

Accounting for Days

LYNNE TILLMAN ON STEPHEN SHORE'S ROAD TRIP JOURNAL

NOT LONG AGO, diaries housed private thoughts and feelings too intimate or shameful to reveal. Virginia Woolf wrote in hers daily, expatiating on yesterday's parties, ideas, and dinner conversations. Some believe remembering can keep us sane, but Woolf succumbed to madness, and remarked on its approach in her diary.

Blogs are, oxymoronically, public diaries, where bloggers play with exposure, others' and their own. Some use handles for anonymity, but with fingerprints in cyberspace and with erasure near impossible, nothing's lost and everyone can be found. Billions of disclosures light up the Internet with electric abandon. While "private" and "public" have for years been theorized as permeable spaces, even illusory divisions, people once lived those separate realities. Now they have actually blurred, and privacy and secrecy are becoming quaint ideas. IDs and personal information are hacked and jacked constantly, and individuals adjust their desires, needs, and aims in sync with technology's capabilities. In this electronic revolution, as written and filmed self-reportage and confessions choke the virtual highways, voyeurism and exhibitionism are just normal.

Stephen Shore wanted his travel diary, compiled in six weeks in the summer of 1973, to be a document of documents, one without commentary. He hoped to make a collection of facts, an objective account of his time on the road. He recorded the car mileage every day and, in envelopes, kept motel bills, gas bills (12 gallons, \$5), and receipts for meals, which he pasted into his sketchbook later. He wrote down what he ate for breakfast (pancakes usually), lunch, and dinner (steak often). He took photographs and listed how many exposures he shot and of what. He distributed postcards of Amarillo, Texas, in drugstore card displays, surreptitiously marking his drive-by visits.

Shore's diary also included picture postcards of towns and buildings he visited, and of some he didn't; two news clippings; and hotel stationery. At night he watched TV and then noted the programs: *CBS Evening News*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *The Bob Newhart Show*, *Mission: Impossible*, the Watergate hearings—shows that instantly evoke the 1970s. His log, then, serves as a cultural artifact, registering more than just his American life.

Shore strove for objectivity by enumerating how he spent his time and how much money he spent. Time is money, any taxi driver can affirm, and there's only so much of each. Our expenditures, in all senses, define us, and a credit card bill can reveal as much as an intimate conversation. Shore's approach assumes this position, and, through his minimal presentation of self as receipt and menu, his diary allows its readers to compose their own portrait of him. Lacking explanations or musings about them, Shore's days are a body of ephemera, a compilation of data and bills, evidence. To reckon a character like this would have been anathema to Virginia Woolf. Shore's diary strips being to an

existential loneliness: You are what you do, where you go, and what you spend, not what you feel or think, or what you think about what you're doing.

Shore and I had a conversation a few years ago for his reissued book *Uncommon Places: The Complete Works*, which includes his seminal American road trip photographs. My first question was about Warhol's influence on his early work. At seventeen, in the mid-'60s, Shore hung around the Factory and observed Warhol working. Not only did Warhol tape, film, photograph, and silk-screen as many things as he could, he also accounted for every dollar he spent for the Factory. Shore also told me (the anecdote wasn't published) that Warhol once gave Shore's father his account books, because he wanted Mr. Shore to invest in the Velvet Underground. Shore's father noticed an odd entry: "\$10 for H for John's toothache." Mr. Shore found it very funny that Warhol noted even the cost of heroin, especially in such a transparent manner. The willed objectivity in Stephen Shore's early work takes a page from Warhol's approach.

The sheets of Shore's fourteen-by-eleven-inch sketchbook have yellowed some with age and appear brittle. Unlike a blog, which lacks materiality, his diary is a unique, tactile object. The idea of deathlessness in cyberspace can be reassuring, especially during a time of extreme transition: Wait six months, the technology will be better; but wait six months, the world will be worse. Shore's diary is not virtual, it is indexical, presenting the things themselves, which, like people, react to time. Now everything would be scanned and digitized, and it would never color, fade, or crack.

More curious than Shore's goal of an objective diary is his last entry on the last page.

AUG 11 1973
MILEAGE: 8268
BREAKFAST: GABRIELLE'S PANCAKE HOUSE,

Shore stopped after a comma. He stopped midthought. He just gave it up. Was it boredom, angst, frustration? Maybe he didn't get what he wanted from it. Maybe a list of facts didn't tell him what he wanted to find out. We can't know. But his abruptness or falling away, his refusal to follow his routine to the last, is a mystery that recasts the entire project. Shore's pasting in of "facts" becomes a poignant activity, suggesting that people can find many protective guises for their vulnerability. The wish for invulnerability can also activate the desire to make art. Explanation and reflection are often inadequate to experience, and what the young Shore doesn't want to say erupts anyway, and writes itself without words. □

A facsimile edition of Stephen Shore's travel diary will be published by Phaidon next spring, with the title A Road Trip Journal.

LYNNE TILLMAN'S FIFTH NOVEL, *AMERICAN GENIUS*, A COMEDY, WAS RECENTLY PUBLISHED BY SOFT SKULL PRESS.

JUL 03 1973

MILEAGE: 723
BREAKFAST: HOME, N.Y.C. (CEREAL)
LUNCH: WOOLWORTH'S, EASTON, PA. (TURKEY SANDWICH)
DINNER: HOLIDAY INN TOWN, HARRISBURG, PA. (ROAST BEEF)
NIGHT AT: HOLIDAY INN TOWN, HARRISBURG, PA.

TV: HAWAII FIVE-O

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PHILLIPSBURG NJ		
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SALES TAX		4.00
TOTAL \$		7.00
CUSTOMER'S SIGNATURE		Stephen Eric Shore
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TOTAL \$		7.00
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