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*Abstract*

The source-path-goal schema is one of the most fundamental schemas governing human conceptualizing with regard to sense-making (Johnson 1993, Turner 1996). Literally structuring the concept of the JOURNEY (involving a starting point, trajectory, and destination), by extension it shapes our understanding of what constitutes a PURPOSEFUL LIFE (initial problems or ambition, actions, solution or achievement) and STORY (beginning, middle, end). Hitherto, discussions of this schema have almost exclusively focused on its verbal manifestations. This paper analyses three autobiographical documentaries in which the filmmaker undertakes a journey: Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March* (1986), Johan van der Keuken's *De Grote Vakantie* [The Long Holiday] (2001), and Frank Cole's *Life Without Death* (1999). The paper's aim is double-edged: to demonstrate the necessity of studying the source-path-goal schema in multimodal, rather than just in purely verbal manifestations; and to show how the source-path-goal schema both enriches and constrains possible interpretations of the three documentaries under consideration. It is moreover claimed that, in the last resort, journey and quest levels are inevitably made subservient to the story level.

*Key words*: autobiographical journey documentary, story-telling, metaphor, identity-construction, Ross McElwee, Johan van der Keuken, Frank Cole.

## Introduction

When in everyday life people move from A to B, the pursuit of that trajectory is usually motivated by more than the simple need to move *per se*. For some reason they *want* to reach B, which thereby becomes a destination. That destination is a location and once reached the movement comes to an end. If the goal of undertaking the journey goes beyond physically reaching location B--for instance because it symbolically stands for an achievement, or because the journey to B is itself no less important than reaching B--the journey becomes a quest. Sometimes, a record of that journey-cum-quest is made, in the form of a novel, a comics album, a film, a blog. That is, journeys, especially quest-like journeys, may lead to some sort of story that is made public.

Media that allow for the representation of movement are better equipped for representing journeys than media that do not. Numerous folktales trace a hero's journey (Propp 1968), and feature films have "road movies" as a subgenre (Cohan & Rae Hark 1997). In this paper I will examine the questing journey in three documentary films, each with a voice-over narration by the filmmaker himself. While images and non-verbal sounds may suffice to convey the fact of the journey *per se*, verbal explanation plays a crucial role in conveying the idea of the quest, and in narrating that quest. The choice for first-person documentaries was here made because when the filmmaker is himself the traveler, the quester, and the narrator, he has optimal control over representing the interrelationships between the three activities. More so than in documentaries about general events--even *auteurist* ones like Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line* (USA, 1988) or Kevin MacDonald's *Touching the Void* (UK, 2003)--the first-person documentarist is at liberty to impose coherence on profilmic reality, simply because he or she is less beholden to respect other people's views on it.

The levels of journey, quest and filmic story-telling weave into one another seemingly effortlessly. This is not surprising, since underlying all three is the same basic "source-path-goal" (from now on: S-P-G) schema. In its most literal manifestation the S-P-G schema structures the concept JOURNEY: the source corresponds to the journey's beginning; the path to its trajectory; and the goal to its destination. For instance, I could say, or cinematically convey: "I traveled *by air* [PATH] from *Amsterdam* [SOURCE] to *Budapest* [GOAL]." The quest similarly draws on this schema: one can "*embark* on a soul-searching *trip*," "be *on the road to* salvation," "*come home* spiritually." And the S-P-G schema also structures the concept of STORY. One can "*begin*," "*be interrupted in*," "*come to the end of*" a story, "*be diverted during*," "*slow down*" or "*speed up*" the telling of a tale, etc. Indeed, we habitually conceptualize our aims and ambitions in life in terms of stories. As Mark Turner points out,

> narrative imagining--story--is the fundamental instrument of thought. Rational capacities depend upon it. It is our chief means of looking into the future, of predicting, of planning, and of explaining. It is a literary capacity indispensable to human cognition generally (1996, pp. 4-5).

Mark Johnson stresses another dimension of storytelling: "*any adequate theory of morality will have to explain the central role of … narratives and other imaginative structures in moral deliberation* (Johnson 1993, p. 152, emphasis in original). In short, we make sense of, explain, and justify our lives by imposing story-structures upon them. Jim Lane observes about the "reciprocity" of unfolding time and the structure of story-telling in autobiographical documentaries that

> such reciprocity appears in these documentaries where the structure of the chronological narrative, while seemingly a fiction imposed on a nonfiction

> discourse, may in fact spring from patterns of life experience. Consequently, the structures of autobiographical narratives of the journal entry approach may be similar to those of life itself (Lane 2002, p. 50).

Since our lives consist in the pursuit of goals ranging from satisfying primary needs such as those for food and shelter to those for money, fame, love and spiritual growth, we can specify this aspect of life in the concept of the QUEST.

As Johnson demonstrates, it is the shared S-P-G schema that allows for the structural metaphors A LIFE/QUEST IS A JOURNEY; A LIFE/QUEST IS A STORY; and A STORY IS A JOURNEY: "The SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema is … the basis for our sense of stories as both literal and figurative journeys" (Johnson 1993, p. 169). The S-P-G schema's centrality in turn derives from the way the human body moves: prototypically it walks forward, from one place to another, and follows a specific trajectory. Hence the S-P-G schema is an "embodied" schema. Embodied schemata are considered the quintessential material for structuring abstract concepts via metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson claim that ultimately all our reasoning about abstract concepts has its roots in the nature and functioning of our body. There is thus an overarching metaphor that can be rendered as MIND IS BODY (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, p. 37).

Another embodied metaphor is pertinent to present purposes. Physical journeys always involve motion. Motion, in turn, is used metaphorically to structure TIME, as transpires from such expressions as "Time *flies*"; "He went on holiday the *following* week"; "Thank god that that's all *behind* us now." The past is *behind* us; the present is *here*; and the future is *ahead* of us (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, chapter 9; see also Yu 1998, chapter 4). Since dominant conceptualizations of JOURNEY, STORY, QUEST, and TIME all build on the S-P-G schema, they share partly the same structure (table 1).

| | SOURCE | PATH | GOAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| JOURNEY | Starting point | Travel | Destination |
| STORY | Beginning | Middle | End |
| LIFE | Birth | Growing up | Death |
| QUEST | Problem | Search | Solution |
| TIME | Past | Present | Future |

Table 1. Corresponding dimensions of the Source-Path-Goal schema in different concepts.

Table 1 presents only a skeletal schema, which can be further elaborated. Table 2 shows some more potential correspondences. In this table the general concept LIFE is abandoned in favor of the more specific concept QUEST (by virtue of the LONG-TERM PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITIES ARE JOURNEYS metaphor, Johnson 1993, p. 167), while TIME is taken as latently present via the TIME IS SPACE metaphor:

| JOURNEY | QUEST | STORY |
|---|---|---|
| Traveler | Person | Character |
| Progressing | Approaching goal | Developing |
| Fellow-travelers | Family/friends | Helpers |
| Dangerous people | Adversaries | Antagonists |
| Meeting new people | Meeting new people | Introducing new characters |
| Change in destination | Changes in purposes | Turning points |
| Pleasant incidents | Achievements, happy events | Advancement of plot |
| Obstacles, delays | Misfortunes | Setbacks in plot |
| Means of transport | ? | ? |
| ? | ? | Medium |

Table 2. More detailed correspondences between QUEST, JOURNEY, and STORY.

Further refinements are possible. For instance, "adversaries" may comprise any impediment to the journey: blockages, features of the terrain, burdens, counterforce, lack of energy source (Johnson 1993, p. 38). Moreover, elements in one concept may, or may not, reveal correspondences with those in the other concepts. Specific contexts may yield, or create, *ad hoc* correspondences not applicable in other contexts. Simons, analyzing Dutch election commercials broadcast on television in terms of their deployment of cognitive models such as FAMILY and JOURNEY as metaphorical source domains, discusses a situation in which a Dutch socialist leader driving a car is seen crossing a bridge. Given the political circumstances of that moment, this image suggested the need for a "transition" from old to new policies, but also hinted at the "bridging role" the socialist party might play between party politics and labor unions (Simons 1995, pp. 158-167). Hence in this specific context the bridge acquires deeper meaning because of the correspondences between the JOURNEY and QUEST levels. The choice to have the socialist leader cross a bridge fits a cliché; as demonstrated by Strack (2004), bridges constitute highly meaningful structures within the metaphorical journey domain, and are amply used in literary and other texts.

The development of a "blueprint" of the autobiographical journey documentary genre can benefit from examining the interrelations of the concepts JOURNEY, QUEST, and STORY on the basis of their shared S-P-G schema. In this manner, drawing on concepts from cognitive linguistics can provide instruments that are useful for theorizing a certain type of documentary--and by extension may shed light on the road movie. Conversely, on the assumption that the S-P-G schema is one of the most important schema's governing human thinking and behavior (Lakoff and Johnson consider it as representing "our most fundamental knowledge of motion," 1999, p. 34; see also Lakoff 1993, pp. 206-208), it is necessary to study not only verbal manifestations of this schema, but also non-verbal and multimodal ones. After all, analyses of S-P-G schemas that are exclusively based on verbal manifestations (in oral stories, novels, written

manuals, text-books etc.) may ignore or fail to point up manifestations that can only be represented in pictorial or multimodal representations (see also Forceville 1996, 1999, 2005a, 2005b).

I present the following more specific theses: (1) The S-P-G schema provides coherence and constraints to interpretations of travel documentaries as a whole and to their various sequences; (2) The S-P-G schema allows for an increase of overall meaning, or of "poly-interpretability," since many elements can be interpreted in terms of more than one of the schemas JOURNEY, QUEST, and STORY; (3) the large degree of overlap between the three schemas resulting from the shared S-P-G schema should not blind us to the fact that in the last resort the STORY level dominates the others.

Three documentaries will be discussed: Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March: A Meditation on the Possibility of Romantic Love in the South During the Era of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation*, Johan van der Keuken's *De Grote Vakantie* [The Long Holiday], and Frank Cole's *Life Without Death*.

*Sherman's March* (Ross McElwee, USA, 1986).

McElwee announces in voice-over at the outset of his film both that he has been dumped by his girlfriend and that he has been given a grant to make a film about William Sherman. Sherman, a Northern general in the American Civil War, was known for his particularly cruel destruction of Southern territory, even though he also, as McElwee emphasizes, confessed to loving the region. McElwee starts out to trace Sherman's march through the South, but while indeed visiting various historic sites and monuments associated with Sherman, he in fact simultaneously makes his own quest-like journey, in search of a possible marriage partner. The film is the story of the journey and of this double-edged "quest." McElwee reinforces the similarity between himself and Sherman--and

their respective quests--in various ways. He muses, for instance, "I keep thinking that perhaps I should return to my original plan to make a film about Sherman's march, but I can't seem to stop filming Pat," and asks one of the women, "Don't you see a resemblance between me and Sherman?" At a costumed party he dresses up as Sherman. Here is how each of the three levels manifests itself in the film.

*Journey Level*. There are two parallel journeys.[1] The first journey traces historic sites connected to General Sherman; the second traces "women from the South" and portrays McElwee's meetings with them. Fitting both journeys are intermediate destinations (historic Sherman sites and women, respectively), while the idea of "conquest" (Sherman's of the South, and McElwee's of Southern "belles") constantly hovers in the background. Many shots are taken from within, and/or of, a car, a train, a boat, a plane, as well as from the body (during walking); and there is footage of the corresponding trajectories: roads, tracks, a lake, clouds, paths. Tellingly, the primary means of transport, a car, often breaks down, is without patrol, or gets stuck in the mud. Hence *literal* progress proves difficult.

*Quest Level*. The quest is the search for the possibility of romantic love. The quest aspect is rendered predominantly verbally, mostly in McElwee's own voice-overs, but also in the comments of his sister, his stepmother, and his friend Charleen, who exhort him to try harder to find a suitable partner. Moreover, each of the women he meets is on a quest of her own: embarking on a career as an actress or singer, writing a PhD, wishing to find the ideal husband, trying to be a good mormon.

*Story Level*. The film itself constitutes the story-level. The presence of the story-level, however, is not just an automatic consequence of McElwee filming the journey and quest. Viewers are constantly reminded that they are watching a mediated representation, a constructed story. In the first place, there is the sustained voice-over of McElwee, who constantly reflects on the film project,

worrying whether he should go on pursuing his woman-of-the-moment or rather visit a Sherman site. The voice-over is often audible over sounds that are synchronous with the images, and has clearly been added later, during the editing process. Moreover, on various occasions McElwee films himself in the mirror (figure 1), while in a number of scenes he talks straight to the camera. Social kisses between McElwee and the women are exchanged without him interrupting his filming, leading to odd, skewed shots. Another element that stresses the selfconsciousness of the film is that people comment on being filmed. Charleen and Karen both ask him at some stage to stop filming; his sister says she feels like a "celebrity"; and Pat, responding to McElwee's complaint that after her departure he will have nothing to film, says he will have to "go find another starlet." (Pat, the would-be film star, is the most camera-aware of McElwee's women. At one moment she performs some fitness drills in front of the camera, with distinctly erotic overtones. She calls them her "cellulite exercises," but one wonders whether there is not a cheeky pun here on her "celluloid exercises" ….) Twice the images have no synchronous sound since--or so McElwee claims in the voice-over--he had forgotten to switch it on. Finally, he often discusses the medium of film as standing between him and love, while at the same time he has, as his sister puts it, "instant rapport with people, because you have a camera." In short, McElwee continuously reminds the viewer subtly that he is telling a *story* about his journey and quests.

Figure 1. McElwee films Winnie, the linguist, but emphasizes the self-reflexivity of his story by simultaneously filming himself in the mirror (*Sherman's March*). © Ross McElwee.

The levels of JOURNEY, QUEST and STORY often interact. McElwee's brother lends him a sports car, thinking it will not only aid him in his transportation, but also improve his "image" with women--and hence help him fulfill his quest. Whenever we hear about a delay in McElwee's literal journey due to the car breaking down, we are invited to interpret this in terms of the failure of his quest for the ideal woman. Furthermore, McElwee's self-conscious reflections upon the problems he has on the QUEST-level are paralleled in his self-reflexive filming, a factor on the STORY-level. Indeed, in his voice-over, he repeatedly establishes an explicit link between his life and the film itself. After Pat's departure, for instance, he says "Both my life and my film seem to be in limbo." The same intertwining is made explicit in connection with Winnie, the linguist doing research for her PhD on a virtually uninhabited island. McElwee has a relationship with her, but when he returns after a few months, she has

dumped him for someone else, accusing McElwee of finding his film more important than her.

Figure 2. Charleen, friend and mentor, filmed by Ross McElwee while she chides him for not actively courting her friend Deedee. © Ross McElwee.

The three levels surface in unison clearly in a scene where McElwee's mentor and friend Charleen (eponymous heroine of one of McElwee's earlier documentaries) shows him around on a historic Sherman site. She berates McElwee, who never stops filming her (figure 2), for not trying hard enough to fall in love with her young friend Deedee. Here is how the scene unfolds:

CHARLEEN: "Passion is the only thing, the important thing. You must say, 'You're the only woman I've ever seen. I would die for you. I live for you, I breathe for you.' […] You got to learn to talk like that. You got to learn to feel like that."

RM: "I don't …"

CHARLEEN: [Interrupts] "How can you be a filmmaker if you never have any passion?"

RM: "I have plenty of passion, I don't even know her, I don't know anything about her."

CHARLEEN: "This doesn't matter! […] What matters is the quality of her passion. So what if you don't know her. That's not relevant!"

[Here they turn into a short dark tunnel]

RM: "Can we walk through here?"

CHARLEEN: "Yes we can walk through here!"

RM: "Where does it come out?"

CHARLEEN: "We don't know where it comes out. We just passionately gonna walk through here. We don't care where it comes out."

RM: "The place is like a tomb."

CHARLEEN: "No, it's not, it's like pubic hair …. Part the bushes, go into the plain, go with it, Ross, it is not like a film! That's the trouble with you. You don't know the difference between sex and death."

RM: "Sex and death?"

CHARLEEN: "Yes, this is life, you can't even tell it when it sits on our face, you can't tell what it is."

McElwee here literally walks through a short tunnel [JOURNEY]; the dialogue with Charleen pivots on his failure to show passion for her friend Deedee [QUEST], and she sees his preference for filming as a choice for death, as opposed to living, which she here equates with sex [QUEST + STORY].

*De Grote Vakantie* (Johan van der Keuken, The Netherlands 1999)

Upon learning he has cancer, the well-known Dutch documentary filmmaker Johan van der Keuken decides to undertake trips to various parts of the world to see whether he can find solace for his disease in the medicinal practices of other cultures, although it remains unclear how hopeful he actually is. A secondary goal may be to chronicle how different cultures deal with severe illness. In between trips he is home, where he shows the viewer a series of favorite objects collected during his life. He asks his doctor whether he will live long enough to complete the film. Again, the film is the record as well as the story of both his journeys and his quest(s) (see also Meuzelaar 2001).

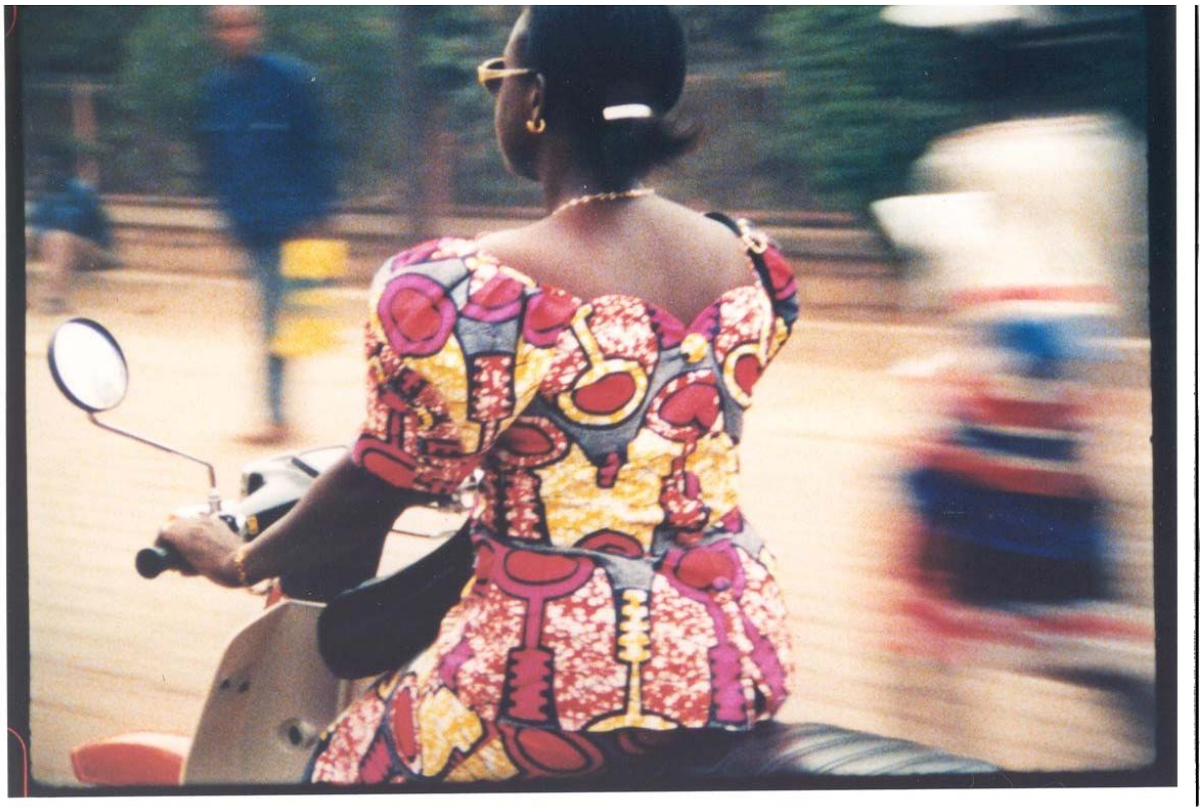

Figure 3. One of many "relocations" (here: in Burkina Faso) in Van der Keuken's *De Grote Vakantie*. © Johan van der Keuken/Pieter van Huystee Film.

*Journey Level*. The film consists of journeys to destinations such as Bhutan, Nepal/Katmandu, Mali, and America. Note that the film's title suggests that these are holiday destinations. On a more specific level, there are trips to

doctors and healers, and to film festivals. The means of transport Van der Keuken uses are highly varied. There are shots taken from within, and of, planes, cars, boats, a hang glider, and from the body (during walking); and corresponding shots of the trajectories: roads, rivers, clouds, paths. At one moment he says, "What you usually do not see in a film are the relocations"--so he will very conscientiously show his own, and other people's (figure 3), "relocations."

*Quest Level.* There are two quests: the dissemination of Van der Keuken's cinematographic and photographic *oeuvre*; and the tension between the desire to find a cure in time and the need to reconcile himself with impending death. Pertinent elements include the references to Van der Keuken's older work; discussions with doctors and healers; a portrayal of Bhutan monks meditating (figure 4; NOT REPRODUCED IN THIS VERSION!); taking stock of his life-hitherto; the depiction of a family dinner; the sequences of dear objects interspersed twice between journeys.

*Story Level*. The film is a film-cum-video-diary, a documentation of the journeys made. As with McElwee, there is a strong sense of self-consciousness in this film. Van der Keuken often talks about films and filming. For instance, he tells the audience that, on the first trip, he has taken both a film and a, much lighter, video camera, in case his health deteriorates too much to handle the film camera. Embedded visual representations abound in the film. There are black/white photographs of himself, scraps of TV programs he watches in a hotel room, plane-flight screenings, and fragments of his own films shown at festivals. Since this latter footage is filmed by Van der Keuken from among the cinema audience in the theatre, the constructedness of the filming process, with frames-within-frames, is further enhanced. Finally, the African filmmaker Razo (Rasmane) Ouadraogo telling about his own film project explicitly reinforces the theme of filmic narration.

It is probably because Van der Keuken faces a *literal* deadline that he so urgently and emphatically draws attention to the passage of time. This partly happens via his voice-overs, but also by filming mornings (roosters crowing, Bhutan monks' morning rituals) and evenings (the sun setting, twilight), sometimes at great length. In one shot of a snow-covered canal street in Amsterdam we see footsteps in the snow, indicating time has passed from it being virginal to people having walked over it. Via the metonymic link to winter, the shot suggests the deep-rooted metaphor a LIFETIME IS A YEAR (cf. Lakoff & Turner 1989, p. 28 *et passim*). Finally, the retrospectives of Van der Keuken's films at festivals connote the passage of time.

The three levels (or four, if "time" is counted separately) often interact. The intriguing opening shot of the film shows a porcelain (?) cup wiggling in another cup, a shot which recurs twice in the film. On the one hand it fits the QUEST theme in that the cups perhaps belong in the category of "dear" objects Van der Keuken collected during his life, and which are visually catalogued in two sequences in the film. On the other hand the sound made by the cups suggests the ticking of a clock, or even a heartbeat (the link to human life is further reinforced by the impression that in the scene's final close-up we no longer see the cup, but the skin of a hand), and hence the passage of time, with the added certainty that the motion will end. The cuts in the way in which this process is filmed are significant: by refusing to show the natural ending of the cups' motion, and reiterating the (filming of the) motion, Van der Keuken may be understood as denying or ignoring the impending termination of (his) life.

Van der Keuken's voice-over regularly fuses the levels explicitly. At one moment he describes his journeys to far-away countries inhabited by man, "who, desperately trying to survive the reefs [JOURNEY/QUEST], lives with the aid of beautiful stories with which he fools himself [(SELF-REFLEXIVE) STORIES] to console himself in the face of nothingness [QUEST]." But the fusion is not only achieved verbally. In one sequence, Van der Keuken struggles up a mountain

along a steep path, aiming the camera at his feet to emphasize he is walking. If we accept Lakoff and Johnson's claim that GOOD, HAVING CONTROL, HEALTH, and LIFE are all UP (1980, chapter 4), it is no coincidence that he walks wishfully *up*, rather than *down*. The panoramic view from the top is a reward for which Van der Keuken had to exert himself considerably--as transpires from the clearly audible heavy breathing. By virtue of its rhythm, this breathing could remind us in turn of the rhythm of the cups. And since apparently the light, handheld video camera is used, the sequence recalls Van der Keuken's fear that he will soon no longer be able to handle the heavier film camera.

Later, in San Francisco, Van der Keuken says, "I must keep filming. If I can make no image, I am dead." He resumes this theme when he is in a Brazilian disco, where there is insufficient light to film, saying, "If I can make an image, I live. But I am dead, for there is no light." When at the end of the film the image turns darker and darker until it is black, accompanied by a similarly fading musical score, we can see this as a way to end STORY, JOURNEY, and QUEST (to make the film and come to terms, at least artistically, with dying).

*Life Without Death* (Frank Cole, Canada, 1999)

*Life Without Death* is an unnerving documentary by a man who decides to cross the Sahara. After four years of thorough preparation, he sets out.

*Journey Level.* Cole's journey is of an astonishingly clear-cut nature. He will cross the Sahara on his own, from East to West, by camel, which will take him about a year.

*Quest Level.* Cole's reasons for undertaking the dangerous journey never become completely transparent, but they are triggered by his grandfather's death. In the beginning, lingering over a casket with his grandfather's ashes, Cole states, "I loved my grandfather …. I'd have faced death for him, if it meant

he could live." During the preparation phase he declares in lip-sync and looking into the camera that "I strove to make myself a person the Sahara could not kill. A person whose outcome is life, not death." Toward the end of the film Cole's voice-over comments, "My grandfather's death changed me," and then Cole says, again in lip-sync and addressing the camera, "It made me want to face death myself. … I wanted to beat death."

Gradually, the self-imposed "rules" of his quest transpire: He is to face intense loneliness without being crushed by it. He is deliberately to risk getting lost and dying of thirst, heat, or at the hands of desert bandits, but he is to survive. He is to seek out terrifying situations, but not succumb to fear. As he remarks, when facing a choice of route, "For once, the outside Sahara route is more hazardous than the Sahara route. I must take it, on principle."

*Story Level.* There are some fleeting and subtle references to the story-telling dimension of Cole's enterprise. He mentions the three cameras he has taken with him, and declares that "time's already my enemy. Filming myself is painfully slow. I lose days to filming, working against heat and sand." Only upon reflection we realize that whenever Cole is on his own, it takes careful planning on his part to film himself riding the camel, as happens a number of times. Moreover, after such a shot is taken, he obviously needs to descend from his camel to pick up the camera again. Other hints of the constructedness of the narration are some freeze-frames, and a few emphatic looks into the camera by Cole. In addition, we may register that the sounds audible during the journey itself must have been inserted in post-production. (Indeed, Cole declared on an earlier occasion, "I use no sync sound in the desert," Cole 1984, p. 17.) Moreover, an exotic, ominous musical soundtrack has been added. There are other elements that put the story-level into relief: the journey is punctuated with black-and-white flashbacks to Cole's grandfather, and beginning and end of the film are connected by the fact that the same shots of the dying grandfather in a hospital bed have been inserted there. Moreover the only two lip-sync to-camera

declarations by Cole bracketing the film are very probably filmed at the same moment, as can be deduced from the fact that Cole wears the same clothes and from the framing of the shot. Finally, the shot in which we see Cole crying, lip-sync, after the death of his grandfather at the beginning of the film, is repeated at the end--but with a difference: it is now in black-and-white and there is no sound. Given that black-and-white are consistently used for flash-backs, and are hence associated with the past, the message might be that Cole has left mourning, like the desert, behind him. Thus, *Life Without Death*, too, contains signals of its narrative constructedness.

Even more so than in McElwee's and Van der Keuken's films, Cole's journey *coincides* with the quest, since fulfilling the quest (a mourning process? a pilgrimage? a self-punishment? a tribute? all of these?) is synonymous with surviving the journey. While McElwee and Van der Keuken usually do not need to worry about their paths *per se*, since these are more or less carved out for them in the forms of roads, rivers, or airline trajectories, finding (or not losing) his way for Cole is a matter of life and death. Hence the many shots of the way ahead, filmed from being seated on a camel, the latter's head in the frame. Car tracks or camel paths in the sand acquire great importance, since they suggest directions in a landscape that has very few landmarks. Maps play a prominent role in this film. The journey's progress is shown on animated maps, and there are constant references to the maps Cole has with him--crucial to his survival.

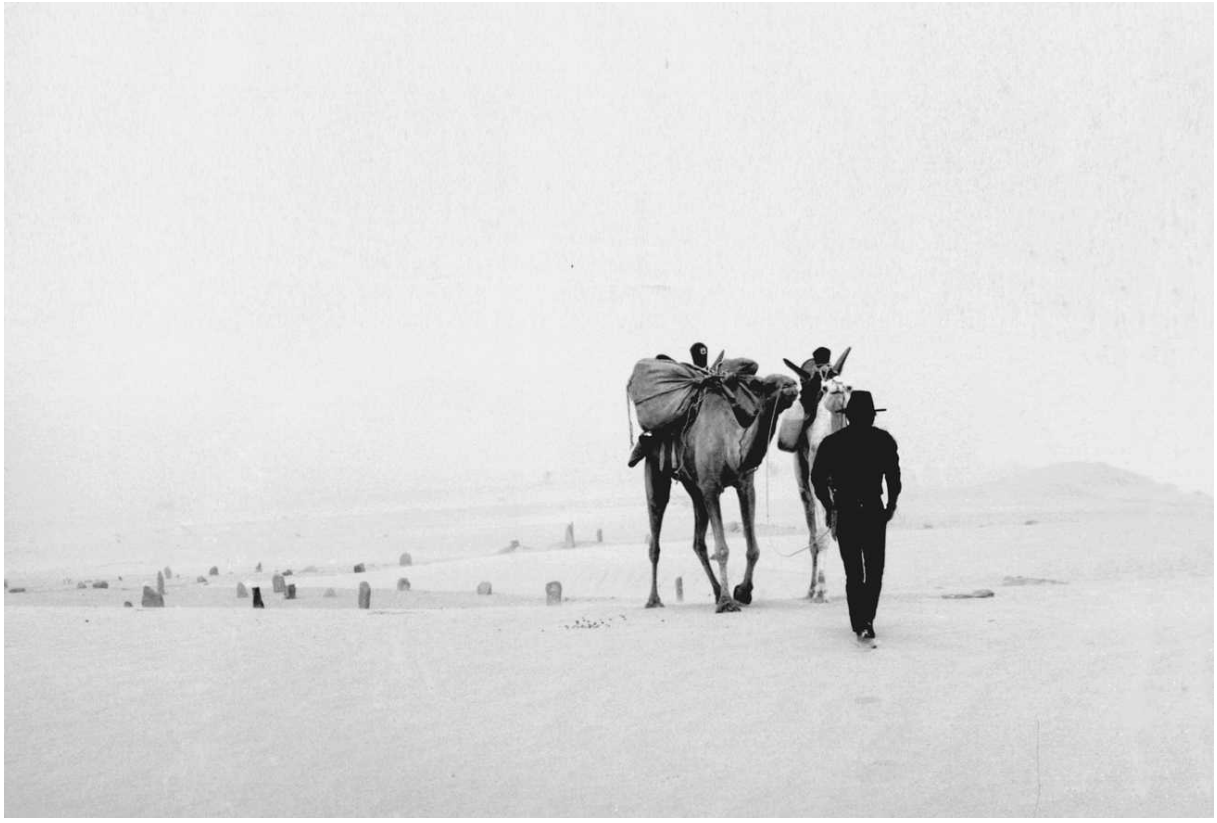

Figure 5. Frank Cole with camels in the desert. There is a hint of "tombstones" in the background. Publicity photo for *Life without Death*. © Frank Cole/Necessary Illusions Productions.

The JOURNEY is punctuated with numerous symbols of death Cole comes across along his way: animal skeletons, skulls, bones, carcasses, barren trees, dried-out ground, hints of tombstones (figure 5). In addition, there are many allusions to lethal dangers: wild animals, venomous snakes, the supposed violence of the Chad police, roving bandits, tribal wars, the heat of the sun, the absence of water, collapsing camels, pure exhaustion (figure 6) …. But these literal encounters with death or threats of death echo on the level of the QUEST, which somehow pertains to making amends for his grandfather's demise. And of course these sustained references, reinforced by the intermittent flashback shots of the ageing, dying, and dead grandfather, and the shots of the phial containing a sample of the grandfather's ashes that Cole has brought along with him, also create aesthetic coherence on the STORY level. Moreover, the shots of the

animated map showing each leg of the envisaged journey become "chapter titles," imposing order and rhythm on an otherwise highly monotonous journey. They also function as signals of Cole's progress: the title card "Red Sea-Sudan" and the accompanying map indicate that this is the last part of the journey and thus intimate to the viewer that the film story is drawing to a close.

Figure 6. Frank Cole, tired and bandaged in the desert. The non-linear footstep tracks suggest the idea of getting lost. Publicity photo for *Life without Death*.© Frank Cole/Necessary Illusions Productions.

## Concluding Remarks: STORY Rules

Let me consider once more the role of the story-level. At first sight, what appears to be the crucial element is the quest: tracing Sherman's march and/or finding a prospective bride for McElwee; searching for a medicine against cancer somewhere in the world and/or discovering how other cultures come to terms with mortality for Van der Keuken; and doing penance for his grandfather's death for Cole. The story, it might seem, does no more than

impose narrative form on a quest in journey format. But in fact, this would be a severe underestimation of the story level.

Most importantly, it is really on the story level that some sort of interesting unity is achieved. The completion of the journeys is no great feat in McElwee's Van der Keuken's case, while Cole's journey, while spectacular, is not in itself enough to sustain viewers' interest during the entire film. There is no unity on the quest level since, arguably, none of the three filmmakers really succeeds in his quest. McElwee is nowhere close to finding a wife at the end of the film (the Sherman project having faded away anyway). Van der Keuken has not found the life-saving medicine and appears to consider his imminent death a serious possibility. And we can hardly conclude that Cole has managed to expiate his grandfather's demise--let alone that he has conquered death. What is to keep audiences interested, then, is the expectation of "narrative integrity." As all narratees, audiences of documentary films hope for "*narrative integrity* … in the stories people tell about their lives and, ultimately, in their identities" (Freeman & Brockmeier 2001, p. 76, italics in original). Since lives do not inherently have such integrity, it must largely be created (ibidem, p. 80) in the narration. Such integrity is partly achieved by a heavy selection of "appropriate" events to be included in the story, and by a correspondingly salient presentation of these events. Moreover, it is to a considerable extent imposed with the wisdom of hindsight. As Freeman & Brockmeier emphasize, "the narrator of an autobiography … always knows the outcome of his or her story. We see this in operation in the simple but extremely important fact that autobiographical narratives often confer meaning on events that they did not and indeed could not possess at the time of their occurrence" (ibidem, p. 82). In another paper Brockmeier specifies:

> … one's life, once shaped and sequentially ordered as a narrative event, appears as a kind of development towards a certain goal--as if the end (that

> is, the present of the narrative event) were the destination of one's journey, an objective which from the very beginning had to be reached like Odysseus' Ithaca. Just as the here and now of the narrative event follows the narrated events of the past, the (temporary) end of the narrated life tends to appear as the *telos* of one's life history--as if a sequential order in time becomes a causal or teleological order of events (Brockmeier 2001, pp. 251-52).

Brockmeier thus points out that a life story's *telos*--which is none other than the "goal" in the S-P-G schema--is largely formulated *post hoc*. It is the imposition of this "retrospective teleology" (Brockmeier 2001, p. 252) that both constrains and enriches interpretations of the three documentaries by McElwee, Van der Keuken, and Cole. It constrains them in that the viewer is invited to fit every element--be it pictorial, sonic, or verbal--in its mold. The viewer is to understand as many elements as possible as (aesthetic) "motifs" manifesting the S-P-G schema--most of which were inserted in the films by their makers for this very purpose. This means, for instance, that when we see the footsteps in the snow in Van der Keuken's film, we are more prone to thinking of the conceptual metaphor DEATH IS WINTER (by virtue of A LIFETIME IS A YEAR, Lakoff and Turner 1989, p. 18) than of a merry Christmas or the opportunity to make a snowman. And when we see a close-up of a single plastic slipper in the sand in *Life Without Death*, incompleteness or loss is a more likely association occurring to the discerning spectator than the problem of desert pollution, or the blessings of cheap mass-produced footwear. Similarly, we cannot but see McElwee's women primarily as his potential marriage partners, not as, say, females of a certain age, or daughters. And because of the three-tiered S-P-G structure of journey, quest, and story, elements in each of them may reverberate on the other levels, resulting in rich, multi-layered representations, thus adding to narrative integrity.

While narrative integrity is thus partly achieved by the editing together of significant motifs fitting the S-P-G schema, the directors' use of language in all three documentaries is essential. Guiding the viewer to the presumably intended meanings after all is enormously facilitated by language (Barthes' 1986/1961 classic essay on the anchoring and relaying functions of language vis-à-vis visuals, although requiring some modification (see Forceville 1996, pp. 71-74) remains highly pertinent). In this respect, we should note the difference between on the one hand monologues and dialogues that are synchronous with the filming, and on the other hand the makers' carefully scripted and performed voice-over texts added later in the editing room. Van der Keuken's and Cole's voice are less often audible diegetically than McElwee's, who regularly addresses the people he shoots and includes several to-camera addresses by himself in the final film. Inasmuch as these shot-on-location sequences fit McElwee's "narrative integrity," one could argue that McElwee, perhaps more than the others, already had a clear idea of how he would eventually impose "retrospective teleology" on his footage during the filming itself. However this may be, there is no doubt that in all three cases the voice-over text and its mode of delivery play a major part in the process of construing narrative integrity. In conjunction with recurring visual and aural motifs, it is the filmmakers' spoken texts, with their distinctive poetic (McElwee and Van der Keuken) or excessively sober (Cole) styles that turns their quests into the plots of stories.

It is also the scripted spoken language (both diegetic and non-diegetic) that most strongly enhances the three men's transformation process of visually represented selves into "characters," fictionalized (or "narrated") varieties of themselves. Consider again the fragment of dialogue from *Sherman's March* discussed above. It is impossible to determine how spontaneous and sincere McElwee is in his responses to Charleen. But one thing is clear: if McElwee would seriously have started courting Deedee, this would have jeopardized his story--and this holds throughout his film. For instance, McElwee must have

foreseen that his decision to prolong his stay away from Winnie, the linguist on her island, would in effect terminate their relationship. Whereas Winnie's defection may have pained McElwee-the-quester, it was crucially necessary for McElwee-the-story-teller. He admits as much when questioned, in an interview, about an embarrassing scene with one of the other women:

> If I were *really* serious, would I be filming her? If I really wanted her to love me, would I not have put the camera down, and convinced her of my seriousness in doing that? Part of it is knowing that it's a lost cause, so I may as well make a good film out of it. And I think the viewer is aware of this (Lucia 1993, p. 34).

Elsewhere, McElwee puts it even more pointedly: "I'm creating a persona for the film that's based upon who I am, but it isn't exactly me" (MacDonald 1988, p. 23, quoted in Fischer 1997, p. 342).

In Van der Keuken's case, it is more difficult to determine to what extent the search for a possible cure for cancer is that of a desperate patient and to what extent that of the clear-headed documentary scenarist. That he is aware of a discrepancy between the two is suggested when, in an interview with Marjo van Soest, he intimates what he felt after setting up the camera to film himself while lying under a scanner for a medical check-up:

> I thought, did I switch it on properly? The nurse said: "please take a deep breath," and I answered, "could you please check if the red light flashes?" I caught myself thinking: otherwise I am lying here for nothing. It's not yourself anymore, it is an image of yourself (Van der Keuken 2001, p. 105).

Since interviews with Cole and other sources on him are scarce, the degree to which Cole has "fictionalized" himself remains largely a matter for

speculation. His journey meant a voluntary submission to the risk of dying, and it may be impossible to distinguish between the bereaved grandson and the filmmaker who wants to come home with a sensational (?) documentary. The fact that during a later journey in the Sahara Cole was actually killed by bandits may tip the balance in favor of the former view.

Whatever the three men's precise motives, the opportunity of telling their filmed stories, and the necessity to impose narrative structure on their respective crises, gave them an indispensable distance to their private plights, resulting in a degree of control over their lives. Simultaneously, the promise of such narrative integrity is a *conditio sine qua non* for persuading an audience to come and see their films. After all, the aesthetically pleasing dimension of narrative integrity ("everything fits") protects the spectator against unsuitably embarrassing confrontations with the messy crises of the makers' private lives--however tragic these may be on a personal level. Thus, being able to "storify" themselves from individuals into characters may for the filmmakers have been an important motivation to embark on their questing journeys in the first place as well as a necessary precondition for sharing this quest with an audience.

In the last resort, then, for all three filmmakers the journeys and the "quests," in a manner not very different from the Hitchcockian MacGuffin, give way to that other quest: to make a film--and thereby to story-telling. This view would fit the intriguing claim by the philosopher John Elster, that

> some mental and social states appear to have the property that they can only come about as the by-products of actions undertaken for other ends. They can never, that is, be brought about intelligently or intentionally, because the very attempt to do so precludes the state one is trying to bring about (1983, p. 43).

Translated to the present context: if the three directors had deliberately and openly set out to tell intelligent, moving stories with optimal narrative coherence about their respective crises, they would have failed to affect their audiences, for they would have been open to the accusation of glaring artifice; but by doing something else--undertake a journey, go on a quest--they have as "by-product" created the artistic stories they could never have achieved if that had been their prime goal. Or, as Elster puts it, "You can cheat death, like insomnia, by ignoring it--on the condition that cheating is not the ulterior motive" (1983, p. 51). McElwee, Van der Keuken, and Cole can be said to have turned their journeys, and even their quests--however serious--into ruses that are both inevitable and dispensable to do what artists have always done: to seek and provide consolation for the imperfection and shortness of life by turning it into an aesthetic artefact: "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (Shakespeare, sonnet 18).

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NOTE

[1] I owe to an anonymous reviewer the observation that, in fact, there is a third journey: that of McElwee, the Southerner-turned-Northerner, returning to the South: "he is an outsider observing them, rather than a Southern man courting local women. His anxiety about whether he still fits in at 'home' (i.e. whether or not he is a 'carpetbagger') colors the story." I will not here go into detail concerning this "third" journey (anticipated in McElwee's earlier *Backyard*, 1976/1984, and recurring throughout his oeuvre) but I thank the reviewer for pointing it out.

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