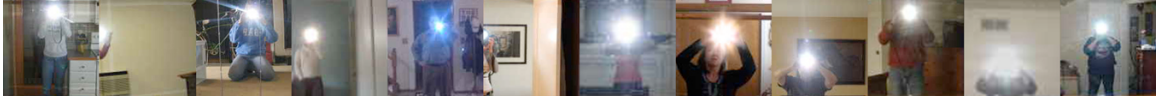


Figure 10. Detail from “People” video sequence, beginning with all flash



Figure 11. Detail from “People” video sequence, with fewer flashes



Figure 12. Examples of photographs before and after cropping



Figure 13. Detail of installation view: surface reflecting the gallery