

Every Car Feels Like Yours

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We spent so many hours together in that car it became our house. We covered miles of Eastern Seaboard, listening to entire albums on repeat, watching the land pass by through the windshield, a movie screen on wheels, eating hot meals in the front, sleeping in the back, only stopping for a tank of gas. The longest drive we made was the one from Richmond to Miami. You slept in the passenger seat nearly the entire way. It was the first time I got to drive. Sometimes, between dreams, you ventured to ask about my research but each time I spoke you'd drift back to sleep like a child lulled to rest by its mother's voice.

In 1996 the conceptual artist known for her stint as a maid in a Paris hotel, during which she photographed clients' personal belongings, took a road trip not much unlike ours. Sophie Calle was joined by director Gregory Shepard on an arduous journey across the American heartland. Leaving New York City in January, the pair drove South toward Miami until a change of heart led them West toward Las Vegas. Rarely in Calle's film do you hear the couples dialogue in real time. Rather, their innermost thoughts and opinions of one another have been taped over. In confession to the viewer, they share their most personal, intimate, opinions about each other after the fact.

Before the road trip, Calle and Shepard had been living together for over a year but in that time the relationship worsened. Calle, despite the cracks in the paint, still dreamt of marrying Shepard, leading her to suggest they get hitched in Las Vegas during the trip.

Early on, Shepard's car breaks down (despite Calle's request that he take it to the shop before leaving New York). Calle claims he treats the car better than her. "He looks at the car like his wife giving birth." Throughout the entire film, the two performed a choreography between car, motel, mechanic, restaurant, and bed. Each shot in the motel room, filmed with Calle's camera and narrated by her, takes a tally of how many nights they've gone without sex, "No sex last night." Shepard tells viewers as they drive over a bridge outside of Charleston. "I feel safe in the car, I want to stop only when we have to."

One night after dinner, Shepard makes his most poignant confession. "I wish I was more in love with her." A few nights later at 3:35 AM while searching for a motel to rest somewhere between Alabama and Texas, he admits he is jealous of Calle because he is not as real as she is. "You keep forcing her to act like your mother. Women can't save you." He wishes he could talk to her about things but is afraid of her judgment.

By the time they get to Santa Fe, Calle's shots of motel-tangled bed sheets emanate something akin to Nan Goldin's *Empty Beds, Boston* (1979). She doesn't even bother to finish the sentence, just a simple "No" tells the viewer all they need to know. As they get closer and closer to Las Vegas it begins to dawn upon Shepard that he will have to make up his mind. Calle, although hesitant at times, seems to want nothing more than to be made his wife. As they drive down the strip, a dystopian landscape through the lens of their 90s camcorder, Calle makes her final plea. Shepherd asks us, "How do I get out of this one, could be a real nightmare..." After pulling into The Mirage Hotel to discuss their future together, Shepard convinces Calle that they will be better off going their separate ways.

As the sun rises in their Vegas motel room the next day, Shepard wakes with a renewed mindset asking Calle to marry him as soon as she opens her eyes. The person the couple tells first about their pending nuptials is the mechanic at the car wash.

The couple exchanges vows at a drive-thru wedding chapel. After their drive-thru kiss, Calle suggests they spend their first night as newlyweds in the Cadillac.

Three months after their Vegas wedding, while living together in California Calle finds a black plastic bag full of letters written during their trip to another woman under the driver seat of the Cadillac. To Calle, Shepard has destroyed the memories of their journey and marriage. When she confronts him about his infidelity, Shepard fails to respond honestly. The film ends with two versions of the same story. Shepard tells us he has never tried so hard to both make a relationship

work and fail at the same time. He admits to us he has written the letters and loves another woman. He finally wants to try and tell an honest story. Calle wants a divorce.

I can't help but think back to our drive South. I can picture the 4x4s that passed up by with the license plate from neighboring states so clearly in my mind. The sun set just as we reached Jacksonville. Unlike Calle and Shepard, we didn't have it in our hearts to turn West and determine the longevity of our relationship. There was no marriage awaiting us if only we drove a few more miles. I dropped you off at your mom's house when we finally made it to Miami and retreated to my bed, sleeping until dusk the next day. When woke, you called, asking what time to come pick me up.