

From Tourist to Traveller:

Discourses of Authenticity and Self-Transformation in Television Travel Genres

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Introduction

Tourism and travel programmes, in the form of direct advertorials, travel and adventure shows, and reality television series set in exotic locations, now constitute a significant set of media forms, genres and sub-genres. This is clearly in line with recent and contemporary increases in the number of people travelling, facilitated by sophisticated transportation infrastructure, inexpensive airfares and an increased exposure, through the media, of what is on offer to the tourist/traveller. Considerable study has been done on the field of travel and tourism in order to ascertain what motivates people to travel; the nature of the interaction between the visitor and the visited; and how cultures are impacted by the introduction of tourism in the area. However, it is curious that, given its abundance and popularity, there is a noticeable absence of academic literature on television travel programmes and genres.

Travel programmes give viewers a window onto travel destinations both within their own countries and, more commonly, around the world. Within the genre of travel programmes, there exists a wide variety of types and sub-genres, usually with an emphasis on tourism, adventure, and culture and heritage. Those differences aside, most travel programmes inform viewers (that is, either potential travellers or so-called 'armchair travellers') about what is available to see and do in, and generally what to expect from, a place, its people and its culture. Travel programmes act as advertisements for both destinations and the act of travelling itself.

Three travel programmes will be analysed in this thesis: *Sahara with Michael Palin*, *Long Way Down*, and *Intrepid Journeys*. *Sahara with Michael Palin* is a BBC television series which documents the 98-day journey undertaken by Michael Palin (a British comedian and television personality) across the Sahara Desert through Northern and Western Africa. *Long Way*

Down is a documentation of the 95-day motorbike journey of actors Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman, travelling south through 18 countries from John o' Groats in Scotland to Cape Agulhas in South Africa, in 2007. Lastly, *Intrepid Journeys* is a New Zealand television series based on travel undertaken by a number of New Zealand celebrities to various travel destinations around the world. The series is screened in New Zealand on TV One and its first episode was aired in 2003. All three of these programmes appear to steer away from the informational or advertorial sub-genre of travel programming (that is, those which explicitly sell or promote a touristic destination or tourism packages). Instead, they claim to highlight the *experience* of travel. Moreover they all share the same geographical location – Africa – which provides an additional continuity and point of comparison.

This thesis will frame, contextualise and analyse those programmes, and this work will be carried out over four main chapters. Chapter One provides a scholarly and theoretical background whereby key academic concepts and issues, and relevant methodological apparatuses, are identified, described and contextualised. Chapter Two examines *Sahara with Michael Palin*, concentrating on the discursive tradition of travel that the programme refers to and models itself on, as well as the various roles taken on by Michael Palin as host. Chapter Three looks at *Long Way Down*, particularly in terms of its focus both on adventure, and by way of extension the performative and presentation styles of its celebrity hosts, Ewan McGregor and Charlie Boorman. Finally, Chapter Four looks at *Intrepid Journeys*, a programme which differs significantly from both *Sahara with Michael Palin* and *Long Way Down*, largely in terms of its New Zealand focus, its range of celebrity hosts, and its advertorial inflection. Despite these different points of emphasis, all three chapters share two main functions or tasks. First they examine how each programme reproduces, commits to, embodies and performs the values, imperatives, narratives and discourses of travel. Second they attempt to contextualise, situate and make sense of the cultural work performed in each programme within the wider frame of the contemporary cultural field of the media.

Chapter One:

Theoretical Background

Travel and Tourism

In *Time and Commodity Culture*, John Frow discusses three discourses that are used to describe, analyse and explicate the field and activities of tourism. The first, according to Frow, is based on “the criticism of tourism as inauthentic activity” (69), where the term ‘tourist’ is “increasingly used as a derisive label for someone who seems content with his obviously inauthentic experience” (MacCannell 94). Within this discourse, the tourist is placed in contrast to the “heroic figure of the traveller and accused of a lack of interest in the culturally authentic” (Frow, “Time and Commodity Culture” 69). Resonances of the scathing denigration of tourists can be found in Paul Fussell’s *Abroad: From Exploration to Travel to Tourism* and Daniel Boorstin’s *The Image: Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. Fussell writes about the loss of the adventurous, inquisitive traveller, claiming that through time, brave explorers have evolved into travellers, who, in turn, have become tourists (41). He writes that “before the development of tourism, travel conceived to be like a study... its fruits were considered to be the adornment of the mind and formation of the judgement” (Fussell 39). This sentiment is echoed by Boorstin in his argument on “the decline of the traveller and the rise of the tourist” (84). Referring specifically to Americans, Boorstin claims that the travel experience has been transformed. He acknowledges that a lot of people travel, yet “few are travellers in the old sense of the world” (Boorstin 79). Boorstin contrasts the ‘active’ traveller, at work in search of adventures and new experiences, with the passive, pleasure-seeking tourist who “expects interesting things to happen to him” (85).

Travel, for Boorstin, has become “diluted, contrived and prefabricated” (79). In fact Boorstin goes as far as stating that the tourist “seldom likes the

authentic... product of foreign cultures”, claiming instead that they travel to look for caricatures; iconic objects, monuments or moments that confirm and satisfies their own expectations (106). Boorstin further criticises the tourist’s demand for what he terms ‘pseudo-events’ which, applied to tourism, can be understood as the “bland and unsurprising reproductions of what the image-flooded tourist knew was there all the time” (109). The tourist’s apparent curiosity and appetite for strangeness and difference, according to Boorstin, “seems best satisfied when the pictures in his own mind are verified in some far country” (109). For Fussell and Boorstin, travel and the traveller are positioned in the past, and both have been lost in the advent of contemporary tourism.

Frow dismisses the first order of discourse as being the “least interesting” (“Time and Commodity Culture” 69) out of the three. In addition, MacCannell argues:

the modern critique of tourists is not an analytical reflection on the problem of tourism—it is part of the problem. Tourists are not criticized by Boorstin and others for leaving home to see sights. They are reproached for being satisfied with superficial experiences of other peoples and other places (10).

Referring to Culler, Frow declares that “it is possible to read the opposition of tourist to traveller outside of this cultural imaginary...the figure of the traveller...is not alien to the tourism industry but functional to it, both as a precursor...and as exemplar” (“Time and Commodity Culture” 69). The dichotomy between travel and tourism constitutes the basis of both cultural capital and commodity, something which can be drawn on by traveller (or tourist) to construct a certain identity of what kind of traveller (or tourist) one is. In fact, Culler asserts that “this repetition and displacement of the opposition between tourist and traveller suggest that these are not so much two historical categories as the terms of an opposition integral to tourism” (n. pag.). Even if the criticising of tourists and tourism bears no weight, Frow suggests that this dichotomy itself could be, and in fact *is*, productive, “in that they carry a desire and self-contempt which drive the industry at the most fundamental level” (Frow, “Time and Commodity Culture” 69).

Problematizing 'Authenticity'

The second order of discourse, as discussed by Frow, refers to tourism as *the quest for*, as opposed to *a turn from*, authentic experience ("Time and Commodity Culture" 70). This particular way of looking into tourism is closely associated with the work of Dean MacCannell, who asserts that "touristic consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experiences" (101). Drawing on Erving Goffman's theory on the division of 'stages' or 'regions', MacCannell writes on "a touristic desire to share in the real life of the places visited, or at least to see that life as it is really lived"; or, "to get off the beaten path" and "in with the natives" (96-7). Goffman suggests that any social establishment consists of a front region and a back region, the front being what is made available to the public eye, it is in a sense a performance; whereas the back region is a sort of operating room, where dishes are cooked, dances are rehearsed and artefacts are polished (69). In short, MacCannell claims that the division of front and back regions of social structures is built on the perceived status of truth and intimacy, where being allowed to see 'behind the scenes' means "to perceive and accept the others for *what they really are*" (94, emphasis added). He concludes that the touristic experience is circumscribed and motivated by this desire to see life *as it is really lived* (MacCannell 94).

This division of front and back regions is based on the distinction between what MacCannell terms as "false fronts" and "intimate reality" (95), where what is seen at the front is dismissed as a mere performance, something constructed and polished, designed and put together especially to be shown to an audience (95). However, MacCannell questions the solidity of this distinction, noting that Goffman has pointed out that the two regions sometimes blend into one another (95). Based on the proliferation of "touristic spaces" (MacCannell 100), MacCannell writes of tourists partaking in guided tours that provide them with access to areas which would ordinarily be out of bounds for outsiders. These tours are characterised by social organisations which are designed to reveal the inner workings of a

social place, and where outsiders, under the tourist label, are allowed further in (or further *back*) than other regular patrons (MacCannell 98). However, MacCannell points out that there is a staged or superficial quality to the proceedings, even if it is not always perceived or recognised by the tourist. This results in what he terms as “an almost authentic experience”, where the back stage is merely a “staged back region” (MacCannell 99). MacCannell suggests that staged back regions are not mere copies or replicas of real life situations; rather, they are copies presented as disclosing more about the real thing than they actually do, presented as a truthful revelation of the back stage when they are anything but (101). Given the tourist’s desire for the authentic experience, MacCannell laments the fact that what is taken to be an entry to the back region is actually an entry to a front region set up for touristic visitation, thus wrongfully leading the tourist to believe that they are moving in the direction of the authentic and the real (101). This staged authenticity, MacCannell argues, is “more insidious and dangerous than false fronts”, as it creates touristic experiences which are not only a lie, but a “superlie” (101-3) which presents itself as truthful revelations.

While this discourse “seeks to value tourism positively”, it problematises the notion of the ‘authentic’ which, within the first discourse, is never discussed or interrogated (Frow, “Time and Commodity Culture” 70). This leads us to Frow’s third order of discourse. Within this discourse, the paradox found in the second order of discourse, namely in relation to the notion of authenticity and how it is measured, is brought up. First of all, Frow asks how the Other can be understood without being reduced to one’s own terms; that is, appropriated (and therefore made decipherable) and judged within the subject’s own regimes of value (“Time and Commodity Culture” 73). Secondly, Frow raises a semiotic problem: “a problem of the constitutive role of the representation for the object” (“Time and Commodity Culture” 73) or the (touristic) sight. For something to be deemed authentic, it needs to be marked and *classified* as such (Frow, “Time and Commodity Culture” 73). However, both Frow and Culler agree that “the paradox, the dilemma of authenticity, is that...when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of

itself and hence not authentic in the sense of unspoiled” (Culler n. pag.). Moreover, in order to be perceived as authentic and genuine, the Other is required to retain, or at the very least perform, an absence of “interested self-awareness” (Frow “Time and Commodity Culture” 72); to be outside of modernity and, by extension, commodity relations. However, a paradox can be found in the fact that the Other is only accessible through commodity relations (Frow “Time and Commodity Culture” 72).

Authenticity, Modernity and Commoditisation

Frow asserts that the primary function of the tourism industry is to sell a product or a commodity to consumers (that is, the tourist), where the product is a *commodified* relationship to the Other (“Time and Commodity Culture” 99-100). It is important to note, however, that the Other has to be (or at least, *appear* to be) someone who exists outside of commodity relations, exchange values and the realm of modernity (Frow “Time and Commodity Culture” 72). As I have established earlier this chapter, the authentic within the discourse of travel and tourism equates to the untouched, pristine and pure, something in the form of “romantic primitivism” (Fussell 38), in the midst of industrialisation and urbanisation of the modern. As Frow argues:

the otherness of traditional or exotic cultures has to do with their having escaped the contamination of this fallen world: having escaped the condition of *information* (in Benjamin’s sense), being unaware of their own relativity, avoiding absorption into the embrace of touristic self-consciousness (“Time and Commodity Culture” 72).

The sentimentalising of the notion of the primitive as something pure, and differentiated from and prior to the corruption of modernity, constitute the attraction of tourism, especially cultural tourism; Ryan claims, for instance, that current tourism products are heavily oriented towards a representation of indigenous culture as being in the past, unchanged and timeless (8). This timeless past is placed against a modernised, more contemporary or

urbanised version of indigenous or Other cultures, with the former usually regarded as authentic and real while the latter are inauthentic and even bastardised (Ryan 8). In this regard, the so-called authentic (indigenous) cultures are cultures in vacuum, exempt from modern developments and outside the realm of modern inter-cultural interaction, depended upon to perform and offer a more 'real' authentic culture.

MacCannell develops this point that the tourist's pursuit of authenticity is closely related to modernity and modernisation. Citing Lévi-Strauss, MacCannell refers to modernity as "disorganized fragments, alienating, wasteful, violent, superficial, unplanned, unstable and inauthentic" (2). In fact, Frow writes that for MacCannell, "modernity is equivalent to a process of structural differentiation, and what has been lost in this process is the structural solidarity characteristic of traditional societies" ("Time and Commodity Culture" 71). In this sense, modernity has led to the demise of the real and authentic; it has taken away true, genuine, instinctive, and sincere human existence and connections. For "the moderns" (MacCannell 3), MacCannell states, "reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles" (3). Frow observes that MacCannell's work

thus elaborates something like Baudrillard's theory of a historical regime of simulation in which the difference between original and copy falls away, and indeed where the very existence of an 'original' is a function of the 'copy'. At the same time, MacCannell retains a commitment to the categories of the authentic and the real, which, as in Baudrillard's work, are postulated historically (and nostalgically) as lost domains of experience or referentiality ("Time and Commodity Culture" 70-1).

Authenticity also plays a role in determining an object's worth in the market, making them even more valuable, and therefore more desirable. Arjun Appadurai writes that commodities "can provisionally be defined as objects of economic value" (3), and, citing Simmel, he argues that value "is never an inherent property of objects"; rather, it is "a judgement made about

them by subjects” (3). Based on this argument exclusively, value can then be reduced to mere subjective judgements of certain groups or individuals. Within the logic of tourism, however, *difference* (between the ordinary and extraordinary, between the everyday and mundane and the exotic) is the driving force behind what motivates people to partake in the act of travel; and it is also difference (between commercialised, inauthentic tourism and adventurous, authentic travel) which constitutes the basis of both people’s claims to cultural capital and the value of tourism as a commodity. Referring to Davydd J. Greenwood, Cohen writes that commoditised cultural products are regarded as things which have lost their intrinsic meaning and significance (381); they are therefore alienated, deprived of their cultural values and exist merely to be consumed. Their value is no longer placed in context of the culture; it is simulated, displaced into the logic of the market, and commoditised as the performance of the exotic, the extraordinary, the Other. The same can be applied to objects of art, as they are no longer produced as articulations of a culture or a specific way of living to be shared within the culture; instead they became objects of aesthetic value, to be sold in the market. Value, in this case, is diverted from cultural to market.

Appadurai explains that diversion “may sometimes involve the calculated and ‘interested’ removal of things from an enclaved zone to one where exchange is less confined and more profitable” (25), suggesting a sense of self-awareness and deliberation on behalf of the diverter. Commoditisation by diversion is where “value... is accelerated or enhanced by placing objects and things in unlikely contexts” (Appadurai 28). Tourist art is described by Appadurai as one of “subtler examples of the diversion of commodities from their predestined paths” (26). Tourist art consists of “objects produced for aesthetic, ceremonial, or sumptuary use in small, face-to-face communities [which] are transformed culturally, economically and socially by tastes, market and ideologies for larger economies” (Appadurai 26). Functional, everyday objects are taken out of their original context and reincarnated, in a way, as ‘authentic artefacts’, however paradoxical that may sound. Appadurai adds that commodity diversion is “driven by the quest for novelty” (28),

something which can be regarded as original or extraordinary. As far as tourist art goes, the objects' original purpose of being gives them their authenticity, making them more valuable (and desirable) than any copies or imitations of the real thing.

Additionally, Cohen writes that "purist' curators and art historians" (375) classify a cultural object as authentic only if it has been made specifically for local cultural acquisition and use *and* if it has not been made with the intention of sale (375). In other words, cultural objects such as native art can only be regarded as authentic if they were produced without the intention of mobilising its exchange value. The same could also be applied to cultural or religious rituals or ceremonies, or simply encounters with the Other (as identified by MacCannell in his discussion of staged authenticity). Taken out of context, these encounters are, in essence, alienated, their value eradicated. Things and encounters outside of commodity relations are here regarded as more valuable and, therefore, more desirable than those within.

The question of value (in relation to cultural products) is raised by Frow through a discussion of an Aboriginal style of painting called *Papunya Tula*. Frow remarks on the "immensely productive mistake" ("Time and Commodity Culture" 136-7) which this style went through as it is, in essence, displaced; recontextualised within the Western art system and marketed and sold to be consumed by the Western art audience. Frow describes the painting style as being "syncretistic" ("Time and Commodity Culture" 136), as its cultural functions are fused with a series of Western art market's aesthetic values, endowing the paintings with "author functions and values of 'authenticity' that are largely irrelevant to [their] initial context" ("Time and Commodity Culture" 137). These paintings provide the Western Australian Desert community with much-needed income; yet on the other side, it is also suggested that their entry to the market has meant that their intrinsic cultural (or, if talking within a Marxist logic, *use*) value were lost. This view is supported by Frederic Jameson, who states that:

the various forms of activity lose their immanent intrinsic satisfactions as activity and becomes means to an end. The objects of the commodity world of capitalism also shed their independent 'being' and intrinsic qualities and come to be so many instruments of commodity satisfaction (131).

Frow also cites Anderson and Dussart, who argue that the paintings "to some extent converts religious art into a commodity, thereby alienating the art from religious practice" ("Time and Commodity Culture" 137). Accordingly, referring to arguments made by McLeod and Cornet, Cohen states that "the absence of commoditization [is] a crucial consideration in judgments of authenticity" (375). Further, questions as to whether the commodity form is always less "humanly beneficial" (Frow "Time and Commodity Culture" 136) than non-commodified use values, and as to whether the shift always equates to a change for the worse, are often posed alongside other criticisms of capitalism as a system which laments the commodification and commercialisation of 'things' which, in the past, were always inalienable due to their cultural significance.

This issue is taken up by Cohen, who writes that "much of the contemporary literature on the nature of modern tourism and its impact upon host societies relies on three important assumptions" (371-2). Firstly: that tourism leads to commoditisation of cultures and cultural products, which, "prior to [tourism's] penetration" belonged outside of commodity relations (Cohen 372). Secondly, commoditisation is regarded as a purely negative process, in that it destroys the authenticity of cultural products and cultural relations, leading to the 'staging' of authenticity (see: MacCannell) and the performance (in the most basic form of the word) of culture for monetary gains (Cohen 372). Thirdly, 'staged authenticity' is said to ruin the tourist's genuine desire for authentic experiences, which eventually leads to the modern tourist being "damned to inauthenticity" (Cohen 372-3). Cohen ominously declares: "it follows from these assumptions that commoditization, engendered by tourism, allegedly destroys not only the meaning of cultural products for the locals but, paradoxically, also for the tourists...the more tourism flourishes, the more it allegedly becomes a colossal deception" (373).

However, Cohen is extremely critical of this conclusion, declaring it “far-fetched and hard to accept” (373) as it constructs an image of “modern society as completely absurd and dominated by sinister powers” (373). He proposes instead to regard ‘authenticity’ as a socially-constructed concept, whose social connotations and meanings are not objective but *negotiable* (and therefore not, and not to be regarded as, a given) (Cohen 374). Cohen argues that different people demand and are concerned with different degrees of authenticity; their regimes of value through which authenticity is judged and measured will also differ (374-5). For Cohen, “the question here is *not* whether the individual does or does not ‘really’ have an authentic experience...but rather what endows his experience with authenticity in the first place” (378). It is within this line of thought that this thesis will be worked through. Ultimately, what should be asked is not what is or what is not authentic, or what counts as authentic or inauthentic. Authenticity should not be regarded as an inherent value; rather, it is discursive category which manifests itself within different regimes of value.

The Embodiment and Performance of Authenticity

In his introduction to *The Tourist*, MacCannell acknowledges that “it is intellectually chic nowadays to deride tourists” (9). The derision of tourists is so prevalent, in fact, that Culler writes:

No other group has such a uniformly bad press and so few defenders. Tourists are continually subject to sneers and have no anti-defamation league. Animal imagery seems their inevitable lot: they are said to move in herds, droves, flocks, or swarms; they are as docile as sheep but as annoying as a plague of insects when they descend on a spot. When granted human status they are the least perceptive, the most gullible, and generally most amazingly foolish of human beings (n. pag.).

The tourist is often regarded as “the lowest of the low” (Culler n. pag.). However, Culler points out that “once one notes that disliking tourists,

wanting to be less touristy than other tourists, is part of being a tourist, one can recognize the superficiality of most discussions of tourism, especially those that stress the superficiality of tourists” (n. pag.), a sentiment that is echoed by Frow as he dismisses this particular discourse as uninteresting (“Time and Commodity Culture” 69). Furthermore, Culler continues by declaring that tourists do set out in quest for authenticity, stating “proof of this is that authenticity is a major selling point in advertisements and travel writing” (n. pag.). Culler, along with Cohen and MacCannell, believes that authenticity, in whatever form or shape and to whatever extent, is, in effect, *the* driving force of the tourism industry.

It has already been established that the dichotomy between travel and tourism can constitute the basis of both cultural capital and commodity, as something which can be drawn on by traveller (or tourist) to construct a certain identity: to stake a claim in being a ‘real’ traveller as opposed to a ‘tourist’, or, ‘better’ tourists than all the other (extremely inauthentic) tourists. This discourse is reproduced, and reiterated by travel agencies, guidebooks, tourism operators and television programmes. The “rhetoric of moral superiority” that inhabits any discussions on tourists and tourism (MacCannell 9) prevails in television travel programming, as each host of the programmes analysed in this thesis demonstrates a commitment to what we can call the discourse of the value of travel. The dichotomy between travel and tourism is regularly reproduced in these programmes to establish both the authenticity of the hosts’ travel experience and their status as ‘real’ travellers. Additionally, both Cohen and Frow agree that the tourist’s search for the authentic is bound in finding “the Other of modernity” (Frow, “Time and Commodity Culture” 72): “the pristine, the primitive, the natural...as yet untouched by modernity” (Cohen 374). Tourism, in this sense, involves a form of nostalgia, as it constitutes a site where the ‘real’ and the ‘authentic’ can once again be found and experienced.

Given that authentic travel constitutes both a form of cultural value and a basis for commoditisation, it is necessary to identify and give an account of

the mechanisms that work to guarantee or testify to the genuineness or credibility claims regarding the authenticity of any travel experience embodied within and produced as a media text. In the travel programmes under consideration, there are two main mechanisms that are deployed consistently in order to achieve these ends. The first of these relates to the ways in which the credibility of prominent media and cultural figures, such as celebrities, is transferred onto the experience; this is a logic and practice that informs most forms of advertising. The second mechanism is tied up with what we can call 'the appropriate performance of authenticity': those involved in the travel experience must be literate with regard to, and able to consistently reproduce, the bodily hexis, and interpersonal genres and discourses, that mark them as credible, trustworthy and genuine subjects.

Sahara with Michael Palin, Long Way Down, and Intrepid Journeys involve one, if not two, central celebrity character(s). The role of celebrity in these programmes should not be underestimated: they act as a point of identification for audiences, and they guarantee and facilitate the authenticity and genuineness of the touristic experience. In his opening chapter of *Ordinary People and the Media*, Graeme Turner writes that

'ordinary people' have always been 'discovered', suddenly extracted from their everyday lives and processed for stardom... and the contemporary media consumer has become increasingly accustomed to following what happens to the 'ordinary' person who has been plucked from obscurity to enjoy a highly circumscribed celebrity (12).

In much of the literature on celebrity culture and ordinariness, the focus lies on ordinary people being processed and produced into celebrities. However, this process can also be somewhat 'reversed', as celebrities could be produced and portrayed as ordinary, though in this case without putting them back into obscurity. Quite the contrary, the 'ordinary' celebrity remains in the spotlight but what they perform is their ordinariness; the mundane and the ordinary. In fact, in their respective roles on travel programmes, their credibility as travellers relies almost entirely on their capacity to perform their ordinariness or, more precisely, their humanity.

In the introductory chapter of *Bodies that Matter*, Butler considers how the materiality of the body can be utilised to reiterate and reproduce cultural norms, and how by linking the materiality of the body with authorised and iterative performances, subjects are 'materialised'. Butler goes on to argue that the construction and materialisation of subjectivities do not just happen; it is not a single act or a single causal process (10). Rather, construction and materialisation constitute an ongoing process of reiteration, a constant reassertion of ideas and practices of norms (Butler 2). In turn, this illustrates how identity cannot be regarded as a simple, static condition of the body; rather, it is a constant process where regulatory norms, through the process of reiteration, act to materialise it. This reiteration (and therefore materialisation) of identity can therefore be understood as an effect of its productive regulatory capacity.

By drawing on the idea of performativity, Butler attempts to create a link between the materiality of the body and the nature of identity. Butler asserts that performativity "must not be understood as a singular or deliberate act" (2) that is expressly carried out by a given subject. Instead, performativity should be understood as "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler 2). By performing in accordance with the imperatives and scripts associated with identity categories, a subject is effectively reiterating and citing it as a discourse, producing and reproducing it as a discursive category, and ultimately confirming its status as a normative. (Conversely, the idea of reiteration and citation contain in them assumptions of authority, power and of something that is worthy of being reiterated or cited in the first place.)

An embodied, authorised performance is required for the subject to remain within, and accepted by, the field. Much like an athlete who has to comply and play by the rules of the game, the traveller needs to not only recognise the field but to perform that recognition in a way that is believable and in tune with what the field requires. In the case of the travel programmes

which this thesis is analysing, these authorised performances are crucial in producing a sense of the 'authentic'. The 'authentic', in this sense, is a category which should not be regarded as intrinsic or natural. Authenticity and 'the authentic' in these travel programmes are constructed by embodied, authorised performances that are consistent with both the discourses of travel and the genre to which each of the programmes belong.

The celebrity's performance of authenticity is crucial to ensuring that viewers consistently identify with, and are willing to take their affective cues from, the accounts and representations of the travel experience as media text. Once any travel experience is transformed into both a media text and, by extension, a commodity, it conforms to, and is inflected by, the logics, imperatives, discourses of the media-as-field. Contemporary media is characterised by the relentless presentation of the hyperbole: the constant generation of the dramatic and the spectacular (Schirato et al. 138). The spectacle is designed to "impose its authority on audiences; get and hold our attention" (Schirato et al. 138). Most importantly, within the logic of the spectacle, events are represented in a way which works to elicit strong emotional responses and arouse passion and excitement from its audiences (Schirato et al. 138). The travel experience as contemporary media text is necessarily inflected by these developments; that is, to some extent it must take on and reproduce the form of the spectacle.

Travel as Media Spectacle

In the highly influential *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord suggests that "all that once was directly lived has become mere representation" (12). Society, and its people, are no longer directed and shaped by first-hand experiences and occurrences; they are instead governed by the spectacle. When he proposes that society is now that of the spectacle, Debord asserts that the spectacle is not a "deliberate distortion of the visual world" or the "product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images" (12-3), rather it is "a

world view transformed into an objective force” (13). The spectacle should not be thought of in terms of its traditional meaning, as extravagant shows or exhibition, or even as a mere collection of images. For Debord, it is a set of social relations among subjects, mediated by images (12). The spectacle, in this sense, is the *entre-nous*, the between-us which acts as the mediator between the subjects and the collection of sights, sounds and their messages which effectively replace direct social relations.

For Debord, the origin of spectacle lies in the world’s loss of unity (22), where individuals and societies have become isolated, disconnected and alienated. The spectacle offers a sort of unity, in the form of a world it holds up to offer: that which is superior, yet simultaneously comprehensible and (seemingly) attainable (Debord 22). However, the spectacle unites “only *in its separateness*” (Debord 22), as spectators “are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very centre that maintains their isolation from one another” (22). Debord argues that direct social relations have been entirely replaced by the subject’s relationship with the spectacle. Drawing on this, Schirato and Webb suggest that the spectacle, as a capitalist visual regime, is characterised by the imperative to produce subjects as individuals who are isolated from any sense of communal identity (166). These individuals feel a lack, a lack which drives them to consume in their pursuit of the superior version of the world the spectacle holds up to view (Schirato and Webb 166).

Effectively, Debord is “asserting that human lived experience – that is, our ‘authentic’ sensory and intellectual engagement with the world – has been lost. In its place we have media representations that pretend to deliver up the world – in a continuously dramatic and hyperbolised manner” (Schirato et al. 139). Further, “[Debord] presumes that the functions of the social field – even society itself – have been taken over by the field of the media: the ‘between us’ of the social is now played out, more or less exclusively, through media simulations, discourses and sites” (Schirato et al. 139). On the other hand, Foucault condemns Debord’s argument on the society of the spectacle, as he declares that “our society is not one of spectacle,

but of surveillance... We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine" (217).

Jonathan Crary concedes that "one can imagine Foucault's disdain...for any facile or superficial use of 'spectacle' as an explanation of how the masses are 'controlled' or 'duped' by media images" ("Techniques of the Observer" 18). However, he writes that:

Foucault's opposition of surveillance and spectacle seems to overlook how the effects of these two regimes of power can coincide. Foucault relentlessly emphasizes the ways in which human subjects became objects of observation...but he neglects the new forms by which vision itself became a kind of discipline or mode of work (Crary, "Techniques of the Observer" 18).

Crary argues that the spectacle is not simply about looking at images; rather, it has become "the construction of conditions that individuate, immobilize, and separate subjects" ("Suspensions of Perception" 74). In the society of the spectacle, the subject is an observer, "one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations" (Crary, "Techniques of the Observer" 6). In other words, the observer is not merely someone who sees or a "passive onlooker" (Crary, "Techniques of the Observer" 5), but someone who sees in a way that is directed and disciplined by a certain system. The spectacle, in this sense, is architecture through and within which the observer are constructed and subjected. Furthermore, Crary asserts that "vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product *and* the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification" ("Techniques of the Observer" 5). Observers, according to Crary, are not only the product of the social system in which they find themselves, but, in their observation, they are also reiterating and authorising that system, something which confirms the validity and the power that the system holds.

Sahara with Michael Palin, Long Way Down, and Intrepid Journeys are, at the very least, informed, if not driven by, the logic of the spectacle. These

imperatives will, in turn, dictate their tone, pace, dynamics and narratives. The spectacle demands constant action and excitement and, in a way (in its search for the different and the exotic), so does travel and tourism. However, there is also an imperative within the field of travel for the experience to be sincere and intellectually- and emotionally-engaging. MacCannell declares that “the position of the person who stays home in the modern world is morally inferior to that of a person who ‘gets out’ often...Authentic experiences are believed to be available only to those moderns who try to break the bonds of their everyday existence and begin to ‘live’” (159). Travel, and its experiences, is marketed as something intrinsically *good*, something that enables the traveller to rise beyond ruins of the fragmented, alienated and simulated modern world and learn more about both the Other as well as themselves. Within the tourism industry and, by extension, television travel programming, encounters with the Other (that is, other people, landscapes and cultures) are effectively commoditised; marketed and sold to their consumers (that is, travellers or potential travellers). However, somewhat ironically, what is marketed depends almost entirely on its (perceived) authenticity. The ‘success’ of travel, then, depends almost entirely on the *performance* of the authentic by the traveller in the form of a commitment to the values of travel.

Conclusion

This chapter provides the theoretical framework for the analytical chapters that follow. The elaboration of key concepts such as authenticity, commoditisation, performance, and the spectacle, as well as the dichotomy that characterises the evaluation of travel and tourism, are essential to any discussion of the cultural construction of travel, and will inform my subsequent analysis of *Sahara with Michael Palin*, *Long Way Down*, and *Intrepid Journeys*. Further, this chapter has sought to question and problematise ‘authenticity’ as a form of classification. Despite being simplistic and even disingenuous, the critique of tourism, and the concomitant

privileging of 'travel' as a more 'authentic' activity, continue to "drive the industry at the most fundamental level" (Frow, "Time and Commodity Culture" 69). In light of this, rather than trying to judge or determine how 'authentic' *Sahara with Michael Palin*, *Long Way Down*, and *Intrepid Journeys* are, this thesis will instead examine the role of authenticity as a discursive category, and consider how it is manifested, and the kind of work it performs, in each of the programmes.

Chapter Two:

Sahara with Michael Palin

Introduction

The BBC television series *Sahara with Michael Palin* (2002) documents Michael Palin's journey across the Sahara Desert through Northern and Western Africa. The programme is shown in four parts as Palin travels through Gibraltar, Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria, before his return to European territory. Palin is a British comedian, actor, writer and television presenter; he is originally known for his role in *Monty Python* (this is something that comes up in the programme and it will be discussed later on in the chapter) but is now also well-known for his range of travel documentaries and their accompanying books. To avoid confusion, I shall refer to the programme, *Sahara with Michael Palin*, as *Sahara*, and I shall refer to the programme's host, Michael Palin, as Palin for the remainder of this chapter.

Sahara opens with a close-up of the Union Jack, against a backdrop of palm trees. In the background it is announced that the Royal Gibraltar Regiment is about to perform a gun salute to honour Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on her birthday. Just as the commander announces the Royal Gun Salute, *Sahara* also announces its roots, its voice and its frame of references: this is a British programme, set in (as the palm trees indicate) an exotic location. The next few seconds show the Regiment firing its shots, before the scene cuts to a close up of Palin being awakened by the proceedings in his hotel bed, looking simultaneously tousled and thoughtful. In a voiceover, Palin proclaims that he "always [has] bad dreams before a new journey", and he speaks of the worry of being late, forgetting to pack his underwear, or, as an afterthought, getting shot at (*Sahara* 1). Palin packs his (relatively small) weekend bag while the voiceover narration continues, telling himself to keep

calm and not to panic about forgetting his mosquito net as he walks out of his room (*Sahara* 1). At once Palin is established as a traveller who does not take 'journeys' such as this one lightly, as someone who is (or at least tries to be) prepared and organised, yet his tone is laden with faux-freneticism and comical undertones, indicating to his self-deprecating brand of humour; Palin is a serious traveller, who does not take himself all that seriously.

Palin tells himself to read his newspaper as it might be the last one he sees for a while (*Sahara* 1). Yet, almost instantly he tosses it into the rubbish bin, virtually unopened, as he walks out of his hotel room (*Sahara* 1). This seemingly insignificant act is countered by the fact that the camera zooms in on the headline which states, "Britain 'to share Gibraltar with Spain'", indicating that it is something of importance, something which merits attention and a degree of consideration (*Sahara* 1). This newspaper headline again puts the programme in its context, in its British frame of reference, and it sets the tone in terms of political awareness. Further to that, his decision to disregard the newspaper suggests that Palin is someone who is more interested in searching and investigating for information himself, placing value on personal conversations with locals rather than relying on existing preconceptions, publications, or the words of a third party.

Not only are the opening 60 seconds of *Sahara* revealing in terms of the programme's cultural context and affiliations, they also introduce Palin and his style of travel. Palin, both due to his previous successes and accolades, and through his introduction to the audience through the opening sequence of *Sahara*, is presented and recognised both as someone *possessing* cultural capital, and as *a form of* cultural capital himself. The type of travel that he is about to embark on is something that audiences can aspire to; in a way he is representing and reproducing a genre of travel that is both interesting and commendable. Palin's role as a lone traveller and explorer figure is evident throughout *Sahara* as he follows in the footsteps of Alexander Gordon Laing (Scottish explorer and the first European to reach Timbuktu) and Mungo Park (another Scottish explorer and the first European to encounter the

Niger River). For Palin, as for those explorers before him, the gaining of knowledge (of the land, the people, their history and their culture) is the main impetus to travel, and the references that he makes (to the explorers and to other cultural figures and products) illustrate and interact with both Palin as a person, and the type of travel he is undertaking and presenting.

Genre, Intertextuality and Pace

The issue of genre is paramount to any discussion of *Sahara*, as it provides a base on which discussions of aspects such as pace, ordinariness, celebrity and the spectacle (which, in turn, inform any discussions in regards to authenticity) can be articulated. Further, it also helps locate or place *Sahara* within a specific travel genre. Prior to *Sahara*, Palin is already well-known and well-established as a comedian and a media personality, notably through his role in *Monty Python*. Palin's role in *Monty Python* would inevitably generate an expectation in regards to humour and, more specifically, a particular *style* of humour. However, more significantly, Palin, as a personality and, more importantly, as a *text*, brings with him a set of generic assumptions which steer audiences towards certain expectations in regards to the programme he is presenting. By recognising Palin, audiences are able to, to an extent, predict what his programme entails, how it would operate and in what tone, as Frow writes that "genre... defines a set of expectations which guide our engagement with texts" ("Genre" 104). Simultaneously, his other travel documentaries and books form expectations in regards to the style or 'type' of travel in which he partakes; what audiences can expect to see or learn, the types of conversation he will have with people and the kind of knowledge which will be obtained. In addition, a number of intertextual references are made by Palin himself, and they are made in keeping to the genre to which both he and his travel programme belong.

For example: towards the end of the second episode of *Sahara*, Palin is on the last leg of his journey to Timbuktu, a landmark destination of which the

historical and cultural significance are quite clearly recognised and conveyed. Once on board a boat, he speaks directly to the camera, remarking that there is “no denying the sense of anticipation” as he gets underway to join the Sahara’s most famous river, the Niger (*Sahara 2*). The significance of the river is thus acknowledged, and Palin notes that before 200 years ago, when Mungo Park laid eyes on it, no westerners had ever seen it (*Sahara 2*). Holding Park’s book to the camera, Palin then speaks about the explorer, informing his audience that Park never actually made it to Timbuktu himself (*Sahara 2*). In talking to the camera about Park, Palin is in a way paying homage not only to Park himself, but also the voyage (and all its historical and cultural significance) to Timbuktu. He recognises that this journey was once an extremely arduous one and by that, one that is worthy of emulating.

Palin’s reference to Park (and Park’s book) works as a form of intertextuality. Fiske writes that while “the theory of intertextuality proposes that any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledges is brought to bear upon it”, these relationships do not manifest themselves in specific allusions to any particular text (108). Rather, he argues that “intertextuality exists rather in the space between texts” (Fiske 108), in our understanding on how texts are related to each other and the form of interaction or conversation they are able to have with each other; as well as the form of conversation we, as readers, are able to have about them. Palin’s reference to Park and his journey does not necessarily mean that he is in a quest to emulate Park or, that *Sahara* is trying to recreate Park’s journey in any way. Yet, it does give an indication of the *type* or the *genre* of travel both Palin and *Sahara* draw on and frame themselves within. Palin’s reference to Park indicates the type of travel that Palin is partaking in, a type which, as described by Fussell, belongs to a time “before the development of tourism”, where “travel [is] conceived to be like study...its fruits...considered to be the adornment of the mind and formation of judgement” (39).

On the subject of genre, Frow writes:

Genre is neither a property of (and located 'in') texts, nor a projection of (and located 'in') readers; it exists as a part of the relationship between texts and readers, and it has a systemic existence. It is a shared convention with a social force. The imputations or guesses that we make about the appropriate and relevant conventions to apply in a particular case will structure our reading, guiding the course it will take, our experience of what it will encounter. But they are grounded in the institutions in which genre has its social being: the institutions of classification in the broadest sense ("Genre" 25).

Not only does genre work to group texts together in a tangible way, it also works to produce an expectation from the audience and, in turn, indicates how they are to consume and respond to it. *Sahara* comes to us, already heavily invested in, and engages with us in terms of, specific generic and intertextual meanings, expectations and presumptions. This is manifested most obviously in the persona of Palin and, consensually, in the 'between-us' that the programme attempts to set in place. A significant aspect of this 'between-us' is to be found in the pace and rhythms of the programme. It operates patiently, carefully and deliberately; and in comparison to the other two programmes analysed in this thesis, it operates *slowly*. Palin is often seen taking time out to think, write and reflect on his experiences and the knowledge he has acquired.

In the first episode, Palin is shown sitting on the bus reading a newspaper on his way to the Atlas Mountains. Voiceover narration still works to keep the audience informed and entertained, yet the diegetic Palin is still; he sits on the bus reading a newspaper, not looking out the window to enjoy the scenery or talking to the driver or other people (who themselves appear to be falling asleep anyway) on the bus (*Sahara* 1). He is, quite simply, passing time whilst being transported across the Atlas Mountains. This display of Palin in transit is a significant one as he, the traveller, is shown *in the process of getting somewhere*, as opposed simply *being* there or arriving there. The programme is not averse to showing the 'lulls' of travel; the

moments where the traveller is rendered inactive, static or even bored, faced with having to fill in time as they are transported from one point to another.

Palin is even once seen sleeping, the night before he embarks on his last leg of the journey towards the Sahara Desert, indicating that there occurs a lull in travel where the traveller rests, that moving forward, whilst is of the essence, is not a constant or necessary phenomenon (*Sahara* 1). At the same time, this 'lull' is filled with Palin dreaming about what he is trying to accomplish; quite literally, what he has been *dreaming* of achieving. A dream bubble of Palin, riding a camel, accompanied by a Touareg camel driver, emerges, and as he drifts off to sleep he utters "tomorrow, I'll be in the Sahara – at last" (*Sahara* 1). This moment signifies a number of things: that there are moments when a traveller finds themselves stationary, yet at the same time, Palin's dream reassures that even though he is not on the move, his destination, his *goal*, is something that is quite constantly in his mind, consciously or otherwise.

The deliberate slowing down of rhythm is further conveyed as the bus makes a stop at a "motorway service station" in the village of Tademt (*Sahara* 1). Not only does the stop put a brake on the forward momentum of his travel, but, in his search for some lunch, Palin announces that, "if it's fast food you're after, the signs are not encouraging" (*Sahara* 1). Tademt (and, by extension, Morocco and Palin's journey as a whole) is effectively placed as a location where fastness does not prevail; instead, it is a somewhere which operates on a slower pace, where coach services stop for a break, where lunch is slow-cooked, and where getting to one place to another means having to occupy oneself to pass time. Jennie Germann Molz writes that Western mobility is often told as a "story of constant acceleration in which speed is the natural and welcome byproduct of technological progress" (270); and in this sense Tademt is placed outside this 'story', and excluded from this modernity.

Travel as Dialogue

It is important to consider the types of conversations Palin holds with the people he meets along the way, the subject topics he chooses to bring up and talk about. *Sahara* is not depoliticised (topics such as slavery, displacement, illegal border crossings and the role of women in Muslim societies are taken up); however, they are never discussed in terms of mere facts and figures. Palin is portrayed as someone who is genuinely interested in and concerned about others; he speaks to people not only to obtain information, but to also seek their stories, how their circumstances have affected them personally, and how they are surviving it. The Africa that Palin depicts in *Sahara* is not the Africa of the media, or at least, not the Africa of popular media. Instead, what is portrayed and covered is an Africa that might be found in a documentary where encounters with the Other are ostensibly about seriousness and knowledge, as opposed to fun and clichés. Palin visits and talks about things which are not covered in the media, such as “one of the least-known armed confrontations in the world” (*Sahara* 1) (that is, the conflict between Morocco and the Polisario Front), and the ‘forgotten’ Smara Refugee Camp (*Sahara* 1).

Palin’s visit to the Smara Refugee Camp is preceded by a couple of rather significant instances which quite clearly demarcate the Sahara Desert from the other places he travels through in the programme. In the morning of his departure into the Sahara Desert, Palin announces, “so this is it, the last hotel” (*Sahara* 1), placing significance on the moment in which he leaves the comfort and relative luxury (and modernity) of urban Morocco behind. The departure from urbanisation continues to unravel in the next two minutes of the segment as shots of a barren, arid and almost foreboding desert, accompanied by rather ominous, instrumental background music, are shown to illustrate the desert as unwelcoming and unforgiving. This is then further fortified by Palin, as he announces from the opened window of his jeep: “the comforts of Morocco are now well behind us... Ahead of us is 1,000 miles of sand and stone and unlike Morocco, the Sahara is not welcoming; it’s hot and

hostile and from now on, it gets serious” (*Sahara* 1). This sombre introduction to the Sahara is then juxtaposed with Palin’s narration on the disputed territory of the Western Sahara and the inception of the Smara Refugee Camp and, by extension, the grim situation in which the Sahrawi people find themselves (*Sahara* 1).

During his time at the camp Palin is accompanied by Bachir, a “well-educated and well-travelled” Sahrawi man who has lived and spent some time in Leeds (*Sahara* 1). It is revealed that Bachir has been a refugee for half of his life, yet his first conversation with Palin revolved around tea and the fact that the Camp ‘imports’ water from an underground reservoir 16 miles away from the camp (*Sahara* 1). Bachir tells Palin that the water obtained from that particular reservoir is used at the camp for everything except to make tea as it is “a little bit salty” and tea needs “very good water” (*Sahara* 1). Palin then inquires where the camp’s tea water comes from and Bachir tells him, with a hint of amusement, that it is transported from about 50 miles away and Bachir chuckles when Palin tries to make sense of this. The serious matter of water supply is offset by the almost jovial tone to the conversation, Bachir’s “unquenchable optimism” and the slightly amused smirk with which he conveys the information to Palin (*Sahara* 1).

The juxtaposition of information and events during Palin’s visit to Smara Refugee Camp is indicative of the tone and the character of both the programme and Palin himself. Just as the serious matter of water supply is offset by a fairly light-hearted conversation about tea, the issue of prolonged involuntary displacement is followed by a walk through the camp’s market in which Palin jokes about wanting to buy some Sheffield dates and cook a camel’s head before stripping down in a make-shift bathroom to bathe himself with cold water (*Sahara* 1). This is then followed by a conversation with Bachir over dinner about how well-run and organised the camp is, and asking him what the future holds for the Sahrawi people (*Sahara* 1). Seriousness is often juxtaposed with triviality, and the mixture of the two works together to create a sense of genuine conscience, empathy and

affective involvement while maintaining an element of positivity and optimism.

Palin also holds a number of conversations on family and family life, or, as he terms it, the “perennial topic of husbands and wives ... And how many of each” (*Sahara 2*). Take for example Palin’s conversation with a Senegalese woman named Dhadi during his train ride from Dakar, Senegal to Bamako, Mali, on the topic of polygamy. Dhadi explains to Palin the reasoning behind a man having multiple wives and she says that she is against it (*Sahara 2*). However Dhadi is quick to note that it is only her personal opinion and while she believes that there is always trouble in a polygamist house, the conversation provides a seemingly balanced and unbiased account of a cultural practice which is widely considered to be taboo and unacceptable in western societies. This, again, serves to illustrate Palin’s purpose of travel: to gain knowledge and a better understanding of how the world works and operates.

Performing the Authentic

The seemingly inane nature of Palin’s topics of conversation is complemented by the way he presents himself. His identity, and the authenticity of his dealings and affective responses with regard to the Other (people, places, events) is predicated on, and guaranteed by, his apparent ordinariness. Palin’s desire to portray himself as someone ordinary is particularly apparent near the end of *Sahara*, where he travels on the Casablanca Express from Algiers to Oran.

During his time in Algeria Palin is accompanied by Eamonn O’Brien, a professional guard who was specifically employed to ensure his security. Through a voiceover Palin explains that violence was rife in Algeria and that the Algiers–Oran train line that he is on “does have a history”, which means that he is not allowed to ride on it unprotected (*Sahara 4*). From then on, the

conversation between Palin and O'Brien reveals the extent of the security problems the line, which runs through an area called the 'Triangle of Death', has experienced (*Sahara* 4). Palin takes in what O'Brien has to say seriously enough, yet with a slight chuckle he remarks on how far from O'Brien's hostile description his experience of Algeria has been thus far, noting that the people have been "very friendly" and that he has come across "no problems at all" (*Sahara* 4). His statement corresponds with his reaction to O'Brien's initial warning at the hotel in Algiers, where he appears to be taken aback by the idea that he cannot leave the hotel without a body guard (*Sahara* 4). As O'Brien explains the severity of the situation, Palin comments that he has travelled "quite a bit" but no one has ever tried to kill him (*Sahara* 4). His reaction to serious and potentially threatening situations works in the same way his self-deprecating humour does: it confirms his 'ordinariness'.

What can be found in *Sahara* is authenticity-as-performative where authenticity is both manifest in, and is guaranteed by, a believable performance of ordinariness. An example of this can be found in Palin's goodbye to the Touareg people after their trek across the Ténéré Desert (*Sahara* 3). The farewell is quite a dramatic affair, as numerous hugs, handshakes, laughter are partaken. However, a sense of genuineness and sincerity are maintained through the idea that the men had gone through an arduous journey together, forging a bond which, in turn, warrants the commotion. Directly preceding this farewell is the scene where Palin is seen to be forging a strong connection with the Touareg men. After the excitement of the French paragliders, the camels are retired for the night, the fire is lit and the tea is brewed (*Sahara* 3). Palin sits around the fire with the cameleers and they attempt to teach him a few words of Touareg and the encounter, thanks to Palin's western pronunciation, proves to be humorous (*Sahara* 3). To even out the ordeal Palin attempts to teach Izambar, one of the cameleers, the word "cheers" and the phrase "bottoms up" (*Sahara* 3), which, as Palin writes in his reflections of the moment, results in everyone hysterically laughing, "almost like old friends" (Palin 191).

The next morning, the farewell segment opens with a shot of Palin conversing animatedly with Omar as Palin's voiceover narration indicates that he is leaving the camel train (*Sahara 3*). Palin then turns towards the other camel drivers, who are standing in the background, raises his hand and calls out, "au revoir" (*Sahara 3*). Instead of just waving back and bidding him goodbye from a distance, all the other Touareg men come forth towards Palin and they shake his hand, one by one (*Sahara 3*). Palin is here rewarded with a fitting goodbye by the Touareg men, their goodbyes signify the bond and the connection that Palin has established with them; one that warrants a personal and heartfelt end before they go their part ways (*Sahara 3*). In this case, the Touareg camel drivers (or more specifically, their reaction to Palin's leaving) work to 'authenticate' Palin's experience. Consistent with the genre of travel in which he is partaking, Palin forges a connection which is deemed genuine enough (or at least appears to be so) and is therefore farewelled not just as a traveller or a documentarian but as a friend.

It is crucial to note Palin's performance throughout the farewell, as even though it is dramatic, it is also wary of seeming over-the-top and, therefore, 'fake' or 'inauthentic'. Palin pokes fun at the theatrics of Izambar, one of the cameleers, suggesting that he could win an Oscar for his performance (*Sahara 3*). 'Performance' here is something that is understood to be completely different to, and removed from, an 'authentic performance'. Whereas an authentic performance appears natural and believable (as previously noted in Chapter One, authorised performances are required for the subject to remain within, and accepted by, the field), a performance such as Izambar's is recognisably excessive and, therefore, perceivable as inauthentic.

The non-spectacular and ostensibly ordinary way Palin responds to things works in two ways: firstly it speaks to the audience through the humour, providing a kind of comedic relief and at the same time the audience are also able to identify with (that is, see themselves in) Palin's reaction and responses (and thus, by extension, Palin himself). Palin engages in what can

be classed as a 'deliberate misperformance of celebrity', an almost rejection of his status and what it stands for. It does not necessarily mean, however, that he does not acknowledge his role as a performer or, indeed, any of his 'work'. Quite the contrary, Palin makes references to *Monty Python*, particularly *Life of Brian*, throughout *Sahara*.

Upon his arrival in southern Tunisia, Palin remarks that he knows the area well as he was crucified there 23 years ago for the *Life of Brian* (*Sahara* 4). Interestingly, the "arid, almost lunar... and uncongenial landscape" of southern Tunisia is showcased, in silence, for a few seconds before Palin walks into the foreground and speaks to the camera (*Sahara* 4) (This presentation is consistent with *Sahara's* relationship to the spectacular, something which is discussed later on in the chapter). A scene from *Life of Brian* is then inserted into the sequence, as Palin continues to talk, stating that he has always wanted to come back to visit the area, as "the place remains in your mind" (*Sahara* 4). He then concedes that it is rather unusual for someone to go back a place where they were crucified (*Sahara* 4). Following this, Palin arrives in Monastir where he visits the great monument of Ribat, where "most of the scenes from *Life of Brian* were filmed" (*Sahara* 4). As Palin walks through Ribat he slowly starts to remember the various parts of the monument where scenes were filmed (*Sahara* 4). Footage from *Life of Brian* is interlaced with footage of Palin walking around and talking to the camera, giving the audience, effectively, an 'instant' access to his memory as it comes back to him, scene by scene.

This instantaneity should not be regarded as haste or carelessness, however, as, in keeping with his approach to everything else, Palin is conscientious and thoughtful in his reminiscing. He waits for the sites to ignite his memory as opposed to speculating what might or might not have happened. Furthermore, in both these sequences Palin talks about *Monty Python* as if it were just an ordinary memory; he does not gloat about its success or his fame. Even though he comments that "the locals never stop talking about the day *Monty Python* came to film [in Monastir]" (*Sahara* 4),

everything else that he says or does when talking about *Monty Python* is extraordinarily 'ordinary'. Palin does not announce his fame, and he does not perform it. Ironically, it is this deliberate (mis)performance and apparent denial of his fame and status which produces Palin as more believable, more endearing and, most importantly, more authentic.

Palin's 'ordinariness', combined with the pace in which he and *Sahara* operate, as well as the type of conversations he holds with those he meets, suggests a programme which is a far cry from what we might think of as the contemporary media spectacle. Following Jonathan Crary, Schirato et al. write:

Crary identifies four main aspects of the society of the spectacle. The first, and by far the most significant, concerns the task of attention management. Precisely because modern subjects have so many media and texts, visual and otherwise, addressing and attempting to engage them ... their attention span will necessarily be relatively brief. Spectacle and its sites and texts encourage this visual wanderlust ('never stop looking') (141-2).

The media spectacle is characterised by the constant generation of the hyperbole and hysteria to both attract and maintain audience attention. What is presented in *Sahara* is slow, inane, and seemingly thoughtful, and appears to be a complete antithesis of the spectacle.

***Sahara* as Anti-Spectacle**

Within the television travel show genre there is a general tendency to provide the viewer with a constant supply of activities, stories, incidents and entertainments: this imperative is closely related to the logic of rhythms of the contemporary media spectacle. The spectacle, as theorised by Guy Debord, demands that things be constantly happening; the constant generation of excitement, hype and hysteria to attract and maintain attention. Yet *Sahara* goes against this logic through the pace and the rhythm in which it operates and in which it presents itself. Through its presentation of pace

and its tone, it is evident that, quite contrary to the constant action required or demanded by the spectacle, *Sahara* is slow, thoughtful, and deliberate. This is especially observable when contrasted with moments where pace is picked up and augmented by quick camera cuts and fast-paced music to demonstrate how modernity has penetrated the traditionally serene and peaceful environment.

By the last quarter of the third episode of *Sahara* (titled 'Absolute Desert') Palin is well into his trek across the Ténéré Desert with the Touareg camel train. As the camera shows scenes of the camel train moving through the bare desert, Palin's voiceover narrates:

We are now in what my French guidebook calls 'désert absolu', absolute desert. The earth, stripped clean, as bare as the glacier, as featureless as the sea. The outside world is so far away it feels almost irrelevant. I can understand why so many religions were born in the desert – the outside is so hostile you have to look inside (*Sahara* 3).

The sequence is comprised mainly of extreme long shots and long shots, of the camel train travelling across a desert which is, quite clearly, expansive and barren. These shots are all held still (except for the opening shot of the sequence, which tilts from a low angle shot to a high angle shot, adding a sense of grandeur to the scene), and along with the instrumental soundtrack of Arabic music playing in the background, the sequence has an ethereal feel to it. Palin's narration also provides a clear demarcation between the Sahara and the rest of the (modern) world. For Palin, the bare, featureless landscape provides a place in which he could look into himself to find meaning in life: away from the temptations and distractions of modernity.

The camel train then stops to take a break and Palin rests on top of a dune with two Touareg men. In a voiceover, Palin says that he is just "beginning to achieve a little spiritual harmony" in the great emptiness (*Sahara* 3). However, he is soon "reminded that in the 21st century, the outside world is closer than you think" and that he and the camel train do not

have the desert to themselves after all (*Sahara* 3). A paraglider¹ flies into the picture, the drone of his engine breaking the previously silent diegesis and swoops in to interrupt the remoteness and isolation of the environment, and Palin exclaims, “I think he’s intruding on our space!” before conceding that he is “probably just jealous” (*Sahara* 3). An extreme wide shot of Palin talking to the paraglider (with the Touareg people and the camels in the background) cuts into a mid shot and Palin, diegetically, reveals that the French paraglider has been to many deserts around the world (*Sahara* 3). When asked about his favourite desert, the paraglider responds with “this one”, the Sahara, as “it’s still alive”, and that “authentic life” can still be found there (*Sahara* 3), suggesting that culture, or the culturally authentic, is a living thing (incidentally, people often speak of cultures dying when they are tainted by modernity). Palin asks the paraglider if he would mind using his machine to take a few shots of the camel train from the air (*Sahara* 3). Palin then turns towards the camera and asks his cameraperson, Nigel, if he would mind, to which Nigel responded with turning the camera from side to side mimicking someone shaking their head in protest (*Sahara* 3). Palin laughs and apologises to the paraglider before reassuring him that Nigel would comply if he was to be given some sweets (*Sahara* 3).

Almost immediately the camera cuts to a low angle shot of the paraglider taking flight and contemporary, upbeat (yet still Arabic-sounding) music starts playing. The next 30 seconds or so show shots of the paraglider flying around and above the camel train, with footage taken by the paraglider himself and shots of a Touareg man sandboarding down a sand dune. The lively, slightly cheesy music continues in this abrupt flurry of activity, aided by modern technology, and the camera work shifts from extended and steady wide shots to quick cuts, combining wide ground-level shots with close ups and moving, dynamic shots taken by the paraglider. This ‘intrusion’

¹ Palin’s accompanying book, *Sahara*, reveals that the paraglider is in fact one person in a team of two: Renaud Van De Meeren is the flyer and François Lagarde is the ground crew. Interestingly, Palin actually spoke with Lagarde, the ground crew, even though it is implied that he spoke directly with Van De Meeren, the flyer, himself (188-89).

demonstrates how modernity has penetrated the traditionally serene and peaceful environment; the 'authentic' Sahara that the paraglider himself claims he desires and appreciates. After a while, in a voiceover, Palin considers: "I think this might be just a streak of Yorkshire Puritanism, but I don't want the Sahara to become an adventure playground. After all the excitement, I'm glad to be back with the people who live here" (*Sahara* 3). The music fades out and the scene cuts to a more serene picture of the camel train at the end of the day, at dusk, as they find a place to stop for the night. The contrasting stillness is filled only with the diegetic sound of footsteps, the occasional bellow of the camels and the cameleers talking to each other as they prepare camp; much to Palin's approval, peace and tranquillity is restored. Modernity, with its toys and gadgets (as well as its cheesy music), is juxtaposed with the much more pleasing calmness and slowness of the 'real' or 'authentic' Sahara.

It is clear that Palin is keen to escape from the flurry of hype and excitement in the form of modern technology, and return to the 'normality' that is the peaceful, slow, and quiet Sahara. Similarly to the way Molz finds the cultural implications of 'speeding through' places in the travel-based reality television programme *The Amazing Race* problematic (276), Palin is quite clearly keen to distance himself from the flurry of hype and excitement. *Sahara* says something about modernity's demand for pace, hysteria and acceleration through both the change in its background music, and the change in pace as implied by the fast cuts of the camera shots. Yet at the same time Palin acknowledges that he is jealous of the paraglider, jealous of his toys, his gadgets, and the fun that he could have with them. Additionally, the irony is also acknowledged by Palin in the accompanying book, *Sahara*, as he writes that the camels had to be led backwards and forwards in order for the "the right shots" to be obtained (190). Palin muses on how "things have changed" (191); momentarily the balance of power and control has shifted as "Omar and his team are following us instead of us following them" (191). He then writes, somewhat melancholically, "whatever relationship I have assumed I was forging with the Touareg has been subsumed by Western

technology” (Palin 191), suggesting that modernity (and, consequently, technology) is all-encompassing and that his association with it detracts his ability to connect with the Touareg people.

Consider also the end of the third episode of *Sahara* – Palin’s last day with the camel train. After spending a few days with them trekking across the Ténéré Desert, Palin leaves the Touareg camel train to head towards Algeria. This closing segment of the episode starts much like the other desert segments, with a series of spectacular establishing wide angle shots of the desert, showcasing its vastness, as well as highlighting the fact that the camel train is a miniscule pocket of life and activity in the middle of the empty aridness. The pace of the segment (and of life in *Sahara* in general) is again reiterated, this time through a low-angle shot of the camel train, footsteps gently ambling across the desert, “the reassuring pat of the life on the move” (*Sahara* 3). At the same time, consider how the sequence is set up and established at the start: by *spectacular* landscape shots, accompanied by (yet again), an instrumental, mystical music; landscape shots which speak to the audience before Palin does, before the verbal narrative is taken up once again. This indicates that the logic of the spectacle does manifest itself, in one way or another.

Palin’s voice-over narration and conversations with people drive *Sahara* forward in terms of narrative flow. However, images of the landscape, the terrain, and the geography of the places through which Palin travels are also used quite extensively to establish Palin’s location and his surroundings, as well as to highlight the magnitude of his journey. This is done through the presentation of the spectacular landscape of the arid desert or the hustle and bustle of a village that is quite clearly different to the western world. It almost goes without saying that as a television programme, *Sahara* relies, to an extent, on a rather spectacular visual regime; yet its presentation corresponds quite clearly to the genre in which the programme operates. *Sahara* is patient, thoughtful, careful, measured and very slow, yet at the same time, it is also spectacular.

Contrary to what *Sahara's* pace, dialogues and host's performance may suggest, *Sahara* is still driven by the imperatives of the media spectacle. What happens in *Sahara* and what Palin encounters may not necessarily be overly exciting, dramatic or suspenseful, but it is precisely the apparent *ordinariness* of it all that makes it, paradoxically, even more spectacular. We have already established that Palin does not concern himself with facts, figures, or historical anecdotes. The stories told by Palin are stories of people's lives, stories of human conditions; that is, stories which attempt to evoke passionate, affective responses from its audiences. These are stories that most people, at their most basic, human level, can relate to; and, contrary to appearances, *Sahara* does not invite its audiences to think, it invites them to *feel*.

Conclusion

Sahara goes against the logic of speed and haste; instead, it operates in a calmer, more composed manner. *Sahara's* use of pace (or rather, lack of pace) is consistent with its emphasis on the gaining of knowledge and the privileging of learning, thinking, cultural immersion and respect. Here, in *Sahara*, there is evidence of "slowness... positively associated with moral deliberation" (Molz 283). However, *Sahara* still does rely on a spectacular visual regime, and the spectacle manifests itself in the form of affective responses the programme attempts to elicit from its audiences. In addition, Palin, in *Sahara*, is unexceptional; he is ordinary and familiar. At the same time, he displays a sense of compassion, of conscience and connection to those he meets along the way, and this genuineness elevates him above the 'ordinary' tourist.

Chapter Three:

Long Way Down

Introduction

Long Way Down is a documentation of the motorbike journey of actors Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman, travelling south through 18 countries from John o' Groats in Scotland to Cape Agulhas in South Africa, in 2007. The journey was originally aired as a television series on BBC Two between October and December 2007, and later released on DVD. It was made following the success of *Long Way Round* (2004), where McGregor and Boorman travelled, also on motorbikes, eastward from London to New York. The same crew members (directors and producers Russ Malkin and David Alexanian and cameramen Claudio Von Planta and Jimmy Simak) were involved in both projects, with the addition of a team medic and a security officer in *Long Way Down*. The team also employed various 'fixers' (local guides and interpreters with extensive local expertise) in the different countries they travelled through. *Long Way Down* was originally aired on BBC Two over six episodes, but the special edition DVD which this chapter is discussing comprises of 10 episodes of about 50 minutes each to showcase about 510 minutes of material.

The format and the duration of *Long Way Down* mean that the programme can showcase the journey itself rather than just the places visited. Each episode of the programme details both the processes of getting to a destination and the time McGregor and Boorman spend on the road, as well as the events which occur along the way. The format also allows the programme to show the team's extensive pre-departure preparation in some detail. The entire first episode of *Long Way Down* is dedicated to showing the team (and their home support crew) applying for visas and filming permits, customising their motorbikes and support vehicles, gathering and packing

supplies and provisions, undergoing off-road riding and driving training, as well as going through both a hostile environment training school and a survival experience training camp. *Long Way Down* appears largely unfiltered; it performs and represents itself as a *real* travel adventure.

The *Long Way Down* DVD series opens with a prologue, a brief back story, narrated by McGregor, Boorman, Alexanian and Malkin, on how the programme came about: following the success of *Long Way Round* and due to McGregor's interest in Africa (which was ignited after seeing Boorman participate in the Dakar Rally). This prologue consists of a series of shots showcasing the ups and downs of McGregor's and Boorman's journey through *Long Way Round*, as well as the close friendship they share. The fast-paced editing and the accompanying background music give the sequence a sense of energy, intensity and drama, filling it with short bursts of action and emotions. The prologue not only introduces the programme, but it sets the tone in terms of its pace and the general style of the programme (which is then further reinforced and supported by its opening credits). Boorman then states that Africa is a place which he and McGregor are 'passionate' about. Boorman's statement is accompanied by spectacular shots of an (unspecified) African desert, while the music also changes to something gentler, more serene and recognisably African.

As the prologue alone indicates, *Long Way Down* operates in a completely different pace to *Sahara*: it is action-packed, exciting and it is most definitely spectacular. However, the programme employs a similar strategy to *Sahara* in relation to pace and what it signifies. The slowing down of pace is used to convey authenticity; this is indicative of moments which call for reflection, consideration and emotional involvement, where McGregor and Boorman, in their words, feel that they are really connecting with Africa. However while *Sahara* is predominantly thoughtful, deliberate and unhurried, *Long Way Down* is unashamedly a *spectacle*. Moreover, in contrast to the Africa that is depicted in *Sahara*, the Africa of *Long Way Down* can easily be dismissed as the Africa of the popular media. Due to the range of places

McGregor and Boorman visit and the activities they partake in, the Africa of *Long Way Down* bears similarities to the Africa of tourism brochures, news bulletins and even NGO appeals. Yet the programme claims to be a whole lot more than that: it claims to be authentic, it claims to be *more* than a tourism brochure. Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman play a significant role in promoting the authenticity of *Long Way Down*; they are characters the programme's audiences can connect and empathise with.

Performing the Authentic

Long Way Down claims to have a great degree of transparency; it is not afraid to share both the good *and* the bad aspects of travelling. The audience is shown the arduous pre-departure preparations, the tensions and the arguments that arise in the team before and during the journey, the mechanical breakdowns and mishaps on the road as well as the joy, excitement and moments of awe and wonder. The programme, then, problematises Goffman's theory regarding the division between front and back stage. This is by no means a new phenomenon, yet it is nevertheless an interesting aspect of *Long Way Down*, given its claims in regards to authenticity. As I have already pointed out in Chapter One, MacCannell writes that the touristic experience is circumscribed and motivated by this desire to see life *as it is really lived* (94). The traveller is driven and motivated by the desire to encounter, observe, and experience the 'real lives' of the Other, to be given access beyond the front region and into the back. McGregor and Boorman are no different. They make it clear that they are travelling through Africa not just to visit monuments and touristic sites but to also 'soak up' the cultures, to meet people and to feel a sense of belonging to the place.

It is worth noting too, however, that the team is also happy to acknowledge the more pampered parts of the trip, for instance in Siena, Italy (*Long Way Down* 2). After leaving the Moto Guzzi factory in Lake Como, Italy, the back-up vehicles are filmed driving in to a hotel complex. Malkin then

appears in front of the camera, stating “excuse the swimming pool behind us” and that in case anyone is wondering, they know that conditions are going to get tougher later on and they have opted not to make it tougher for themselves in the beginning (*Long Way Down 2*). The team occasionally stays at hotels and lodges instead of pitching a tent and camping, and this is not something that the programme is averse to showing. Malkin’s admission to what can easily be regarded as taking the easy way out or giving in to luxury is something that is rarely seen in an adventure-based travel programme. Yet curiously, *Long Way Down*’s claim of ‘full disclosure’ also works to enhance its sense of authenticity, it works to suggest that it holds no pretence and that what it does show is ‘real’. It is worth noting, however, that McGregor and Boorman opt to separate from the rest of the crew and camp at a campground that night, further cementing their status as ‘real’, adventurous travellers.

Goffman distinguishes the two regions by the kind of performances that are given by the actors, stating that backstage “the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character” (69). Goffman’s distinction between the two regions can be problematised simply by the fact that McGregor and Boorman are not expressly ‘acting’ or ‘performing’ a (fictional) character. In *Long Way Down*, they are, quite simply, performing themselves. Yet it is worth noting that it is a ‘performance’ nonetheless, as in front of the camera, McGregor and Boorman are required to be travellers; they need to express wonder at majestic monuments, they need to be awed by breathtaking scenery and they need to be moved by the hardship and adversity the people of Africa have gone through. However, there are moments where McGregor and Boorman are in what Goffman proposes to be “backstage style” or “backstage behaviour” (78). McGregor and Boorman are often heard cursing (even though McGregor says that he has been trying to cut down, for the sake of his father (*Long Way Down 6*)); they regularly discuss sex (or rather, the lack of it) during their journey; they talk about Boorman’s bad diarrhoea (*Long Way Down 8*); and they attempted to set Boorman’s fart alight (*Long Way Down 2*). These displays of boorish

behaviour authenticate not only themselves, but also the programme as a whole. McGregor and Boorman are not, by any means, polished performers or impeccable and enigmatic hosts like Palin. Quite the contrary, they are often vulgar and foul-mouthed, discussing topics and disclosing information that could be regarded as 'inappropriate' for audience consumption. It is through these kinds of behaviour that *Long Way Down* gives its audiences access to its back regions; the programme blurs the distinction between front and back regions.

Goffman outlines that the back region, or backstage, "may be defined as a place, relative for a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performer is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course... it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed" (69). The notion of authenticity, in this case, is predicated on the idea that whatever happens in the back region is real; it is the truth, and it is authentic. On the other hand, the front region, or front *stage*, is where performances occur, what takes place here are merely "illusions and impressions" (Goffman 69); it is the location of "false fronts" (MacCannell 95). However, as I have pointed out in Chapter One, MacCannell is highly critical of the solidity of this distinction, and Goffman himself admits that the two regions sometimes blend into each other (see: MacCannell 95). MacCannell writes on what he terms "staged back region" (99), whereby what is perceived as a back region is merely a front constructed to appear like the back, providing an illusion for tourists which would lead them to believe that they are witnessing something authentic. The same could be applied to *Long Way Down*. What is interesting is the blurred distinction between McGregor and Boorman's front and back region performance, given the genre and the format of the programme. A programme like *Long Way Down* is built on the idea that cameras are ever-present, that they are there to record every minute of everything that they do. At the start of discs 2 and 3 of the DVD series, Malkin and Alexanian outline that McGregor and Boorman are each given a video recorder. On top of that, their crash helmets are also fitted with cameras and a third motorcycle is travelling with the pair, ridden by Claudio, a cameraman. The two support

vehicles carry two more cameras, one operated by Jimmy, a cameraman and the other by Jim, their security personnel who also doubles as the third cameraman. These ever-present cameras make it difficult to judge the authenticity of McGregor and Boorman's performances. They could, as MacCannell suggests, be guilty of 'staging' their authenticity; of performing a *staged* backstage style.

Part of the allure of *Long Way Down* is the chance to see McGregor and Boorman 'in real life', a chance to see them out of their traditional or customary setting, facing challenges which, if not 'everyday' as such, we ourselves either have, will, or could potentially be. Here, McGregor (and to a certain extent, Boorman) act as a selling point as their status as celebrities is undoubtedly appealing to the audience. Furthermore, *Long Way Down* presents an opportunity for the audience to see *Africa as McGregor sees it*; the chance to experience travelling across Africa *through* the experience of a celebrity. McGregor, in this sense, is a marketable commodity, fitting into what Turner describes as those "produced, traded and marketed by the media and publicity industries... [whose] primary function is commercial and promotional" ("Understanding Celebrity" 9). This voyeuristic allure could only go so far, however, as the nature of the travel genre calls for the authentic; it calls for the real, the genuine and the believable. McGregor has to be recognisable, to the audience, as more than a celebrity. The audience needs to be able to connect with him and they need to be able to identify with his experiences. It is necessary for McGregor to perform both these identities appropriately to guarantee the authenticity of both *Long Way Down* and himself as a person.

McGregor and Boorman: 'Ordinary' Celebrities

As an actor and a celebrity, McGregor is well-rehearsed in the art of performance, of 'acting up' for the camera and of maintaining a public persona. Andrew Tolson, among other scholars, has identified the public fascination with the 'real' identity of the celebrity, what is sometimes 'hidden'

backstage. Moreover, Tolson argues that a “credible public identity” (456) is produced by both successful performances and what can be characterised as a ‘positive’ use of fame for ‘a good cause’, ultimately giving that person, or that celebrity, moral justification (456).

McGregor and Boorman visit a number of United Nations mission sites through their journey across Europe and Africa. In fact, an emphasis is placed on raising awareness on a number of issues such as HIV/AIDS, poverty and landmines. McGregor and Boorman’s humanitarian efforts are at once *benefitting from* and *beneficial to* them. Their celebrity status means that they have an access to project the issues and the efforts to combat them across to a wide-range of people. At the same time, their interest in and their action towards these issues act to elevate their status: they are *more* than just celebrities, they are *morally-conscious* and *morally-responsible* celebrities. Take their visit to the UNICEF Mission Base in Zalambessa, Ethiopia, for example (*Long Way Down* 5). McGregor and Boorman, accompanied by a UNICEF representative, visit the home of a young man who lost his leg after stepping on a mine whilst walking home with his family (*Long Way Down* 5). The camera flicks between the young man (on crutches and missing one leg, looking fairly unconcerned and almost content) and McGregor and Boorman’s concerned faces. McGregor then states, to the camera, that he cannot believe that the field which he is standing on was once full of landmines, at which point the camera pans around to show children frolicking and playing across the field (*Long Way Down* 5). McGregor’s narration switches to a voiceover, where he remarks on how much of an eye-opener it is to see the effects of landmines and the devastation they cause, “first-hand” (*Long Way Down* 5). The camera then returns back to McGregor looking at the camera, the close up shot showing the emotions on his face. It is apparent that he is on the brink of tears, and he turns away abruptly, choking on his words (*Long Way Down* 5).

McGregor’s interest in the effects of landmines, as I have mentioned before, elevates his celebrity status; it puts him above, as *more than*, a celebrity.

However, this display of raw emotion works to *ground* him, temporarily removing his status as a public figure and re-producing him as an ordinary person, one who is capable of perceiving and sympathising with *real* adversity and hardship, and one who is able to experience and be overcome by *real* or *genuine* emotion. This seemingly contradictory state of being is something that is prevalent in celebrity culture, as Turner writes that:

The discourses in play within the media representation of celebrity are highly contradictory and ambivalent: celebrities are extraordinary or they are 'just like us'; they deserve their success or they 'just got lucky'; they are objects of desire and emulation, or they are provocations for derision and contempt; they are genuine down-to-earth people or they are complete phonies ("Understanding Celebrity" 8).

There is an imperative for McGregor (and to an extent, Boorman) to perform both his ordinariness and his 'celebrity-ness'. McGregor is required to acknowledge his fame, his privilege and the responsibilities that come with it, yet he needs to perform them appropriately. These performances need to be (or at least appear to be) authentic and they cannot, by any means, be excessive or appear to be self-indulgent. There needs to be a balance between performances of ordinariness and performances of 'celebrity-ness', and the two work together to both produce and guarantee authenticity. However, quite paradoxically, acknowledgements of fame and status can also work to produce a sense of ordinariness. This acknowledgement can indicate a sense of self-awareness and a sense that it has not been taken for granted. Furthermore, it can also act as a springboard for some self-reflexive (and potentially self-deprecating) humour, as demonstrated by McGregor in a number of occasions.

Take McGregor and Boorman's visit to the site of the original *Star Wars* films in Tunisia, for example (*Long Way Down* 3). *Star Wars* is first mentioned in the first episode of the series, where McGregor and Boorman are planning the route of their trip. In speaking about the heat, McGregor recalls how his make-up kept running in the set of *Star Wars* during its filming in Tunisia (*Long Way Down* 1). This comment, however brief, is significant in that it

acknowledges McGregor's involvement with the film and his occupation as an actor and also, by extension, his status as a celebrity. The visit to the site is a source of excitement for McGregor and Boorman, and Boorman expresses how "glad" he is that they made the effort to visit the site, adding that McGregor would really appreciate it too as the films were a big part of his life (*Long Way Down* 3). Upon arrival at the site, the pair enters the 'Star Wars Bar', where a poster of the more recent *Star Wars* film (starring Ewan McGregor) is mounted on one of its walls (*Long Way Down* 3). The camera zooms in on the poster into a close-up of McGregor's face on the poster before retreating back to reveal Boorman taking a photo of the real-life McGregor grinning cheekily next to his own poster (*Long Way Down* 3). A few more photos (of both McGregor and Boorman next to the poster) are taken and at the end of it Boorman expresses his surprise at the fact that nobody recognised or approached McGregor at the site, leaving him to wonder "if people's minds are fried from the heat" (*Long Way Down* 3). McGregor is equally reflexive about his fame and 'recognisability' as he confesses, with a laugh: "I rather arrogantly thought I'd be mobbed... disappointed" (*Long Way Down* 3). It is, of course, difficult to judge the degree of seriousness with which McGregor's 'confession' is made. McGregor's actions could be deemed as narcissistic and his admission to his vanity could easily be interpreted as sheer egotism and self-involvement. However, his sheepishness and his humour act to counter this. His self-reflexivity, in the form of an admission to his own arrogance, is productive, however paradoxically, in terms of establishing and guaranteeing a sense of ordinariness. It produces him as someone who is able to not take himself too seriously and able laugh at himself, quite similarly to what Palin does in *Sahara*.

McGregor and Boorman's role in *Long Way Down* is twofold and contradictory: at once they are celebrities *and* ordinary people. As celebrities, they are public figures; representatives, in a sense, of contemporary western culture. At the same time, they are also ordinary people and the emotions they experience are indisputably human: the nervousness, the horror, the disbelief, and the urge to make a joke. There is a degree of performativity in

McGregor and Boorman's identities; performativity which is both *embodied* and *appropriate to* the situations for which it is called. *Long Way Down* employs a set of strategies that produce McGregor and Boorman as 'authentic celebrities'. While Palin offers a deliberate *misperformance* of the celebrity, McGregor and Boorman dip in and out of their celebrity-ness, overtly performing both their fame (and as we have seen, bearing the social 'responsibilities' that come with it) and their ordinariness.

The Pace and Dynamics of *Long Way Down*

Throughout the planning process, both McGregor and Boorman are firm in their expectations of the journey. From the start Boorman is concerned about committing to too many things and running out of time, and he points out that "Africa is big and we only have three months to [travel through it]" (*Long Way Down* 1). This results in quite lengthy discussions of, and some arguments about, time constraints and making sure they do not simply 'whizz' or rush through countries and places without 'really experiencing them'. There exists a tension between keeping to schedules and deadlines, and wanting to ensure that the experience is as authentic and as fulfilling as possible. Both McGregor and Boorman make a few comments throughout the programme comparing this trip to their *Long Way Round* trip, mainly about how the latter was less rushed, and that they had more time and more freedom (*Long Way Down* 4). For McGregor and Boorman, *Long Way Down* has to at least be as rewarding and as inspiring as *Long Way*, and as exciting, as 'real' and as 'authentic' for its audiences. A strong discourse of nostalgia can be detected in McGregor's and Boorman's accounts, in that they recall the previous experience to be (in effect) *better* and that they long for a repeat of it. What McGregor and Boorman are reproducing is, in effect, angst about the disappearance of 'travel', in Boorstin and Fussell's conceptualisation of the term. McGregor and Boorman are worried that *Long Way Down* will become a touristy programme, filled with touristy experience, whereas *Long Way Round* was clearly about the experiences of travel.

For McGregor and Boorman, speed is clearly something to be wary of, and the continually express their concerns about rushing through places and countries without having ‘soaked up’ the culture, the people and most of all, the experience. For them, pace, or going too fast, disqualifies and destroys authenticity. The authentic is something that can only be experienced slowly; it is something which can only be achieved with due regard for time. McGregor and Boorman’s aversion to pace is particularly evident in the first five episodes of *Long Way Down*, as they state, again and again, that they constantly feel pressured to meet deadlines and to cover immense distances between places.

The first real time pressure comes in Episode Two, when the team has to make it to Lake Como to visit the Moto Guzzi museum and factory by a certain day, as (it is implied) it is not open any other day. In a team meeting, Malkin points out to McGregor and Boorman that there is a lot of mileage to be covered if they want to make it to the factory, and Alexanian tells them that they need to decide whether it is something that they want to do, or whether they are willing to forgo the opportunity (*Long Way Down 2*). This team meeting is followed directly by Boorman’s video diary entry, where he laments the “terrible pressure just to get on all the time” and the fact that there seems to be a constant “manic rush” to get to places (*Long Way Down 2*). Alexanian acknowledges that they “fucked up on the schedule” for the first time in Episode Three, just as the team is leaving their camping ground in Rome to head towards Sicily to catch the ferry (which only runs once a week) to Tunisia (*Long Way Down 3*). On their first night in Libya McGregor wonders how they are going to get through Libya and all of Egypt in just five to six days (*Long Way Down 3*); and during a particularly arduous leg of the journey where he and McGregor had to ride more than 400 miles in a severe sandstorm after a sleepless night, Boorman questions why they put themselves in such a potentially dangerous situation “just to catch a boat” (*Long Way Down 3*). During a lunch stop in Alexandria, Egypt, both McGregor and Boorman express their concerns to Malkin about feeling exhausted after

riding almost relentlessly, and the fact that they have not had any time to recuperate since they left John o' Groats (*Long Way Down* 4).

McGregor also speaks of feeling touched by a couple he had met who have been riding bikes for nine years. He finds himself feeling "slightly envious of the time that they have" (*Long Way Down* 4). However, he does acknowledge that it is his own fault for not making the journey longer (*Long Way Down* 4). Having time and not being constantly under pressure to meet deadlines and mileages is here regarded as something positive; a luxury and a privilege worth being envious of. There is an ever-present sense that time is something that is constantly running out, creating tension and suspense which sets the tone for most of the first half of the journey, and for the programme as a whole. This continuous sense of constraint is one of the main ways time is measured and kept track of in *Long Way Down*. No dates are ever presented, and days are only counted in relation to the journey - how many days are left leading up to the departure, what number day of the trip it is, and how many days are left. Days are also very rarely named, and when they are, it is only in relation to meeting deadlines (such as a ferry which only runs once a week and a museum which only opens on certain days).

Different locations, events or moments are 'assigned' different paces or speed. Take, for instance, the moment where McGregor and Boorman reach the pyramids in Cairo (*Long Way Down* 4). The sequence is preceded by a lunch stop in which the team, looking glum and morose, speak negatively about feeling "crap", "knackered", "shattered" and "a bit fed up" (*Long Way Down* 4). This all-too-brief moment of respite then cuts to footage of McGregor and Boorman weaving through heavy traffic in (presumably) downtown Alexandria, while rhythmic music plays steadily in the background. The footage then cuts to McGregor and Boorman riding through a much quieter open road, quite obviously out of the city centre, with Boorman, through his helmet microphone, saying that he and McGregor realise that they have chosen the route themselves and that the time they have had to and will spend on the road is a consequence of their decision

(*Long Way Down* 4). The footage of Boorman and McGregor riding along the road is shot through a camera travelling alongside them, providing a sense of speed and movement as the landscape moves in a blur in the background. The sequence consists of fairly mid-length cuts of shots and varying zooms, adding to its dynamics whilst maintaining a degree of patience and calm. The sequence also contains a very short shot of the pair riding through heavy traffic approaching Cairo, yet its significance (in relation to diegetic pace) is lost in its brevity. A quick change to a picture from Boorman's camera then shows that they are closing in on the pyramids. The upbeat, energetic background music continues to build up as McGregor and Boorman high-five each other whilst riding side-by-side, gliding closer to the iconic structures. The scene reaches a crescendo as they arrive, and McGregor giddily giggles and exclaims "oh my god!" in his excitement (*Long Way Down* 4).

While clearly used to illustrate added stress and pressure to reach destinations and to keep to their deadlines, the shot of McGregor and Boorman negotiating traffic in their approach to the Pyramids also serves to add a layer of movement in the quick montage of shots. Pace is augmented in this sequence through both the crescendo of the background music, the range of camera shots used, and the palpable excitement of McGregor and Boorman. Once at the site, stationary cameras are used to capture long and extreme long shots of McGregor and Boorman riding alongside and weaving through the Pyramids, giving the audience a range of rather spectacular shots which showcase their grandeur. Once they stopped McGregor and Boorman looked at each other and they share a giddy laugh, while McGregor's voiceover comments on the "good fortune" that they have had, being able to ride there and to have the place all to themselves once they are there (*Long Way Down* 4).

What follows next is footage of the whole crew gathered some distance away from the Pyramids. Time has clearly passed as the low sun in the horizon indicates that it is dusk and nearing sundown. Footage of McGregor and Boorman smiling, laughing and reflecting is interspersed with shots of

the spectacular landscapes under the dramatic, dusky sky as the pyramids provide an impressive backdrop. Instrumental, contemplative music plays in the background as the diegesis is kept silent and McGregor, in a voiceover, says: “it’s one of those moments in your life when you’re face to face with something, or someone, you’ve known all your life... I was standing looking at the Pyramids, I have known them ever since I’ve been aware yet I never saw them in flesh before” (*Long Way Down* 4). McGregor’s statement may seem to fit in with Boorstin’s contention that people now travel to look for iconic objects, monuments or moments that confirm and satisfy their own expectations (106). Boorstin refers to people’s (i.e. *tourists*’) demand for what he terms touristic “pseudo-events” (108), that is, the “bland and unsurprising reproductions of what the image-flooded tourist knew was there all the time” (109). However, there is a clear attempt, on McGregor’s part, to internalise the experience, to add a sense of personal significance. In his reflection McGregor acknowledges that he has known of the Pyramids all his life, he is aware of their existence, their location and, most importantly, their significance. The Pyramids, for McGregor and Boorman (and, by extension, everyone else in *and watching Long Way Down*), are far more than a set of triangular structures in the middle of the desert; they are great monuments, “feats of engineering”, and something of great historical and cultural significance whose mere sight, as Malkin says, “would make you feel better” (*Long Way Down* 4). McGregor and Boorman speak of how “lucky” they are to be able to come face-to-face with the iconic structures, and they remark on what “an amazing privilege” it is to be given the opportunity to explore them (*Long Way Down* 4).

The sense of gratitude and humility displayed by McGregor and Boorman place them firmly as ordinary people or ordinary traveller who are, at the same time, educated enough to understand and appreciate the magnitude of their experience. McGregor and Boorman’s emotional reactions to seeing the Pyramids are something that is emphasised and focussed on. The Pyramids are portrayed as something that demands a passionate response. Unlike *Sahara*, no historical or cultural knowledge is imparted. What is deemed

important is the affective response elicited by the sight of the monuments. Pace is slowed down once McGregor and Boorman have reached their destination. The upbeat, fast-paced music stops and a quieter, more serene soundtrack takes over. The length of camera shots which comprise the segment does not necessarily get longer but movement, energy and excitement give way to stillness, tranquillity and quiet reflection. Both McGregor and Boorman stand still, trying to soak up the atmosphere while remarking on how “beautiful” the Pyramids are, how they “really [are] one of the Seven Wonders of the World” (*Long Way Down* 4). Unlike Palin, McGregor explicitly says that he is not concerned with historical facts, important dates or “Roman ruins” (*Long Way Down* 5); for him, the most important thing is feeling like he has soaked up as much of Africa as he can (*Long Way Down* 5). While McGregor and Boorman do succumb to the allure and the majesty of a sort of ‘Roman ruin’, they succeed in making the moment about the experience, about what it means for them rather than concerning themselves with facts and the historical information. *Long Way Down* (and McGregor and Boorman) makes it quite clear that it is not centred on imparting knowledge or learning about historical facts, and while McGregor and Boorman may display a certain degree of interest, they certainly do not pretend that they are experts in these matters. For McGregor and Boorman, the most important aspect of the encounter is that the experience is deemed to be worthy of sharing. The sense of excitement, which is heightened further by its juxtaposition with the moroseness of the conversation during their lunch break which precedes it, is genuine (or at least, portrayed quite convincingly as such), and it invites the viewers to partake. The contemplation and the sense of appreciation and awe which follow also are (or seem to be) equally genuine, acting simultaneously to reiterate the cultural significance of the Pyramids and to confirm McGregor and Boorman as travellers rather than tourists.

The tension caused by unrelenting time constraints and the pressure to keep moving forward eventually culminates in a falling out in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, towards the end of Episode Five. McGregor and Boorman both

realise that they have made a mistake in route planning. Boorman blames the row on the massive mileage they have covered, an outcome of the demanding schedule. What is most interesting in this segment is the way both McGregor and Boorman engage with the discourses of travel; what it means for them, and what it should or should not be. McGregor says that he wants to feel like he has soaked up as much of Africa as he can, that he wants to “*feel Africa’s spirit*” (*Long Way Down* 5). Further, McGregor says that for him and Boorman:

the journey isn’t about visiting this place or visiting that place...The journey is a bigger, deeper picture about moving through countries and its people and meeting people and feeling a sense of where you are, at the present tense, feeling that we’re here and now and not feeling we’ve got to get there, then (*Long Way Down* 4).

McGregor distances himself from tourists (or even travellers) who ‘drop in’ and merely ‘visit’ places; for him travel is ‘bigger’ and ‘deeper’ than that. For him, *Long Way Down* is not a holiday, and certainly not a tour; it is a *journey*. Simply being there is not enough, as the process of getting there, the trials, tribulations and emotional ups and downs are all part of the experience. At the same time, travel is also about experiencing the present surrounding, not continuously looking ahead to the next destination or the next port of call. Further, for McGregor and Boorman, the travel experience is closely tied to the idea of *feeling*.

Travel is not just about seeing landscapes and monuments, fulfilling social responsibilities, or even talking to people. For these experiences to count, for them to matter and for them to qualify as being ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ travel experiences, the traveller needs to *feel*. Fussell writes that travel, as opposed to tourism, is “conceived to be like study...its fruits were considered to be the adornment of the mind and formation of judgement” (39). While this is what occurs or at least is strongly performed, to an extent, in *Sahara*, in *Long Way Down* the imperative is for the traveller not to learn, but *feel*, and the moments which are shown in the programme work to not only exhibit McGregor and Boorman’s feelings as they travel through Africa, but it also attempts to elicit the same affective responses from its audience. This

generation of affective responses is characteristic of the media spectacle, and while *Sahara* makes a clear attempt at distancing itself away from the notion of the spectacle, *Long Way Down* is rather unashamedly located within the spectacular.

Long Way Down: An African Spectacle

Long Way Down is clearly eager to distance itself away from the 'touristy': the commoditised, the packaged, the mediated and the predictable. In some ways, it is *more spectacular* than touristic. As we have already seen in the moment where McGregor and Boorman arrive at the Pyramids, the (positive) experience is heightened by the sense of strife and the gloom that precedes it. The pyramids provide McGregor and Boorman (and, by extension, the audience) with a release from the negative atmosphere at the time, yet the experience is made more gratifying, rewarding and satisfying due to the fact that they have *earned* it. McGregor and Boorman have to *work* for their experience, making them more analogous to the type of 'travellers' that Boorstin refers to (85). McGregor and Boorman have earned the right to witness dramatic sunsets, to come face-to-face with spectacular wildlife, and to observe breathtaking scenery, as they had to overcome hardship and challenges. They brave the weather (cold torrential rain in France and Italy (*Long Way Down 2*) and a severe sand storm in Libya (*Long Way Down 3*)), and they have to negotiate some testing riding surfaces and road conditions.

Overcoming challenges is clearly conveyed *and* perceived as something that qualifies *Long Way Down* as being 'authentic' and credible. More importantly, however, this display of challenges adds to the sense of drama and excitement; it is exhilarating, gripping and thrilling and it is characteristic of the spectacle. The spectacle, as we have already established, should not be thought of in terms of its traditional meaning, as extravagant shows or exhibition, or even as a mere collection of images. The spectacle, is the *entre-nous*, the between-us which acts as the mediator between the

subjects and the collection of sights, sounds and their messages which effectively replace direct social relations. While *Sahara* employs the idea of the anti-spectacle to depict an authentic style of travel (and therefore an authentic experience), *Long Way Down* does the exact opposite. It employs the spectacular, the frenzy, the excitement, the emotional turmoil, *the hyperbole* to depict authenticity. As we have seen in the Pyramids sequence, *Long Way Down* often interweaves positive and negative moments to heighten the sense of drama. The authentic, for *Long Way Down*, is the reality of the passion, nothing is (or at least appears to be) polished, glossed over or hidden: its realness demands and sustains attention.

Similarly to *Sahara*, pace (or rather, lack thereof) is used in *Long Way Down* to frame moments of thoughtfulness and deliberation; in a way, to convey moments of self-reflexion and self-transformation. However, unlike *Sahara*, *Long Way Down* does not attempt to move away from the logic of the spectacle. These slow, meditative moments are interspersed and juxtaposed with energy, momentum, enthusiasm, and heightened emotions. When *Long Way Down* slows down, it is to ensure that McGregor and Boorman get (or at least *appears* to get) their chance to “soak up as much Africa as [they] can” (*Long Way Down* 5). There is a tension between McGregor and Boorman wanting their experience to be as fulfilling and as authentic as possible, and the need to keep moving on and moving forward in the journey; to make the next border crossing, to catch the next ferry, to complete the next UN mission and to reach the next destination. *Long Way Down* presents itself as an authentic travel/adventure documentary; so McGregor and Boorman must appear to have an authentic experience, they need to look as if they have completely immersed themselves in the adventure. It cannot look hurried, glossed over, romanticised, commercialised or commoditised; in other words, it cannot appear to be (overly) mediated. McGregor and Boorman’s encounter with the gorillas in Rwanda provides one of the best and clearest illustrations of this.

Upon the team's arrival at their accommodation in Rwanda, McGregor, 'privately' through his helmet microphone, says that:

I was quite overwhelmed as we left the border that we were here. I thought, 'we know the name Rwanda so well...' We associate it with one thing, which is horrible, horrible genocide and violence. What's this nation been through? And how has it managed to heal itself? I don't know (*Long Way Down* 7).

His statement sets the tone for how Rwanda is to be understood as a country. It also provides a preview of the kind of 'journey' they will undertake through the country: it will be one which demands profound emotional involvement. This rather sombre introduction is then, quite curiously, followed by McGregor and Boorman talking, the next morning, about how excited they are about hiking up Parc National des Volcans to see some gorillas. However, rather typically, this is not a simple or straightforward hike: an element of risk and danger is added as McGregor and Boorman are accompanied by a number of soldiers who, as Boorman explains, are there to protect them against poachers (*Long Way Down* 7). The idea of working for and earning the experience is once again established as the hike proves to be a rather strenuous one. However, the team is rewarded for it by coming across a family of gorillas, and as Boorman remarks, it is "so worth the walk and everything. It's just... amazing" (*Long Way Down* 7). A series of statements conveying their emotions at encountering the gorillas are articulated by McGregor and Boorman, ranging from disbelief: "oh, my god, he's beautiful. There he is, can you believe it?"; to traces of fear and trepidation: "I feel quite nervous, I mean, they're so big"; to pure awe and wonder: "so beautiful, we're so close"; "she just looked at us, with this open expression as she breastfed her child. God, it was *extraordinary*"; "there are things about them that blew my mind, like if you looked at their eyelids for too long, it started to actually freak me out because they just looked like us when they blink and look"; "looking into the eyes of a wild gorilla, and you have this moment of connection which is extraordinary. Extraordinary!" (*Long Way Down* 7).

A strong sense of the natural and the unmediated is conveyed strongly in the sequence as it is kept virtually silent apart from the sound of rustling

leaves and gorillas chewing. McGregor and Boorman speak in whispered tones, and the lack of background music acts to further reinforce the serenity and importance of the moment. The pace of the sequence is also reduced: there are no quick cuts between shots, and McGregor and Boorman are shown barely making any movements while they watch the gorillas sitting, savouring their food or moving around slowly and contentedly. McGregor and Boorman are quite clearly overwhelmed by the experience. Boorman later remarks that it was a “beautiful, beautiful day”, and that he had “really, really enjoyed it” (*Long Way Down* 7); and McGregor says, “that was the most amazing day with the gorillas, unbelievable. Absolutely amazing to be so close to such beautiful, strong animals...What a privilege” (*Long Way Down* 7). The focus of McGregor and Boorman’s encounters with the gorillas is not knowledge or education; rather, it is the emotions experienced by McGregor and Boorman during their encounter. Similarly to what happens at the Pyramids, the experience is assigned more credibility and authenticity through McGregor and Boorman’s emotional involvement in it.

Predictably and inevitably, ‘Africa’ is a word that is heard often in *Long Way Down*, given the location the team travels through. During the team’s pre-departure preparations, the magnitude of the journey is continuously set up and reiterated through the repetition of the word ‘Africa’. For example: McGregor and Boorman comment on how excited they are to be “tackl[ing] Africa from head to toe”, how “Africa... that’s just... gonna be mad”, and the fact that “Africa is big and we only have three months to do it in” (*Long Way Down* 1). The team also had to go through a “more African-orientated hostile environment training course” (*Long Way Down* 1), and this sets up the continent as the ‘Other’ as far as travel destinations go. Furthermore, a distinct border is drawn between Europe (that is, *western*: the known, the familiar) and Africa, the great unknown. On the morning of their departure from Rome, McGregor, in the middle of speaking to the camera about the next leg of the trip, suddenly exclaims, “we’re going to Africa the next day!” as if it had just dawned upon him and once in Sicily, he then speaks of “getting everything ready for Africa” (*Long Way Down* 3).

At the very start of the series McGregor remarks on how “great” it is to spend time with Boorman again, and the sentiment continues throughout the series as McGregor testifies, again and again, how “lovely” it is to be riding with his friend. For the both of them the trip presents an opportunity to escape their day-to-day lives, to get away from their daily commitments and responsibilities, which may have prevented them from spending time with each other. McGregor and Boorman’s travel through Africa is to a significant extent about escape – about getting away from the ordinary, the everyday, the routine and the mundane, consistent with what Urry labels as the driving force behind travel: a desire which arises out of a basic binary division between the ordinary or everyday and the extraordinary (12). Moreover, *Long Way Down* is, as McGregor puts it, “the stuff of... little boy’s dream of adventure” (*Long Way Down* 4).

The idea of escape is not one that is ever mentioned explicitly in the programme, yet just prior to their return to ‘normality’, Boorman remarks that for the duration of *Long Way Down*, “it’s just you, and getting yourself through the day” (*Long Way Down* 10). He then observes, “the no responsibilities, you know? ... It’s the most luxury” (*Long Way Down* 10). In the last episode of the series, as the journey draws close to completion, McGregor and Boorman express how torn they are between not wanting their adventure to end and looking forward to being reunited with their families (*Long Way Down* 10). McGregor and Boorman can be heard saying how much they “love” travelling through Africa; how they are “so accustomed” to riding their bikes everyday and that it “feels like the right thing to be doing” (*Long Way Down* 10). They also speak about getting “sadder and sadder” about the journey coming to an end, yet these feelings are always conflicted with talks of looking forward to seeing their wives and children (*Long Way Down* 10). As much as the journey is a trying and challenging one at times, it still plays its role as a form of escape for both McGregor and Boorman: it is a place and an occasion where they can be carefree, where they do not have to worry about anyone else but themselves (in most parts) and partake in

'boyish' acts. At the same time, there is an imperative for McGregor and Boorman to re-assume their regular roles in the world; to *want* to return, to be glad for the journey to end, and to miss their families. Their disposition to escape and play has to be balanced by the realisation of their responsibilities.

In a sense, Africa, as the different, the strange and the exotic, provides an idyllic setting for a form of escape. Furthermore, this (perceived) inherent difference ensures that whatever happens in *Long Way Down* will always elicit excitement, wonder, awe, curiosity and many other forms of feeling. An almost countless number of Africa sunsets are presented in *Long Way Down*, each of them serving to illustrate and emphasise the beauty and exoticness of Africa, which, in turn, acts as the perfect backdrop for moments of contemplation or personal reflection. Africa, for McGregor and Boorman, first and foremost constitutes the site for the production of an almost unlimited supply of affect.

Conclusion

Long Way Down focuses on the emotional states and reactions of McGregor and Boorman as they travel through Africa. Unlike Palin in *Sahara*, these affective responses (moments of hype and excitement as well as of frustrations, horror and despair) are privileged over historical places, landscapes and local people, and form a large part (if not the majority of) its focus and its appeal. It is these affective responses which drive the narrative of *Long Way Down*, putting the programme in a sub-genre different to that of *Sahara*. Unlike Palin, McGregor and Boorman are not armed with facts and information, nor are they particularly knowledgeable with regard to the history and cultural stories of the places they visit and the people they come across. Nor is it their aim to be so; they are not, by any means, 'experts'. While *Sahara* is thoughtful, deliberate and unhurried, *Long Way Down* is energetic and dynamic. *Long Way Down* evokes affective responses and attachment

from its audience through the overt display and performances of emotion on the part of McGregor and Boorman.

Chapter Four:

Intrepid Journeys

Introduction

Intrepid Journeys is a New Zealand television series based on the 'intrepid' travel undertaken by a number of New Zealand celebrities to various travel destinations around the world. The series is screened in New Zealand on TV One and its first episode was aired in 2003. Unlike *Sahara* and *Long Way Down*, *Intrepid Journeys* employs the series or episodic format, whereby each episode contains one full 'intrepid journey'. It is also worth noting that *Intrepid Journeys* is associated with 'Intrepid Travel', a company which is in the business of selling a particular type, or rather a particular brand, of travel. The 'journeys' of *Intrepid Journeys* consist of around 15 days of travel in the country (or, in some cases, countries) of destination. These 15 days of travel are then condensed into 44-minute episodes, allowing for advertisement breaks in a 60-minute television slot. In its eight seasons, *Intrepid Journeys* has travelled to more than 50 countries around the world. However, this chapter will focus on five episodes in particular: 'The Road to Damascus with Danielle Cormack', 'Intrepid Egypt with Marcus Lush', 'Colours of Morocco with Dave Dobbyn', 'Journey to Timbuktu with Te Radar', and 'Namibia with Jenny Shipley'. These episodes have been chosen for the countries visited, which will allow for some form of geographical and, perhaps, cultural continuity with the other two programmes analysed in this thesis.

Each episode of *Intrepid Journeys* is hosted by a different New Zealand celebrity, including actors, comedians, and politicians. The hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* work in a similar way to Palin in *Sahara*, as the narrative of each episode is framed, to an extent, by their personalities. Each host is interested, engaged in, and appreciative of, the benefit of travel; yet the differences in attitude and approach, though subtle, can be found in each episode. Te Radar,

for instance, is light-hearted, humorous and playful, in comparison with Dobbyn's more philosophical and spiritual approach. Shipley and Cormack are both down-to-earth and amiable, yet Shipley is graceful and compassionate while Cormack is sociable and vivacious. At another end of the spectrum altogether, Lush is dry, understated and a little sardonic. However, these differences are quite superficial, as each host is committed to what we can call the discourse of the value of travel.

The 'journeys' of *Intrepid Journeys* are considerably shorter in length than those of *Sahara with Michael Palin* or *Long Way Down* (98 and 85 days respectively), which means that the programme operates at an entirely different pace, and is therefore presented in a different style. However, despite a number of differences, *Intrepid Journeys* shares the same generic characteristics and dispositions as both *Sahara* and *Long Way Down*. Authenticity continues to be the prevalent discourse and a form of capital in the programme, and the dichotomy between travel and tourism is again articulated and emphasised.

The company 'Intrepid Travel' promotes itself as a provider of tours which travel off the beaten track: it is about 'real' people having 'real' experiences, discovering 'real' cultures. *Intrepid Journeys* does the same thing. 'Intrepid Travel' and *Intrepid Journeys* claim that they are able to assist travellers in finding real or 'intrepid' travel. The dichotomy of travel and tourism can be detected not only in how 'Intrepid Travel' (and, by extension, *Intrepid Journeys*) describes itself; it is also often articulated by *Intrepid Journeys*' hosts. They do this by describing their experience as 'real', distancing themselves from tourism, and stating how much the experience has changed them. As Culler writes, the "ferocious denigration of tourists is in part an attempt to convince oneself that one is not a tourist. The attempt to distinguish between tourists and real travellers is a part of tourism-integral to it rather than outside or beyond it" (n. pag.). The hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* attempt to steer their journey (and, therefore, *Intrepid Journeys*) away from tourism, showing how the dichotomy between travel and tourism does

indeed “carry a desire and a self-contempt which drive the industry at the most fundamental level” (Frow “Time and Commodity Culture” 69).

Modernity vs. Culture

Similarly to *Sahara*, in *Intrepid Journeys* modernity is placed quite explicitly against, and in contrast to, a notion of culture that is largely pre-modern. There is also a tendency to regard modernity with disdain and distrust, and the hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* display an eagerness to critique modernity, to display their appreciation of culture and ‘the simple life’ of the Other. For *Intrepid Journeys*, modernity is what has taken away authenticity, and the hosts demonstrate a kind of nostalgia for those places and people untouched and unspoilt by modernity. For the hosts of *Intrepid Journeys*, the encounters with pre-modern cultures and peoples form the basis of their authentic (and pedagogic) exchanges and, by extension, form the basis of their status as real travellers.

During her overnight stay in Wadi Rum, Cormack is taken by “simplicity” of the lives of the Bedouin people (‘Road to Damascus’). After experiencing an evening of music played on “home-made instruments” and freshly roasted coffee, Cormack remarks on how “good” their life looks (‘Road to Damascus’). Similarly, Te Radar remarks that the music festival he is attending is “delightful” and that while it is chaotic, it is armed with “a sense of mystery and intrigue” which modern music festivals lack (‘Journey to Timbuktu’). And finally, Lush comments on the lack of advertising in the underground station in Cairo, and he points out that the public do not wear labelled clothing and with this discovery he announces the people of Cairo “don’t seem to be tainted by western commercialism at all” (‘Intrepid Egypt’).

It is, however, Shipley’s episode which offers a remarkably clear demonstration of the contrast between modernity and pre-modern culture. Throughout the episode, Shipley expresses her curiosity about the cultural

make up of Namibia: it is the youngest nation in Africa, yet it is home to one of the oldest tribes in Africa. Shipley travels north to Kaokoland, an area which, she says, is “dominated by the Himba [people]” (‘Namibia’). Upon arrival in the region, Shipley’s voiceover narrates that the Himba people “look completely amazing...in their tribal jewellery and their red ochre body paint” (‘Namibia’). As the camera shows scenes from around Shipley’s bus, she continues: “life in these towns can be tough and I get the feeling that modern Namibia is challenging the Himba way of life” (‘Namibia’). The shot then switches to show Shipley arriving at a tribal village, walking up towards an awaiting Himba man, a tribal headman who, as Shipley says, is “trying to hang on to his culture” (‘Namibia’). Shipley is then shown sitting with a Himba woman, holding her baby. With the help of a translator (who can be heard but not seen), Shipley tells the (unnamed) Himba woman that she has “two babies”, before proceeding to tell her their genders and the fact that she likes other people’s babies as she is rather fruitlessly waiting to be a grandmother (‘Namibia’). After asking for permission, Shipley then enters one of the huts. Once inside, the camera shows close-up shots of activities inside the hut.

The opposition of the traditional and the modern is not only articulated, but becomes apparent and is made *visible* inside the hut. The earthy, primitive and rudimentary hut provides a striking background to the imposing, technologically-advanced film cameras. In addition, the reaction of the Himba people and their apparent ‘interest’ serves to further highlight the contrast between the two categories, placing them further apart and setting them quite directly against one another. Just as the paraglider interrupts the traditional serenity and tranquillity of the Sahara desert (see: Chapter Two), by entering the hut, modern technology, in the form of cameras, quite literally penetrates traditional Himba life. Shipley’s presence, as well as the cameras’, interrupts what is described to be the daily ritual of the Himba family. Shipley says that while the Headman’s family is busy preparing the red ochre body paint, he himself “seems interested in slightly newer technology” (‘Namibia’). Shipley expresses her fascination with, and her affection for, the

Himba people as they are “dignified, beautiful...and so practical” (‘Namibia’). With the aid of a translator, Shipley converses with the tribal headman on the topic of cultural preservation, and she remarks on what a mistake it is in the western world to believe that development is always for the best. She then reiterates: “I think it’s a mistake for us to think that everything developed and western is best” (‘Namibia’).

Shipley’s views in regards to modernity and development are consistent with, and appropriate to, those required of her as a traveller. By voicing her judgement on the subject of modernity, Shipley is effectively reproducing a discourse which her role, as a traveller, requires of her. Pre-modern culture is celebrated for its ‘realness’ and its ‘authenticity’. On the other hand, modernity is destructive and corrupt, and it is to be condemned. The Himba culture, as Shipley says, is “dying” and modernity is to blame for this (‘Namibia’). Shipley’s encounter with the Himba tribe attempts to be educational and instructive, yet, at the same time, it also attempts to appear warm and friendly. Shipley’s exchange with the Himba woman appears to be a remarkably ordinary one: two women, or two mothers, talking about children and grandchildren. Here Shipley employs a strategy of ‘impression management’, where her apparent ‘ordinariness’ acts to establish her status as an authentic traveller. Moreover, at the end of her journey, Shipley comments on how “nice” it was to drop her title and her history; to be an ordinary person and to travel Namibia simply “as Jenny” (‘Namibia’). This sentiment is carried through all the episodes of *Intrepid Journeys*, as each celebrity host travel as ‘ordinary’ travellers.

Celebrity, ‘New Zealandness’ and Authenticity

Intrepid Journeys showcases New Zealanders exploring the world, travelling to interesting and exotic destinations and having adventures. Moreover, the programme attempts to show New Zealanders, or, specifically, New Zealand celebrities, ‘roughing it’ – sleeping in tents or budget accommodation

establishments, eating local foods from street stalls and markets, and generally getting out of their comfort zones. The kind of travel experience that *Intrepid Journeys* tries to portray is certainly not one of 'insulation' or one that is based on "cultural mirages" (Boorstin 99). Rather, these hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* experience these things *firsthand*: they meet and interact with the locals, sharing stories and learning about each other's lives, cultures and customs; they visit historical sites; and they climb remote mountains and sand dunes. These celebrity hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* are interested, adventurous and open-minded.

The hosts have three main shared characteristics. Firstly they are New Zealanders: they are identifiable as such and their performance and articulation of this 'New Zealandness' frame their travels and encounters with the 'Other' (people, culture, and landscapes). Secondly, they are celebrities, meaning that the ambivalent discourses that surround 'celebrity-ness' will again be present in the way that they are represented and understood. Thirdly, and most importantly, they are travellers: despite their cultural identity and their status, they are required to perform their roles as travellers, and they need to reproduce appropriate discourses, attitudes and sensibilities.

Intrepid Journeys offers a New Zealand perspective on travel, and the 'exotic' or the 'Other' is compared to and contrasted with an overt sense of 'New Zealandness'. Urry argues that travel (and tourism) is the result of a basic binary division between the ordinary/everyday and the extraordinary (12). Travel calls for a certain amount of strangeness and exoticness: the destination (the people, the landscape, the culture or the 'Other') needs to be interesting, or, more specifically, different. The 'Other' in *Intrepid Journeys* is not merely the other culture; it is the 'Other' seen through the eyes of a New Zealander. People, things and landscapes identified as different, as interesting, as strange or as exotic are judged and determined by the host whose background and cultural identity are recognisably those of a New Zealander. In turn, what the audiences see, hear and feel is filtered through

the cultural viewpoint, and, as Bourdieu would put it, the *habitus*, of a New Zealander (78). *Intrepid Journeys* employs a series of strategies to promote its 'New Zealandness', and the most visible is its currency page.

Each episode of *Intrepid Journeys* features a 'currency page' which appears near the start of the episode, usually after an initial introduction to the country to be visited by the host. This page provides viewers with information regarding the local currency, and how it compares to the New Zealand dollar. In addition, it also tells the viewers the cost of basic items, such as a bottle of water or a beer. The currency page always features a voiceover from the host, their voice adding to the visual information available on the screen. Their tone is conversational and informal, and provides value judgements on how cheap or expensive they think the countries they are visiting are. The presence of *Intrepid Journeys'* currency page suggests that the programme regards itself as more informational or promotional compared to *Sahara* or *Long Way Down*.

The hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* make it clear that they are New Zealanders, and there are a number of signs which point out their 'New Zealandness'. For example, while commenting on the dubious state of the vehicles, Cormack mentions that unlike in New Zealand, the Warrant of Fitness does not exist in Jordan. Towards the end of another episode, Dobbyn can be heard singing "everything is ka pai... I'm here at last, it's such a blast" ('Colours of Morocco'). Lastly, Shipley refers to herself as "always the practical girl" ('Namibia'), reproducing a familiar notion of the resourceful, capable yet laid-back Kiwi. The signs articulate the hosts' 'New Zealandness', reproducing distinct signs which are identifiably and recognisably New Zealand. More importantly, however, are the ways in which their identities are inexpressly articulated: the signs of 'New Zealandness' which are not necessarily verbalised but, rather, performed. Finally, but perhaps most importantly, all of the programme's hosts are New Zealand celebrities; they are people who are well-known or at least familiar to the New Zealand audience. These celebrities, in most cases, are instantly recognisable. Their fame and their

exposure to the public means that their personality traits, their taste, their sense of humour and their character in general are more or less known. Dave Dobbyn, for instance, is an artist and musician, and his interests are predominantly cultural, aesthetic and spiritual. Dobbyn's concluding comment is that his journey has added "vistas to the vocabulary of becoming an artist, a song-writer" ('Colours of Morocco'), effectively reproducing his cultural identity. Te Radar typifies the good-humoured, laid-back and resourceful New Zealander, ready to tackle any adventure in a typical 'Kiwi' fashion. However, it is Shipley's episode in particular which is especially constructed by and within her (former) professional role as a prime minister. In contrast to any other episode, Shipley's identity is showcased and made explicit during her introduction.

'Namibia with Jenny Shipley' starts with a statement from Shipley: "I retired from politics in 2002 for the quiet life" ('Namibia'). Shipley's statement is accompanied by a diegetically-silent visual montage of her performing her role as prime minister: in a black suit walking briskly down a corridor, evidently before or after an official engagement; in a blue suit holding a press conference; and in an official handshake with (former) Governor General Sir Michael Hardie Boys, presumably on the day she was officially named as the Prime Minister of New Zealand. Shipley then muses, "I ask myself what on earth am I doing allowing cameras back into my world" ('Namibia'), implying that the 'quiet' life is one away from the cameras, away from the public eye; it is a private life. She then declares, "my name's Jenny Shipley. I was the Prime Minister of New Zealand, and I'm going to Namibia" ('Namibia'). Unlike the other hosts, Shipley is identified and defined not just by her name and her travel destination, but also by her professional role. In turn, her identity could be used not only to define her (her actions, her conversations, and her experience), but the episode itself. Further, Shipley's identity also frames the episode for the audience: her journey is not simply an intrepid journey: it is the intrepid journey of Jenny Shipley, the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, and now a media celebrity. However, with the exception of her introduction, Shipley is predominantly portrayed as

ordinary through her episode. Her intrepid journey is simultaneously one which belongs to the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, but, more importantly, it is also the journey of an ordinary New Zealander or rather, more precisely, an ordinary New Zealand traveller. Shipley's professional role, in the case of *Intrepid Journeys*, actually acts as a backdrop to *highlight* her ordinariness. Over the course of the episode Shipley is a former prime minister of New Zealand, but, more significantly, she is a woman, a mother, and a traveller.

Similarly to *Long Way Down*, part of the attraction of *Intrepid Journeys* is to see celebrities in 'real life', out of their ordinary settings and out of their comfort zones. However, unlike *Long Way Down* and *Sahara*, the hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* are never seen (with the exception of Shipley) acknowledging or performing their 'celebrity-ness' during their travels. Their fame or 'status' as celebrities is not expressly recognised in the programme, it is almost completely disregarded. This means that they travel as unknowns and these celebrity hosts experience the world and encounter other people as *ordinary* travellers. However, it does not mean that the discourses of celebrity are completely irrelevant in *Intrepid Journeys*. Quite the contrary, this disregard (both by the hosts themselves and, to an extent, by the programme) is a significant part of *Intrepid Journeys*. We have already observed that Palin's deliberate misperformance of celebrity, and McGregor and Boorman's simultaneous performances of the celebrity and the ordinary, act to construct a sense of authenticity, both for themselves and for the programme they are hosting. For *Intrepid Journeys*, the programme's disregard of its hosts' celebrity status also aids in constructing a sense of authenticity, or, more aptly, *intrepidness*, to its hosts, its journeys and itself, the programme.

Chapters One, Two and Three have established that scholars have identified the contradictory and ambivalent nature of the discourses that surround celebrity (See: Turner). The way celebrities are viewed and represented fluctuate between 'special' or 'gifted' and 'ordinary'; 'deserving'

and 'fraudulent' or 'lucky' (Turner "Understanding Celebrity" 8), and the same ambivalence applies to the celebrities who host *Intrepid Journeys*. On the one hand, their prominence in society and their recognisability mean that they could act as a sort of guarantor of the authenticity of the experience, and, by extension, of the episode or even programme as a whole. Their standing in society, the fact that they have 'made it' and achieved fame – made something of their lives – suggests that they are commendable or trustworthy. On the other hand, they could be "complete phonies" who "just got lucky" (Turner "Understanding Celebrity" 8), meaning they are no more qualified, or even less qualified, to pass judgement on the subject of authenticity. Given that celebrities are often perceived as "the epitome of the inauthenticity or constructedness of mass-mediated popular culture" (Turner "Understanding Celebrity" 5), their presence in *Intrepid Journeys* may counteract any attempts on establishing a sense of the authentic.

Andrew Tolson argues that "our culture has become fascinated by a type of public performance in which signs of 'real emotion' can be detected" (446). He adds that there exists an imperative to 'be yourself' in the contemporary media industry (Tolson 446). Tolson contends that 'being yourself' "must be understood as a type of public *performance*; but a performance which, crucially, is not perceived as 'acting' (445). He notes that "for this to be brought off successfully, the public persona of the celebrity needs to project an aura of 'authenticity' which...also lays claim to a wider moral credibility" (Tolson 445). The opening up of the backstage region is utilised in both *Sahara* and *Long Way Down* and it is again present in *Intrepid Journeys*. The technique operates in a similar way to the other two programmes: its purpose and function is to construct a sense of authenticity. In Chapter Three I referred to *Long Way Down*'s employment of 'disclosure' as a strategy that works to construct and enhance its authenticity. While this is not utilised to the same extent in *Intrepid Journeys*, it is nevertheless part of an integral strategy. The format and time constraints of *Intrepid Journey* restrict the programme in terms of the amount of information it can provide, so instead of 'full disclosure', the programme relies on what Tolson defines to be "visual

rhetoric” of authenticity (445) to construct a sense of the real. For the hosts of *Intrepid Journeys*, this means being shown in ‘intimate’ settings and during times which are traditionally private.

At the beginning of ‘Colours of Morocco with Dave Dobbyn’, Dobbyn is shown in his hotel room, tucked in bed just before he is about to sleep. Here he talks about how modern technology aids in alleviating his homesickness: he is able to listen to his favourite music and read his bible on his iPod, and he can call and send text messages to his family back home in New Zealand on his mobile phone. Te Radar, on the other hand, is shown stripping down to his underwear in his hotel room while telling the camera that he is “looking forward to washing the Dogon dust off [him]self” (‘Namibia’). Standing in his boxer shorts, he proceeds to tell the camera that he is also looking forward to going to the toilet as he had not been able to in the six days that he has been in Mali. The camera then follows Te Radar into the bathroom, where, in his attempt to wash his turban, he has dyed his hands purple. The camera also follows Shipley into her tent and she is shown inside her sleeping bag, without her glasses and without any make-up as she is getting ready to go to sleep. The next morning Shipley takes a shower in the ‘bush shower’ and the camera shows not only the construction of the shower but her head and her face as she tries to negotiate shampooing her hair in the cold morning water.

These moments of ‘intimacy’, however brief, claim to break down the barrier between the hosts’ public and private appearances. Further, they also act to exhibit the apparent omni-presence of cameras in *Intrepid Journeys*. These moments suggest that the camera can be present to capture every minute of the hosts’ experience, even their most private moments. Furthermore, it implies that the cameras are always given access to the hosts, that there are few moments too private or personal for the cameras not to capture and for the programme not to show. At the same time, it also suggests that the hosts are willing ‘sharers’ of these moments; that they are apparently aware of the demands for authenticity in travel and in travel programming. These displays act to construct a sense of authenticity for both

the programme, and for its hosts. In this light, the hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* are portrayed as *knowing* travellers: those who are aware of the discourse of authentic travel programming.

By forgoing their fame and their celebrity status, Cormack, Dobby, Lush and Te Radar are able to stake a claim to being 'real' and 'intrepid' travellers. They travel the world as *ordinary* travellers: they stay at budget accommodation and they eat food bought on the side of the street or at local markets. The term 'intrepid' is often used by the programme's hosts, either to refer to a particular moment or experience, to simply refer to the trip, or as a way of characterising the journey. *Intrepid Journeys'* connection with Intrepid Travel brings a set of generic assumptions and generic constraints which guide both the programme and its audiences. The word 'intrepid', in this case, can be treated as an intertextual reference or as a generic cue; it could be unpacked to reveal a series of generic conventions and expectations. 'Intrepid' could mean adventurous and exploratory, as seen in Te Radar's 'journey' to Timbuktu and Lush's climb up Mt Sinai. It could also mean getting out of one's comfort zone and limiting luxuries as Shipley demonstrates by sleeping in a tent, showering outdoors and forgoing make-up. The hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* often camp outdoors, and when they do stay at an accommodation establishment, their amenities are rudimentary. They are 'roughing it'. The term could also be tied in with the choice of destinations chosen for the programme, which are often third world and/or 'exotic', and very rarely 'luxurious'. The destination countries of *Intrepid Journeys* are a key part in the construction and the interpretation of the programme.

'Intrepid' also refers to the situation that these travellers are surrounded by foreigners. It is also worth noting that no host is ever seen interacting or acknowledging other travellers, even though it is obvious (visually) that they are around – on the same bus, truck, boat, or donkey-riding group. For instance, Dobby's camel ride in the desert is a group activity, and a number of long shots in the sequence clearly reveal the presence of two other 'camel riders' ('Colours of Morocco'). Additionally, at the start of his river cruise

along the Nile, Lush acknowledges that other people on the boat are mostly Australian travellers, but he is not once shown interacting with them. The distancing themselves from, and appearing not to be associating with, other tourists are utilised by the hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* to establish and confirm their status as travellers. The dichotomy between travel and tourism can again be detected here, as Cormack, Dobbyn and Lush are, in a sense, portrayed to be *better*, or possessing more capital than, the “herds, droves, flocks or swarms” (Culler n. pag.) of tourists. The hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* travel alone; and they experience the countries they visit by themselves and for themselves.

Travel as Transformative

Similarly to *Sahara* and *Long Way Down*, *Intrepid Journeys* claims to be a real, authentic, and *intrepid* travel programme. At the same time, its hosts, too, claim to be real, authentic intrepid travellers. The hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* are active in reproducing the dichotomy between tourist and traveller. Culler argues that the desire to distance oneself from being labelled a tourist is a common one; in fact, he writes that “part of what is involved in being a tourist is disliking tourists (both other tourists and the fact that one is oneself a tourist)” (n. pag.). Danielle Cormack, for instance, is happy to find that she has steered away not necessarily from other tourists, but other antipodeans. Upon entering the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Syria, Cormack says that while there are a lot of tourists there, she is pleased that they are either from Iran or Iraq, and not Australia or New Zealand. She is eager to distance herself from being a typical tourist as she expresses her delight at finding that even though she is at a ‘touristy’ spot, these tourists are not (her idea of) ‘common’ or ‘ordinary’ tourists. These particular tourists at Umayyad Mosque are *exotic* tourists, and their exoticness and difference elevate them from the ‘regular’ tourist who are often regarded as the “lowest of the low” (Culler n. pag.).

Consistent with how 'Intrepid Travel' describes itself, the hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* often define what they are experiencing or encountering as 'real'. Shipley describes the market scenes at Katutura on a Saturday morning as "real-life Namibia" ('Namibia'), and Cormack refers to the ancient Roman ruins of Jerash as "real history" ('Road to Damascus'). As an adjunct to this claim, each episode of *Intrepid Journeys* links the realness of the experience to the discourse of self-transformation.

Take Cormack's visit to a refugee camp, for example. As the camera captures images of a fairly desolate, run-down township from a moving vehicle, Cormack, through a voiceover, says that she is stopping at a Palestinian refugee camp, located just outside Amman, on her way to the desert ('Road to Damascus'). Cormack continues:

Right now is my highlight and my lowlight. Low because it's incredibly sad that places like this exist. This is where people have to seek some sort of political asylum because of what is happening in their own country. Incredibly sad that that war is still raging and that these people are living in these camps [or] compound ('Road to Damascus').

Cormack's voiceover is accompanied by both sweeping shots of the township taken from a moving vehicle, and of Cormack herself walking around the township. Cormack is then shown talking to a few local men, asking them how long they have lived there for. The man answers: "10... 15 years" and the camera switches between focussing at the man she is talking to and at the smiling, chatting children who have gathered on the inside of the circle. The diegesis is again rendered silent as Cormack continues: "highlight because of the joy that I could see me being there are bringing these kids", and the camera tilts down to focus on smiling, laughing children waving and giving Cormack the thumbs-up. Near the end of the sequence, Cormack asks the man she is talking to if he was telling the children to be good, and the segment closes with her cheering along with the children, showing that some things, such as joy, can be shared and communicated despite a language barrier. Shortly after that, Cormack is back on the road, as indicated by the camera capturing more images from a moving vehicle. Cormack continues

her reflection: “I guess this part of the world has all manner of ostracised people. It’s still hard to process that people are forced to live in camps for years. The kids – being outcast is all they know” while the scenery changes from the township to green, sprawling countryside and empty, open roads. The music also changes to a more upbeat one as Cormack heads towards her next adventure, this time a more positive one.

Cormack’s visit lasts barely one minute in the episode. What is shown of her interaction with the locals is also extremely brief and, because of that, seemingly unsubstantial. However, Cormack is still able to reflect on her experience as her encounter, despite its brevity, seems to have had an effect on her and her perception of the world. Cormack is, in a sense, required to reproduce the discourse of self-transformation and self-improvement. The programme, or, even beyond that, *travel*, demands this from her: it is important that she reflects, learns, betters herself and adjusts her perspective. The genre also demands for her encounter and her interaction to be ‘real’ and genuine, as opposed to staged, packaged or sanitised, and her articulation of self-reflection guards against this. At the end of her trip, Cormack starts her (customary) concluding statement by acknowledging her common “fears of terrorist nations” (‘Road to Damascus’) at the start of her journey. However, she reflects on how “generous and non-threatening” all the people she encountered were, something which is quite the contrary to media portrayal. Cormack’s reflection is not, by any means, an uncommon one in the programme.

At the end of their trip all of the hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* speak of how ‘taken’ they were by the places they have just visited, how ‘eye-opening’ their experience was, and how much their perception has changed. Each host speaks of having learnt or gained something from the experience, portraying the journey in nothing but a positive light. Te Radar remarks on how “amazing” it is to “realise, or re-realise”, how people live in Mali: “living in homes made out of stones and mud [and] cooking on open fires with no electricity” (‘Journey to Timbuktu’). Dobbyn comments on the “changes”

(‘Colours of Morocco’) in him as he travels through Morocco. He speaks about losing himself in the journey, overcoming “certain social shyness” and “stripping away the Pakeha layers” to find something new in himself (‘Colours of Morocco’). Even Lush, whose initial demeanour and tone indicate a scepticism and lack of enthusiasm for the trip, concedes at the end of his journey that he felt privileged to have experienced what he did. He remarks that everyone seems to have been “hit by the miserable stick” whilst walking through the township of Aswan, before proceeding to make a series of negative comments about items which are being sold in the shops (‘Intrepid Egypt’). Lush also expresses his disappointment at having to make a stop to look at “tired old statues” during a donkey ride with other travellers. Lush illustrates what Fürsich describes to be the ‘untourist’ (211). However, in his concluding statement he acknowledges the transformation in himself, and he concedes: “talk about getting rid of stereotypes...to be amongst...a religion that was so different, for me, was an absolute privilege and it was a real eye-opener for me, it really changed my perception” (‘Intrepid Egypt’).

These testimonies illustrate the desire of the hosts-as-travellers to partake in, and to reproduce, a specific discourse of travel. Self-transformation is vital to any discussions on travel; in fact, it is a discursive imperative. Travel is regularly described as ‘eye-opening,’ it is where revelations and self-realizations take place; it changes the traveller, and it always changes them for the better. Travel is seen as a way to improve oneself, and *Intrepid Journeys* is eager to demonstrate that all its travellers experience exactly that. At the same time, the hosts’ reproduction of the discourse of self-transformation guarantees their status as (‘real’) travellers and, therefore, the authenticity of the accounts they provide. All the while, however, this personal and authentic experience and process of self-transformation is mediated by and produced within the logics and imperatives of the media spectacle.

Intrepid Journeys and the Spectacle

Some experiences presented in *Intrepid Journeys* are quite superficial, and offer not much more than a brief moment of excitement. The spectacle manifests itself in *Intrepid Journeys* not necessarily in the form of big or dramatic exchanges or events. Instead, what the spectacle demands is for something to be constantly happening; the generation and re-generation of moments which evoke affective or passionate responses. Not everything that happens (or appears to happen) in *Intrepid Journeys* is necessarily significant, momentous or dramatic, but it always attempts to elicit some form of affective response from the viewer, channelled through an identification with the subjectivity and experience of the celebrity.

Take Te Radar's encounter with a scorpion in the desert, for example: the sequence employs a number of strategies to suggest a sense of calamity, yet, at the same time, it is careful in reassuring its audiences that the situation is well under control. The majority of the scene is shot on a hand-held camera, providing a realistic feel and a sense of adventure. At the same time, it constructs a sense of intimacy and closeness, as the scenes are brought to the screen raw, unedited and, by extension, real. Te Radar looks decidedly ridiculous, wearing oversized black goggles, an electric blue turban and a bright green shirt. He is, after all, performing and embodying his persona, both the comedian that he is known as, and a self-proclaimed "shambolic traveller" ('Journey to Timbuktu').

The sequence starts with a close up of Te Radar's leg, his trousers rolled up and looking concernedly at his knee. He reveals to the camera that he just got stung by a scorpion and that it is "a little bit stingy" ('Journey to Timbuktu'). Te Radar muses how the sting makes for a "complete desert experience" and though he has not died yet, he says that death would be fitting as all the explorers he has read about have all died on their way to Timbuktu ('Journey to Timbuktu'). On his way to find help, he comments, with a smile, on how "intrepid" the whole situation is. In contrast to his smile,

the background soundtrack is an ominous one, suggesting that the situation could be one to cause concern. However, Te Radar's demeanour continues to convey the opposite and works against the tone of the music as he appears to be more taken by how 'intrepid' the situation is rather than the potential danger. Te Radar then saunters off to find someone to help him, and through a voiceover, he informs the audience that while Mali, unlike Mexico and Egypt, does not rate in terms of death resulting from scorpion bites, he is not taking any risks.

While it may be clear that Te Radar was never in any danger of becoming ill or even dying off the scorpion bite, a sense of urgency and anticipation is still conveyed in the sequence. Te Radar's scorpion encounter bears no narrative impact or consequence, yet the sequence constructs a sense of intrigue and mystery, something of great importance. The close-up of a scorpion (that is, a fatally venomous animal) scuttling along the sand at the start of the scene, followed directly by Te Radar studying his leg concernedly and accompanied by the ominous tones of the soundtrack all work to produce a sense of anxiety and imminent peril. Yet, in the end, the man from whom Te Radar seeks help informs him that he had been bitten by a non-threatening baby scorpion. He reassures him that he is in no danger of dying and suggests he takes an aspirin to help alleviate the sting. Te Radar laughs at the suggestion, before asking if beer would be a better remedy, alleviating any tension or suspense that might have been built through the sequence.

The spectacle also manifests itself in 'Colours of Morocco', yet in a different manner. The episode opens with a series of spectacular landscape shots of Morocco: a slow zoom out of a red desert mountain, a downward pan of Aït Benhaddou, still shots of the red desert, and a shot of a minaret silhouetted by a red sunset. Mystical and rather eerie 'Arabic' tones accompany the opening scenes, giving the sequence a serene, spiritual, yet mysterious feel. These establishing landscape shots bear similarities to those shown in, and employed by, *Sahara*, where images of the landscape, the terrain, and the geography of places to establish a sense of 'exoticness',

tranquillity and grandeur. Further, they partake of the notion of the anti-spectacle, as even though the landscape is spectacular, the pace and the rhythm it conveys go against the logic and imperative of the spectacle which demands for constant action, acceleration, and the generation of hyperbole and excitement.

The illusion is brief, however, as the peaceful opening 30 seconds of the episode is broken by Dobbyn's voiceover introducing the episode. Dobbyn philosophises: "they say that life is a grand adventure or it's nothing at all" ('Colours of Morocco'), embodying the perfect 'spiritual traveller'. Dobbyn continues:

I am off on one of the trips of my life, and it is a grand adventure already. Just the mere fact that I agreed to come to Morocco has stirred something in me that's made me step beyond myself. So, will my hang-ups come with me? Will my fear of foreign toilets just overwhelm me? Will I step outside of myself in order to find something new? I hope so. I certainly hope so ('Colours of Morocco').

As Dobbyn finishes his opening speech, the music crescendos to and the camera cuts from Dobbyn's talking head to a series of shots taken from his trip: Dobbyn riding a camel in the desert; street scenes full of exotic-looking people and donkeys commuting; Dobbyn with a snake draped around his neck; and Dobbyn walking through the busy streets and markets of Morocco. The editing also changes in pace, and the rapid sequence of shots and the augmented rhythm of the music change the tone of the introduction almost instantly. The serene and barren desert landscape is replaced by the hustle and bustle of a more urban Morocco, yet one thing remains constant: its aura of mystique and exoticness.

Difference and exoticness are employed by the introduction to 'Colours of Morocco' to capture and maintain attention. However, it is simultaneously used as a backdrop to Dobbyn's philosophical preface to his journey. The opening two minutes of 'Colours of Morocco' introduce not only Dobbyn as a traveller, but also the episode: its pace, tone, and the visual regime within which it operates. *Intrepid Journeys* may claim and attempt to be slow,

thoughtful and deliberate, as its opening 30 seconds indicate. However, this is soon lost in a whirlwind of the *spectacular*, where it succumbs to the imperatives and the demands of the media spectacle. The format of *Intrepid Journeys* and the time constraints under which it operates means that the experiences of its travellers are inevitably packaged and condensed. There are no dull moments in *Intrepid Journeys* and there are certainly no lulls, as the programme sweeps its travellers (and, by extension, its audiences) into its journey. Further, as a setting, Africa is employed as the different, the strange and the exotic; in other words, a site which facilitates the (continuous) production affect. Africa is simultaneously primordial, chaotic, serene, natural, poignant, vibrant, desolate and full of life, but, most importantly, it is *moving*, it makes you *feel*.

Due to its episodic format and the time constraints it operates under, the experience that *Intrepid Journeys* can present is a distilled and condensed one. *Intrepid Journeys* simply cannot afford to drag itself out; its hosts cannot afford to linger at one spot and really immerse his or herself in a place as there simply is not enough time. The hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* are transported from one place to another in rather quick succession, and emphasis is placed on being at or visiting certain places instead of the process of travelling. The hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* attempt to perform their roles and embody the reflective, thoughtful and contemplative traveller, yet they are restricted by the pace and the timing of the programme. In contrast to Palin, the journeys undertaken by the hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* (that is, their visits to and their encounters with the 'Other') are not necessarily driven by the desire or the imperative to learn or to gather knowledge. Rather, they work to produce affective responses: pity and sympathy for the cheerful and animated refugee children, marvel towards the difference or perhaps the oddity of the 'Other', or awe upon encountering majestic ancient ruins and landscapes.

Conclusion

Intrepid Journeys showcases the adventures of New Zealanders around the world: it is about their experiences in strange, exotic countries. The celebrity status of the hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* is underplayed, meaning that they travel and experience the world as *ordinary* travellers. *Intrepid Journeys* is set apart from *Sahara* and *Long Way Down* in terms of its format, timing and country of origin, but the programme reproduces a familiar set of discourses of travel. In comparison to *Sahara* and *Long Way Down*, the style of travel that is presented in *Intrepid Journeys* is a rather condensed one. However, the hosts of *Intrepid Journeys* share much of the same characteristics with the travellers in the other two programmes: they express a disdain for tourism, they are critical of the effects of modernity on traditional cultures, and they are eager to distance themselves from other tourists. Most importantly, travel, for the hosts of *Intrepid Journeys*, is a method of self-improvement and self-transformation.

Conclusion

The point was made, in the Introduction to this dissertation, that the main focus of analysis and discussion was going to be on the kind of cultural work that the three travel programmes performed, and, by extension, how this work was tied in with, and inflected by, the logics and imperatives of the cultural field of the media-as-spectacle. In other words, I sought to identify what was culturally symptomatic about these programmes and their genre. What I can say, in response to this inquiry, is that even though the concept of social, cultural and personal authenticity is never explicitly discussed in any of the programmes, it is fundamental to any discussion on travel and tourism and to the experiences that the subjects of tourism/travel elicit from, or identify with, the field and its contents. Each programme employs different strategies to perform and guarantee the authenticity of the ensemble of their experiences, activities and agents. *Sahara with Michael Palin* constructs a sense of the authentic primarily through the use of pace and rhythm to produce a reflective and considered sensibility and narrative. The programme eschews speed and haste; instead, it operates in a calmer, more composed manner. *Sahara's* use of pace is consistent with its emphasis on the gaining of knowledge and the privileging of learning, thinking, cultural immersion and respect, something which, importantly, is both embodied in and guaranteed by Michael Palin. While *Sahara* is thoughtful, deliberate and unhurried, *Long Way Down* is energetic and dynamic. *Long Way Down* chooses to focus instead on the drama, frustrations, and excitement of adventure travel. Authenticity, for *Long Way Down*, is manifested in the passion and emotions of its travellers, Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman. On a different plane altogether, *Intrepid Journeys* employs a visual rhetoric of authenticity and the overt reproduction of a dichotomy between travel and tourism. More so than the other two programmes, *Intrepid Journeys* relies on its hosts to articulate, rather formulaically and with undue emphasis, the discourse of self-transformation and self-improvement so as to guarantee its

authenticity. This difference is clearly related to their experiences and encounters being comparatively brief, packaged and condensed.

All three programmes employ celebrities as their hosts, and the way they are presented is consistent with, and adds to, the ambivalence and contradictory nature of the discourses that surround celebrity culture. While the presence of celebrities form part of the attraction and the marketability of these programmes, the hosts of *Sahara*, *Long Way Down*, and *Intrepid Journeys* are also required to perform as credible travellers in order to ensure that viewers can identify with, and are willing to take their affective cues from, the accounts and representations of the travel experience. The hosts' credibility as travellers relies almost entirely on their capacity to perform their ordinariness or, more precisely, their humanity; a process which, in turn, produces them as 'authentic celebrities'. Palin, in *Sahara*, is unexceptional; he is ordinary and familiar. However, his misperformance of celebrity, along with his display of compassion, conscience and empathy with regard to those he meets along the way, elevate him above the 'ordinary' tourist. *Long Way Down*, on the other hand, evokes affective responses and attachment from its audience through the overt display of emotion and passion on the part of McGregor and Boorman. McGregor and Boorman's role in *Long Way Down* is twofold and contradictory: at once they are celebrities *and* ordinary people. As celebrities, they are public figure with social and moral responsibilities; yet, at the same time, they are also ordinary people and the emotions they experience are palpably human. Finally, *Intrepid Journeys*' uses the celebrity status of its hosts in order to establish a comfortable 'between us' with regard to its viewers and the hosts-as-travellers. The hosts are both larger than life 'Kiwis' and, as a corollary, real and down to earth people; they are 'intrepid' travellers who have authentic experiences and undergo genuine self-discovery.

Finally, all three programmes package travel as a commodity, whereby encounters and interactions with the Other, be it people, cultures, or landscape, are marketed as intrinsically good, valuable and desirable. Travel

is enriching because the traveller learns about and experiences the world and sensibility of the Other, and is transformed for the better by the experience. However, once any travel experience is transformed into both a media text and, by extension, a commodity, it conforms to, and is inflected by, the logics, imperatives, discourses of the media-as-field. As Schirato et al. argue, contemporary media is characterised by relentless hyperbole: the constant generation of the dramatic and the spectacular (138). However differently it is manifested, *Sahara with Michael Palin*, *Long Way Down*, and *Intrepid Journeys* are situated within and strongly informed by the logic of the spectacle. For all three programmes, their relation to the viewer, and the way they present the experience and idea of travel, is negotiated through a regime of pure affect. *Sahara's* presentation of pace and tone appears, at first glance, to be directed against the idea of the spectacle. However, it is precisely the slowness of *Sahara* which invites the viewer not to think about, consider or analyse what is being presented, but instead to lose oneself in an affective embracing of the vast silence and emptiness of the Sahara. On the other hand, *Long Way Down* is transparently spectacular, as the programme focuses on the emotional states and reactions of McGregor and Boorman as they travel through Africa. Finally with *Intrepid Journeys*, the time constraints under which it operates means that the programme needs to produce moments which can elicit instant affective responses in quick successions.

In summary we can say that this analysis of *Sahara with Michael Palin*, *Long Way Down*, and *Intrepid Journeys* offers one particular insight with regard to media representation of the field of travel. It is clear that the programmes feel the need to perform a discursive commitment to those ideas and attitudes that the field of travel, as a tradition, considers to be valuable – basically a willingness to embrace difference and the Other, along with the notion that the authenticity of the travel experience carries a pedagogical function that facilitates the self-transformation of the subject. However the programmes considered here – chosen precisely because they bridge the various genres and sub-genres of the field – more or less inhabit

this sensibility in a manner which is congruent with, and largely inflected by, the logic of the media-as-spectacle.

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