

ECHOES IN THE NIGHT: A PERFORMANCE THESIS

By

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ABSTRACT

Humans are storytellers, who learn by sharing experiences through stories. The ability to connect extends to stories told through various media such as print, film, photography, and audio. This performance thesis used narrative through film to introduce audiences to native bat species across Texas, mainly the Mexican Free-tailed Bat, while demonstrating minimally invasive filming techniques. Information about bats was shared through my personal experiences working with and filming bats in a way that showcases the species with minimal disruption to the animal.

The thesis begins by addressing how particular practices within the wildlife film industry have led to audience deception and the repercussions stemming from deception. The literature review covers the impacts of pseudo-documentaries, invasive film techniques, the effects of computer-generated images, and the influence of wildlife documentaries on the public's attitude towards animals. Additionally, ethically questionable practices have shaped the wildlife documentary industry, from independent to large-budget filmmakers alike. Fishers' narrative theory served as the theoretical guidance for the project to examine how documentaries have shaped the public's attitude towards wildlife and how more ethical practices can achieve worthwhile goals that serve to educate while protecting the animals filmed.

The documentary demonstrates the filming practices I engaged in with my filming partner, Dr. Raymond Matlack. Through narrative and imagery, I sought to educate the audience about the species and the efforts taken to film these animals with minimal disruption. The film viewing took place on July 10, 2017, in the AT&T HD Studio of the Fine Arts Complex at West Texas A&M University.

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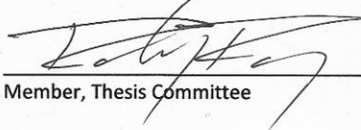
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Within the realm of filming wildlife documentaries lies great hypocrisy (Bouse, 1998; Richards, 2014). Few viewers understand how wildlife documentaries are created and presented. In short, the way in which we view a wildlife documentary is often not how the documentary was filmed. The editing of footage, digitally altered shots, captive animals, baiting, and the use of invasive technology are techniques resorted to, and in some instances necessary, to capture video. Because such measures can present audiences with a false reality that is sometimes detrimental to the animals, concerns have been raised about the way nature documentaries are captured and the ethics that should guide the production of documentaries.

Filmmakers can go to extremes in the capture of footage, which often disregards the animal's wellbeing, as well as the repercussions of misleading audiences with pseudo-nature documentaries. For example, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) show *Cruel Camera* revealed acts of cruelty towards animals filmed in documentaries. These acts included "using tethered animals as bait to attract predators" and the "routine use of staging and editing to create highly constructed sequences" (Richards, 2012, p. 323). Further, Richards (2012) elaborates that the filmmakers behind Disney's *White Wilderness* "used a movable turntable to catapult lemmings off a cliff into a river, creating the enduring but entirely erroneous myth of lemming mass suicide"

(p. 323). Clearly, there is pressure to produce documentaries. Animals are unpredictable however, some measures resorted to are unnecessary and harmful.

The following review of literature is an attempt to persuade and to provide understanding of the constraints surrounding wildlife documentaries. Sometimes an attitude of “the ends justify the means” is appropriate. Financial demands, time constraints, and a lack of control over the subjects all factor into the measures used to capture animals on film. A truly a non-invasive way to film wildlife does not exist; however, I still argue that a set of ethics should guide videographers. This thesis is an attempt to show a film where minimal disruption was caused to the animal, yet illustrate the instances in which ethics may be compromised for the greater purpose of exposing the public to certain species and behaviors.

In his discussion of filming ethics, Richards (2012) draws on the beliefs of Jeffery Boswall, who has been a producer at *BBC*’s Natural History Unit (NHU) for 30 years; Boswall’s work provides the inspiration for the ethics Richards believes should guide wildlife documentaries. These ethical guidelines are: (a) to avoid deception of audience members; (b) to declare the use of a captive animal to obtain shots; and, (c) to never place the animal in harm’s way (Richards, 2012). Richards (2012) states, “the ethics of wildlife documentary should be re-centered on the complex ethical relationship between wildlife documentary makers and the animals and ecosystems they film, rather than on issues of audience abuse or deception” (p. 325). My stance on the prioritization of audience deception and animal safety differs. In an ideal world, both would be upheld equally; however, I believe the effort to avoid deceiving audiences should be more important. In the remainder of this chapter, I illustrate the effects documentaries hold on

their audience and the shaping of audience views of our natural world. Research into pseudo-documentaries and audience deception are discussed at length in the remainder of Chapter I. Additionally, this chapter examines how practices enacted by wildlife filmmakers result in the harm of animals. Following is a discussion of how narrative theory is applied to studying wildlife documentaries.

RATIONALE

Nature documentaries serve as portals through which the public may increase their knowledge of our natural world. Nature documentaries take viewers across geographical boundaries and into the lives of animals. However, the influence of nature documentaries is highly debated with scholars arguing that the “perceived power of wildlife films to change attitudes and behaviors is largely based on anecdotal evidence” (Wright, 2009, p. 462). Wright (2009) acknowledged that “there are no firm arguments for or against the notion that wildlife films help to ‘save’ wildlife, simply because of the lack of scientific evidence to support either claim” (p. 463). Ladino (2009) also questions “whether these films prompt human viewers to respect nonhuman animals, the environment, or each other”; he said that positive impact “remains to be seen” (p. 84).

Some scholars argue that documentaries have the ability to further conservation and a connectedness to nature, while others argue documentaries misguide viewers in their concept of our natural world and the animals constituting it. As discussed by Wright (2010), “published research on the impact films can have on eliciting conservation action is minimal” (p. 462). In contrast, Arendt and Matthes (2014) believe that “the existing literature shows that exposure to nature documentaries can influence knowledge and attitudes” (p. 455). Despite being a consumer product, it remains unclear whether wildlife

documentaries hold enough sway to influence or mold audiences and their schemas of our natural world.

My experiences as a wildlife videographer have made me aware of the process behind producing a wildlife documentary. Further, my experience as a videographer have taught me accountability for the safety and respect to animals. There may not be entirely non-invasive ways to capture wildlife however, achievement can be made for safe and non-fictitious production approaches.

Impacts of Photography

Nature documentaries have evolved to serve as educational sources, the partnership between media and environmental awareness began with photography. As recounted by Springer (2011), “both photography and the modern conservation movement got their start in the middle of the 19th century, and have been entwined ever since” (p. 8). Birds used to be killed in vast numbers for scientific collection and for fashion embellishments (Springer, 2011). The use of photography alleviated the demand for specimens, and conservationists urged “people to forego killing birds in favor of taking photographs” (Springer, 2011, p. 8). Photographs filled the niche that bird specimens did because they could be used for species identification purposes and viewed widely by the public. Similarly, photography helped connect people with nature, becoming “indispensable to the tasks of educating people, soliciting funds, and learning about species’ numbers and conditions in the wild” (Springer, 2011, p. 8). Springer notes that nature lovers found that they could gain similar satisfaction from photographs as they did from specimens, thereby linking the love of nature with the protection of animal species. The use of photos for preservation efforts demonstrates the bridging of

photography and conservation with ethical considerations, much as can be done with documentary films today.

As the field of nature documentaries has evolved, so have ethical considerations, as noted by Deogracias and Perez (2013):

From the 1950s and 1960s onwards, the new television documentaries strived to become scientific (informative) so that people could learn about the animal kingdom in its most complete and scientific guise (persuasive), but they also accepted that they had to entertain the viewer (entertainment) (p. 575).

The task of mediating educational and entertaining material within nature documentaries, proved precarious: “showing wildlife while respecting the documentary truth, and simultaneously achieving an entertaining television programme was very complicated” (Deogracias & Perez, 2013, p. 573). A major criticism of nature documentaries is the deceptive or false projections of our natural world through media such as film or photography.

According to Springer (2011), the depiction of the African savannah by *National Geographic* and *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* saw several generations of Americans believing the savannah to be populated by animals and void of humans. One instance examined by Bouse (2003), pertains to the portrayal of lions in nature documentaries. Bouse (2003) explains: “On television, lions and most other animals are almost in continuous motion” (p. 125) resulting in a false portrayal since non-captive lions spend the majority of the day, about 20 hours, at rest (p. 125). In this case, the natural behavior of lions is not adequately portrayed because “television thrives on movement, drama and action to attract and hold viewers’ attention” (Bouse, 2003, p.

125). The fallout of such false portrayals can misguide audiences and their image of nature.

Not only can the images shown impact viewers' thoughts of an animal, but so can music. Nosal, Keenan, Hastings, and Gneezy (2016), showed how the use of musical soundtracks in shark documentaries posed a direct effect on viewers' perceptions towards sharks. Nosal et al. (2016) said "Participants who viewed a 60-second video clip of swimming sharks set to ominous background music regarded sharks more negatively and less positively than those who watched the same video clip set to uplifting background music or silence" (p. 13). Production techniques have an influence on how audiences perceive species featured in documentaries.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The choice to showcase bats as a focus in the film is because bats are a misunderstood species of wildlife. As discussed by Hoffmaster, Vonk, and Mies, "much of the public has a phobia of bats and view them in a negative light" (2016, p. 1). Such misconceptions about bats as feared, diseased creatures are detrimental as they shadow their ecological contribution. According to Hoffmaster, Vonk and Mies (2016), "When bats share environments with humans, many benefits, both environmental and economical, are conferred to humans" (p. 1). Familiarity with bats results in an understanding of bats and serves to counter fear. Such presents an opportunity for people to see the beneficial nature of bats.

Studies reveal that people's perceptions of bats are affected by a multitude of factors such as natural history, morphology, perceived threat or harm, geographical relation to the animal, prior knowledge and cognition abilities, and physical appearance

(Fancovicova & Kubiato, 2009; Knight, 2008; Schlegal & Rupt, 2010).

Schlegal and Rupt (2010) found that a person's "environmental knowledge and environmental awareness" have proved pivotal as influencing factors on people's attitudes towards wildlife and the environment. Additionally, Schlegal and Rupt (2010) noted that people "with high fear expectancy, disgust sensitivity, and desire for modern comforts are more likely to avoid wildland environment" (p. 288). People who are not active in our natural world are less likely to have high knowledge about wildlife species and their ecological contributions. Aside from awareness of wildlife and the environment, additional factors may play a role in the shaping of attitudes.

In their study of how to improve public perceptions of bats, Hoffman et al. (2106) found education to play a serious role because "perceptions of risk from bats . . . can sometimes be informed by biases rather than hard evidence" (p. 6). Their study revealed persons who are knowledgeable about bats hold "a more positive attitude towards bats, and are more willing to help bats" (p. 7). This confirmed impact of knowledge on positive attitude points to the potential value of wildlife documentaries. In addition to knowledge and attitude, other factors have been shown to influence perceptions.

As shown by Schlegal and Rupt (2010), people's affinity for a species "primarily depends on the criteria 'appearance', 'usefulness/harmfulness' and 'rareness'" (p. 288). Aesthetics, or physical attractiveness, of a species can influence public perceptions, and thus public support, of a species (Knight, 2008). Unfortunately, bats are not perceived to be the most aesthetically attractive: "bats have backwards feet, thumb hooks and enormous ears" (Prokop, Fancovicova & Kubiato, 2009, p. 20). The decision to film certain species of wildlife is rooted in humans' opinions as to what wildlife is

aesthetically pleasing or appealing. Springer (2011) comments: “the prominence of cute creatures [in film] has nothing to do with the reality of animal existence and everything to do with human projections and prejudices” (p. 19). Springer addresses the existence of bias towards a species’ likability. Schemas towards species may be furthered by stereotypes centered on a species’ aesthetics.

Media depictions of unattractive wildlife such as bats only further fear and misunderstanding between humans and bats. As Knight (2008) points out, “bats are associated in popular media with blood sucking evil vampires” (p. 96). Prokop et al. (2009) suggest that “naïve ideas about the real size of bats, which are usually magnified in horror films, would also contribute to fears of bats and their potential danger to humans” (p. 28). Perceptions of bats as vectors for disease are also sensationalized. According to Hoffmaster et al., (2016), “[A]lthough many bat species pose a serious risk of disease to humans, estimates are often exaggerated with all bat species generally considered equally dangerous” (p. 3). Exaggerations and the fear mongering of bats on screen encourage fear of bats in real life.

Difference often scares us. Prokop et al. (2009) discuss the dissimilarity between humans and bat species. When “taking bat morphology and natural history into account, there is very little overlap in the coexistence between humans and bats, which makes bats less familiar to humans than other mammals and even birds” (p. 20). For one, “unlike humans or birds, bats do not use audible acoustic signals for communication” (Prokop et al., 2009, p. 20).

Documentaries made to further phobias towards a species only reinforce stereotypes that hinder the conservation of that species. The allowance for filmmakers to

showcase a particular species as a species worthy of conservation can double as an allowance of personal bias. Personal bias could result in species discrimination that furthers a cycle of fear. Additionally, such bias could result in a lack of representation of wildlife species in nature-oriented films. Undesirable wildlife, like bats, are not generally perceived to be attractive to people, and these prejudices can prove harmful to conservation efforts.

Kahn, Saunders, Severson, Myers, and Gill (2008) conducted a study to gauge if school children, after being exposed to bats in a zoo exhibit, would consider the bats worthy of care and conservation despite simultaneously fearing bats. In the 2008 study, the children, ages 6 to 16, were exposed to fruit bats in a free-ranging zoo exhibit. After exiting, the children were questioned about their feelings towards bats, the bats' presence in the natural world, and whether the child would provide care for a bat. The goal of the researcher was to find out if people can simultaneously fear a creature and still want to conserve the creature. The study showed that children, despite fear, still expressed feelings of care towards bats with 73% saying they would care if bats did not exist in our world and 69% stating "it would matter to them if they lived their whole life without ever seeing a real live bat" (Kahn et al., 2008, p. 380).

My hope for this endeavor is not to eradicate fear of bats but, instead, to make people more aware of the importance of bats through film. Because I cannot erase the fear of bats, I aim to encourage alternative schemas of bats contrary to undesirable portrayals that are circulated to the public and to highlight their ecological and economical contributions. People may still fear bats; however, they can also appreciate and understand bats. According to Hoffmaster et al. (2016), "if the public is going to put

forth an effort in assisting to save bat populations, they must have a more positive view of bats” (p. 4). As a filmmaker, if I hope to succeed in changing perceptions towards bats, I first must change the manner that I present bats to the public. In the following chapter, I will discuss the role narrative plays in film and how it provides a platform to share experiences. In other words, the film itself becomes a way to influence or alter audiences’ schemas towards bats told through the window of personal experience.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nature documentaries can serve as a medium for raising the public's awareness of our natural world. This medium harnesses the power to transcend geographical limitations, allowing people to become intimate with foreign parts of the world. The success of wildlife programs on popular channels such as BBC, Disney, and Discovery, gives rise to an examination into the ways in which both on-screen and off-screen actions affect audience members' perceptions. Using narrative theory, this paper aims to divulge the role narrative holds in film and on audiences' abilities to become drawn into the media. Additionally, this thesis investigates how production techniques can have a negative influence on viewers' understanding of our natural world.

The boundaries of wildlife ethics have always been blurry and malleable. Clear lines have never been drawn in the sand, and a connection to the entertainment industry has resulted in a subjective and changing set of ethics. Broken, blended, and overshadowed to create a popular product for consumers, nature documentaries must answer for ratings and to producers. The industry "has become increasingly ratings-driven, and therefore reliant on formulaic, dramatic narratives that continue to blur the lines between fact, reconstruction and 'info-tainment,' and fiction" (Bouse, 1998, p. 116).

Fakery, captive animals, staged scenery, and intrusive technology all aid filmmakers in their quest to obtain the shots.

Experience in the field of wildlife biology, wildlife photography, and videography, has made me more abundantly aware of the disconnect that exists between the camera and the wildlife, the audience member and the show. For most nature documentaries, their sole purpose is to entice the public in a manner that is both entertaining and educational. This thesis calls for a re-examination of how the practices and behaviors shown on screen shape the industry, and in turn, the audience. What follows is a discussion of the impacts of invasive technology, deceptive production techniques and pseudo-science documentaries saturating the market.

A growing trend in nature documentaries is the prevalence of pseudo-science or info-tainment programs created for the sole purpose of reeling in large ratings to the detriment of presenting accurate information about our natural world (Richards, 2104). Mainstream educational networks leading the industry include networks such as *BBC* and *Discovery*, both of which have endured backlash for their production of pseudo-science programs. *Discovery* had fallen under heavy scrutiny from the scientific community for fictional programs such as *Megalodon: The Monster Shark Lives*. The show hit *Animal Planet's* airwaves in 2014 and “was the highest-rated program in Shark Week history” (Ulaby, 2015, para. 20). Despite the network later admitting that the show was rooted in fiction, it was presented as truth, an approach that “convinced 70% of viewers that the giant prehistoric shark still existed even as outraged scientists insisted that the show was ludicrous and almost entirely fictional” (Winsor, 2014, para. 2). Demonstrated here is the ability of a film to convey false beliefs about our natural world.

Popular programming blocks such as *Shark Week*, contribute to the growing trend of pseudo-science programs, furthering anti-science slander, which dismisses the work of legitimate scientists. Marine biologist Jonathan Davis had a childhood fascination with sharks, one that was encouraged by programs produced by networks like *Discovery* (Ulaby, 2015). His respect for the network tarnished when it unapologetically portrayed his research in false light. During an interview for *NPR*, Davis recalled how the network took an interest in his research on sharks. He told of the shock he felt when the footage of him and his team conducting research aired on *Voodoo Shark* (Ulaby, 2015). Interview portions of the biologist commenting on his research were edited to suggest that he was doing research on, and held the belief in, a non-existing shark.

The alterations of programs extend beyond the fabrications of science (Bradley, 2015; Evon, 2015; Hare, 2013; Winsor, 2014). The very means by which shots are obtained can severely violate ethics. Included in these ethics violations is baiting to attract predators, the use of captive animals, staging of animals, and deliberate sequencing of shots to portray events in a different light (Boboltz, 2015; Mendick & Malnick, 2011). Such measures alter the animals' otherwise natural behavior and at times, force the animals to engage in behaviors they otherwise would not do. By using such means to obtain footage, filmmakers are portraying animals in a false light, oftentimes using the sequencing of the shots to portray events, behaviors and relationships presented as common occurrence (Boboltz, 2015; Mendick & Malnick, 2011). Well-known wildlife filmmaker and author Chris Palmer admitted that shots dubbed as sensational often take precedence over shots that contribute to conservation issues or are accurate in the portrayal of animal behavior (Boboltz, 2015). During the

filming of one show, Palmer admits he shot many individual whales then edited the scenes of individuals together to accomplish the goal of portraying a mother and calf humpback whale embarking on a 3000-mile trek (Boboltz, 2015).

Other tactics that mislead the public pertain to the use of captive animals, staged predator-prey conflicts, filming animals in staged settings, the baiting of animals, artificial sounds, computer generated-graphics, and in extreme cases, violation to the animals' wellbeing through technology or bodily injury (Boboltz, 2015; Bouse, 1998). When budgets fall short, computer-generated images such as those used in *Turtle: The Incredible Journey* and *Life of Pi* aid filmmakers greatly (Boboltz, 2015). The advances in technology have opened filmmakers to a whole new realm of possibilities, from creating shots that were not or cannot be obtained, to filming animals partaking in acts not readily witnessed. In regard to using technology to create footage and natural events or animal behavior, Springer (2011) found the following:

The assumption that a photo tells the truth has always been doubtful because of photographic selectivity as well as outright hoaxes, but it is especially problematic now that digital technology has made possible computer enhancements that can alter the meaning of a photograph without being detected, and, in an even more dramatic shift, CGI creates images of things that do not exist outside of the computer. (p. 10)

Such use of technology has broken down the door for deception of audiences.

Technology allows filmmakers the opportunity to create animals in a certain image despite whether the filmmakers themselves have ever seen or interacted with such animals. The use of technology to create images of our natural world feeds into the

deception of audience members and the possibility of inaccurately portraying animals in their natural habitat.

Leading networks such as *BBC* have set the bar for standards and the ethics by which filmmakers should conduct themselves. However, *BBC* has been under fire for their methods of collecting footage. One of *BBC*'s most notorious instance is footage of a polar bear cub filmed in captivity and presented as being captured in-situ (Boboltz, 2015; Mendick & Malnick, 2011). *Disney* joins the ranks of misleading and unethical film practices for their award-winning documentary, *White Wilderness*, in which lemmings were forced to jump to their watery graves "with camera angles artfully concealing the filmmakers' interference" (Boboltz, 2015, para. 24). In addition, Disney admitted to pushing a polar bear off a cliff side for creating comic relief (Boboltz, 2015).

Human Interactions

The way persons interact with animals has spawned controversy about on-camera antics performed in wildlife documentaries. On-camera personalities have become synonymous with concerns over human-wildlife interactions. Prime examples are Steve Irwin and Timothy Treadwell, whose interactions with wildlife and wildlife-related deaths, have resulted in a reinforcement in the conflicting ideal that humans do not hold a place in the wild.

Since his 2006 death, the lasting impact Irwin had on the public, given his interactive approach to wildlife, has been a topic of debate. "Agitator," "ratings driven," and "fanatic," are terms that have been assigned Irwin post-death as controversy has opened the field for judgment of his effect on wildlife conservation. The other side of the argument associated with Irwin is his pro-wildlife influence on fans globally. At the

center of this debate lies the techniques employed by on-screen personalities and the impression these acts have on the public's perception towards appropriate and expected interactions with wildlife.

Timothy Treadwell's and Irwin's deaths spurred heated debates over "who" should be interacting with wildlife (Brown, 2010; Schutten, 2008). In the wake of Treadwell's death, "many wildlife experts and others objected to Treadwell's anthropomorphizing the bears and habituating them to humans by living in close proximity" (Schutten, 2008, p. 194). Ladino (2009) argues the drive to capture wildlife stems from a yearning to understand how human and animals relate. Nature documentaries often grapple with hierarchical relations between humans and non-human animals (Ladino, 2009). Within nature documentaries' narratives, some liken animals to humans by anthropomorphizing the animals with regard to kinship, formation and maintenance of relationships, and emotional capacities. Meanwhile, other narratives vilify animals, furthering the human-nature binary that humans are removed from nature, are dominant over nature, and can be harmed by nature. Ladino (2009) points out that the stories found in nature documentaries are not the stories of the animals; instead, they are the stories of humans. Ladino (2009) states:

the insidious nature of anthropomorphism is that, in the process of this editing, we often forget that these are *human* stories- products of our own active imaginations, our own rhetorical and cultural biases, and our own desire to formulate ethical rules of conduct for humans that are somehow legitimized by being 'natural.' (p. 62)

In the case of Treadwell and the anthropomorphizing of the bears throughout the film, audience members were introduced to an assigning of characteristics and relational bonds to the bears. Throughout, Treadwell named the bears and often commented on their behaviors and moods as he observed them daily. The bears became an important piece in telling Treadwell's story based on information Treadwell had previously related to audiences; especially when Werner Hertzog speculated as to which particular bear may have been responsible for Treadwell's death. Hertzog, a German director, was captivated by the footage Treadwell filmed of himself with the bears. Hertzog was inspired to assemble the footage to tell Treadwell's story. *Grizzly Man* was released in 2005, and told the personal story of Treadwell and the bears he lived beside and his tragic death at the hands of a bear.

The narrative shifts depending on the expertise of those interacting with wild animals. According to Springer (2011), "Wild animal photography and filmmaking flourished throughout the 20th century, made popular by professionals and enthusiastically taken up by amateurs" (p. 12). Treadwell is viewed as an amateur whose actions placed in him the way of harm, while Irwin enjoyed success partially based in his knowledge of wildlife (Northfield & McMahon, 2010; Schutten, 2008). Factors such as experience in a particular field and education have excused people like Irwin who engage in daring behaviors while simultaneously damning persons such as Treadwell who is "depicted as violating the monopoly on research because his credentials do not match what Western society has deemed an acceptable person" (Schutten, 2008, p. 207). In the case of Treadwell, he was not the only person living near bears. Biologist Matthias Breiter was observing the bears and camping as well. Breiter's career has focused on

bears, particularly brown bears as the subject of his work at the University of Heidelberg. Schutten (2008) notes “there are no claims that researchers such as Breiter should not be allowed to camp among the bears because he is a ‘professional’” (p. 207). Holding a degree or extensive background influences how the actions of on-camera personalities are judged as either unprofessional or professional; a factor that weighs heavily when injury or death occurs because of those actions.

Debates have been spurred in accordance with what dictates as animal’s right to privacy and to the very core of whether animals should have a right to privacy. An animal is simply a subject that lacks the ability to consent to being filmed. The relationship between filmmaker and subject is one-sided, with responsibility weighing heavily on the filmmaker. The demands of the industry insist that animals are shown in a different light, carrying out tasks that humans would deem private: “Mating, giving birth, and dying are recurring characteristic in nature documentaries, but the human version of these activities remains largely absent from broadcasting” (Mills, 2010, p. 199). As humans, we suspend notions of privacy during our viewing of a wildlife documentary. Mills goes on to say, the animals’ engagement in private behaviors occurs outside of normal viewing and therefore “interpreted as a challenge to the film crew rather than an inducement towards ethical responsibility” (Mills, 2010, p. 199). Scholars such as Bouse (1998) and Mills (2010) stand firm in their stance that the illusion of participation on the animals’ part should not be confused with consent. In fact, the animal’s tolerance toward filmmakers extends from a limitation in its ability to avoid filmmakers.

Accountability for production standards is often in conflict with entertainment. According to Schutten (2008), “Much of what we know about nature is circulated to audiences through the media via film, advertising, and television programming” (p. 196). The channels of dispersal demand that as consumers, producers, and most importantly, filmmakers, we are held accountable to standards that neither deceive the public, violate animals, or result in their harm. The demands of producing and the rewards reaped from the completion of a product are great and a much worthy endeavor; however, the manner used to accomplish a product can be distasteful and prove costly to the audience and to the film’s subjects. When illusions are resorted to, the element of documentation is erased.

Treadwell’s close living quarters and interactions with bears would lead to a brutal bear attack that ended in the slow deaths of him and his girlfriend. Because Treadwell was a one-man film crew, the manner that he engaged the camera shaped the way the audience experienced his film. Footage was captured in a point-and-shoot manner resulting in handheld camera footage that is unsteady and shaky. When stationary footage was captured, audience members witnessed Timothy setting up the shot then re-positioning himself from behind the camera into the view of the camera. As his positions changed, so did his demeanor: he transitioned from cameraman to host sharing his observations of the bears. Hertzog became greatly interested in the footage shot by Timothy pre-death and decided to assemble the footage into a cohesive documentary (Schutten, 2008).

Perhaps the stand-out characteristic of *Grizzly Man* lies in the fact that the film details the experiences of a man who is no longer alive. The knowledge of his death only

adds to the suspense and influences the severity of audiences' reactions when a disruption happens on-camera. Disruptions pertain to animals interacting with the camera unexpectedly or shaky captures resulting from a single man trying to film his own experiences. As discussed by David Johnson (2008) the creation of suspense and the joining of audience members into the experience is contributed in large part from "a fundamental link between . . . camera and a spontaneous, uncontrollable reality that exists" (p. 75). In the case of *Grizzly Man*, the uncontrollable reality that exists refers to Treadwell's death at the hands of the animals he spent his life trying to protect. His gruesome death was captured on an audio recording, which Herzog is shown listening to (Johnson, 2008). Additionally, Herzog speaks of the death of Treadwell and his girlfriend in the film's narrative voice-over (Johnson, 2008). Although Treadwell's death is not seen on film, his death is clearly expressed throughout the film. The entirety of the film is presented to audience members as the events that occurred before Treadwell's death. The film is presented by Herzog with an ominous and empathetic tone for Treadwell and his endeavors to illicit compassion for bears.

The element of having testimonials of persons and the showing of animal footage invites viewers to experience a moment that was previously lived. The camera functions as a window creating ties between what's on screen and reality, the people existing within the frame appear to communicate with the viewers. These factors create the illusion of a previously lived reality occurring in real-time and contributes to the creation of suspense. Best summarized by Johnson (2008) "the connection of camera to reality sets up the existence of the videotape as *real*, even if it is only studio footage" (2008). Any wildlife-person interaction, disturbance, or interaction with the camera

breeds a sense of suspense for audience members who are accustomed to the camera functioning as a sterile window from which they enter into another world. The commentary uttered by those portrayed on screen serves to elaborate particular experiences or feelings, making the audience's experience that much more real. The arrangements of scenes and the allotted time each scene runs contributes to the realistic feel. This result is evident through Herzog's "technique of allowing takes to last longer than they should" (Johnson, 2008, p. 73).

Within the realm of reality documentary, the atmosphere created extends greatly beyond that of what is seen and conveyed by on-camera subjects. Sometimes the audio of what is seen and what is not seen is responsible for creating the magic. As a side effect of documentary filmmakers, especially those on minimal budgets, the lack of polish found with post-production results in a product that lacks a veneer and in turn, is more "real" or "raw."

Many parallels can be drawn from Treadwell's video style to my thesis. Herzog's technique of longer scene takes will be mimicked in the visual portions of my film.

Within the interview scenes, lines are not muttered clearly or are spoken too fast as on-camera persons often talk to others off camera. Such reasons require that scene length be edited longer than desired and therefore, invite audiences into an awkward but candid discourse. Like Treadwell, transitions from behind the camera to front of camera are used, amateur filming abilities of the crew echo in certain scenes, and the visual portion details the experiences of a film crew that has since dissipated.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

The exploration of narrative is described by James Cutting (2016), who conceptualized narratology as the “study of stories and story structure and the ways these affect our perception, cognition, and emotion” (p. 1716). Cutting (2016) continues to elaborate that the “everyday stories that we tell each other are the reconstruction of our experience in narrative form, and these become the units of remembered life” (p. 1713). “One key characteristic of stories is their propensity to make us leave the actual world behind and become deeply immersed in the story world” (Gnambs, Appel, Schreiner, Richter, & Isberner, 2014, p. 191). Immersion into stories births the possibility of shared experience or learning through stories.

Fisher’s narrative paradigm proposes that humans are essentially storytellers who communicate and come to understand the world through stories: a stance supported by Gnambs et al. (2014), who state “people are natural-born storytellers and story recipients” (p. 191). The viewpoint that humans are essentially storytellers led to Fisher (1985) classifying or describing humans as “*homo narrans*” (p. 74). To Fisher (1984), the relevance of humans as storytellers is symbolic as “symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories are meant to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common” (p. 6). Narrative is a way for us to make sense of the world around us. “Sensemaking is driven by a need for plausibility and narrative rationality in relation to others - fidelity to the accepted story of what team life and loyalty should be” (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011, p. 80). Stories are a way in which we come to know and to understand the world. They are a tool used to make sense of our surroundings and through stories we receive an exchange of knowledge.

Fisher simultaneously describes his paradigm as one which subsumes aspects of former theories and as being distinctly independent from previous paradigms and theories such as traditional rationality and dramatism. Narrative paradigm differs from traditional rationality as narrative does not demand that communication must be presented in argumentative form (Fisher, 1984). Instead, the paradigm requires that communication be examined from a historical and situational standpoint and “has relevance to real as well as fictive worlds, to stories of the living and to stories of the imagination” (Fisher, 1984, p. 2). Further, the paradigm distances itself from traditional rationality because unlike traditional rationality it “is not an account of the ‘laws of thought’ and it is not normative in the sense that one must reason according to prescribed rules of calculation or inference making” (Fisher, 1984, p. 9). Fisher makes clear that narrative does not have to be learned, “whether written or oral, [it] is a feature of human nature and that it crosses time and culture” (Fisher, 1984, p. 8). Narrative as described by Fisher, is a natural component of being human. We learn and infer truths about our surroundings and others through narratives expressed by others. Important factors such as the probability and rationality of stories are key. Probability and rationality allow people to infer the validity of a narrative.

Due to stories serving as sources from which we form meaning and gain knowledge, importance is placed on the validity of stories. “Engagement with a story leaves us with a sense that the story was authentic” (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008, p. 256). Establishment of a story’s validity is achieved through what Fisher describes as narrative rationality. Narrative rationality is directly dependent upon a person’s awareness and ability to perceive narrative probability and narrative fidelity.

Narrative probability is expressed as “formal features of a story conceived as a discrete sequence of thought and/or action in life or literature” (Fisher, 1984, p. 349) or stories coherence. Probability is achieved “when a story begins to come together, identities begin to make sense, identities and actions can be given a sense of narrative rationality and we can connect plot and character” (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011, p. 81). Probability factors into a person’s ability to achieve sensemaking, the point in which a story becomes cohesive and gives an allowance for sensemaking.

Sensemaking is tied to self-examinations, the point in which a story can be applied to one’s life. “Narrative rationality has particular relevance for our examination of how we make our lives sensible because our example centers around an event that draws into question the values of reliability and fidelity and leads to a critical self-questioning” (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011, p. 66). Narrative fidelity is whether the stories experienced by a person align with other stories a person knows as true in their lives (Fisher, 1984). As expressed by Cunliffe and Coupland (2011):

Being aware of our own and other’ bodily sensations and gestures can give us a fuller understanding of the complexity of situations. Embodied and embedded forms of sensemaking are important in helping us understand the qualitative differences in the way people behave and how their sense of identity influences relationships and actions. (p. 82)

Finding truth through stories, rhetoric, or discourse guides thought and action.

“One key characteristic of stories is their propensity to make us leave the actual world behind and become deeply immersed in the story world” (Gnambs et al., 2014, p. 191).

Noted by Busselle and Bilandzic, “the power of narrative is not diminished by readers’ or

viewers' knowledge that the story is invented" (2008, p. 256). When engaged, audience members construct meaning from narrative, therefore becoming an active participant (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008, p. 257).

Narrative in Film

The prominence of narrative extends beyond stories communicated orally. Visual media has become a medium for sharing narratives. A relationship is established between people and the same process of using probability and narrative rationality to judge the cohesiveness of the story still apply. "Digital stories rely on images - either still or moving - to form the relationship between the narrator and the audience more fully" (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010, p. 41). However, the extent to which audience members become enthralled with the media varies among individuals. "Individuals are assumed to differ in their propensity to become transported into story world" (Gnambs et al., 2014, p. 188). Prior research has shown that individual differences regarding absorption or empathy have shown to affect a person's ability to become immersed or transported into a story. Many influences come together to affect whether an individual becomes immersed. An individual's environment, mental state, and the medium through which the story is communicated all contribute to transportation. A change in any of these factors may alter the likelihood of a person's susceptibility to becoming transported into a story. When transportation occurs, a person's attention is diverted almost entirely to the story.

Transportation is conceived as being a state in which one becomes totally submersed into the story and unaware of their surroundings. A person's likelihood of becoming transported is dependent upon both trait and situational factors.

"Transportation theory and research suggests that the experience of being transported into

a narrative world is a function of both the situation (including the text being read or the TV series being watched, etc.) and a rather stable propensity to become immersed in story worlds” (Gnambs et al. 2014, p. 188). Transportation is a mental process that is heavily influenced by individual differences like susceptibility to becoming transported. “Transportation is conceived of as a psychological state with substantial intraindividual and interindividual differences” (Gnambs et al., 2014, p. 187). Additionally, transportation is conceived as being a state in which awareness of surroundings and self is lost (Bussels & Bilandzic, 2008; Eunjin, Ratneshwar & Thorson, 2017).

When viewing digital media, viewers are receiving the digital story with many of the same senses used to decipher our daily surroundings, such as sight and hearing. “Film viewers automatically receive a constant stream of narrative information through the same sensory channels with which they would process real-world events” (Bezdek, Foy & Gerrig, 2013, p. 415). Videos are vivid forms of storytelling that have the potential to transport viewers. Like stories, videos serve as portals that illustrate and tell a cohesive story. “Digital stories are short vignettes that combine the art of telling stories with multimedia objects including images, audio, and video” (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010, p. 37). In some respects, not only do films engage viewers through storytelling, films have the potential to bring a more vibrant approach to stories.

The movie *Grizzly Man* serves as a perfect example of how narrative within a nature documentary presents animals through the eyes of people (Ladino, 2009). The story of the Alaskan grizzlies is told through two human narratives, each a clear reflection of how the individual views the bears. The two dichotomous narratives call into question the human-nature binary. Treadwell’s narrative aligns with the idea that humans

and animals can co-exist and is contrasted by Herzog's narrative that humans should remain separate from nature; nature being seen as a place humans venture, not a place where they are meant to stay.

In her thorough examination of Timothy Treadwell's self-shot documentary, *Grizzly Man*, Ladino (2009) contrasts the two narratives present in the film. The first is that of Timothy, a man who left civilization to devote his life to living among Alaska's grizzly bears for 13 summers. Within the film, Treadwell documents his experiences with the bears and divulges his reasons for living in such an extreme manner. His narrative positions the bears as equals, worthy of respect, empathy and capable of co-existence with humans. This narrative "has a democratizing effect that undermines Herzog's efforts to turn them into dangerous adversaries" (Ladino, 2009, p. 75).

The second narrative presented in the film is that of Herzog, who took the incoherent footage and assembled it into a documentary. Herzog's admiration for Treadwell is revealed in his narrations; however, he reinforces the belief that bears should exist separate from man. This supports an opposing view of the human-nature binary than that preached by Treadwell.

Herzog's narrative enacts empathy for Timothy and positions the bears in an opposing light. Herzog's narration clearly shows that he is indifferent about nature and leaves audiences with the thought that "the inhospitable locations" that Treadwell co-inhabited with the bears serve to "reinforce the impression that the films' animal subjects have rightful existence apart from human beings" (Ladino, 2009, p. 83).

Diverging narratives of the bears are laid throughout the film. Hard to ignore, is that despite Treadwell's behavior of living within the same area of the bears, Treadwell's

gruesome death shadows the whole film and seems to support the narrative of separation between man and nature. Ladino's examination illustrates how two narratives speak not just to the issue at hand but to the underlying philosophy presented in a story.

CHAPTER III

PRODUCTION

This chapter details the steps of the production that shaped the project. As time progressed, so did the quality of footage as well as the general concept behind filming. All footage was gained roughly over a 4-year period and was initially gathered with a minimal concept of how the footage would be constructed to tell a story. Footage was captured with the purpose of using the footage to create an interesting and educational piece over bats. Therefore, importance was placed on capturing the behavior of bats including roosting sites, process of flight and morphology. Also important to note, is that the filmmakers were self-taught camera enthusiasts who held educational and experiential backgrounds in the field of Wildlife Biology. The opportunity to film was made possible through the solicitation of grants, contributions made by donors and support from West Texas A&M University.

Collection of Footage

Footage composing the short film was captured over the course of many years by myself and Dr. Raymond Matlack, Endowed Professor of Wildlife Biology at West Texas A&M University. As film was gathered, various concepts of how the film should be presented emerged. Texas Wild was officially established by West Texas A&M

University around 2011, and as the concept of the film emerged, efforts to capture a variety of native wildlife across the state increased. The gathering of footage used to compose the short film ceased in July 2016. All film viewed was collected between 2011 and 2016.

Film was captured in all seasons and with the proper securement of permits through the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). All filming activity was done on public or private lands and was approved and known by persons of authority through the entirety of our shoot. No boundaries were disregarded or overstepped. All media and completed products have been, or will be, made available to filming locations at no charge.

Approach

Educational material pertaining to wildlife was injected throughout to clarify the animal's behavior witnessed by audience members. The goal was to produce an informative narrative that raises the audience's awareness of Texas bat species. Additionally, the extensive field experience and education of both myself and Dr. Matlack, conveys a sense of authority over the subject matter discussed throughout the segments. Through research we were conducting, we gained chances to film species not readily captured in the traditional manner of scout, wait, and shoot. A prime example is the bats featured in the film; many species of bats are crevice roosting or foliage roosting. By combining research with film, bats that were caught using mist nets were filmed and released in a timely manner. Because filming was done by two persons, we could carry out filming in ways that went unnoticed by the public. Measures such as using remote camera setups and filming at night were relied on heavily. Filming in some cases was

carried out in secluded locations and using areas accessible to the public such as bird blinds.

All production aspects of the visual works were captured using a skeleton crew, which was composed of myself and Dr. Matlack. This project demanded learning camera and audio equipment; development and understanding of the role narrative plays in films; scriptwriting; an understanding of public attitudes held towards wildlife; securing proper filming permits; familiarity of both state and federal laws; and, post-production aspects. In addition to serving as videographers, we formed the creative brain trust of the project. Dr. Matlack and I also headed funding opportunities and wrote grants to secure equipment, cover transportation costs, and pay for camping expenses.

Equipment

High definition footage was captured using a variety of cameras including three Canon 5D Mark III, two Canon XA10 and XA25, two Canon 7D Mark II, a Canon C100, five GoPros including Hero 3, Equinox underwater housing, and a DJI Phantom II drone. Audio was captured with the use of two TASCAM recorders and two RODE microphones.

Great respect was given to the animals' well-being as cameras were deliberately aimed to capture the subjects engaging in rarely witnessed behaviors and/or their natural habitats. Much of the footage appears monochromatic due to capturing subjects with infra-red cameras. The decision to use infra-red cameras was made so that the process of filming would not alter the animals' natural behavior. Infra-red lights are not visible to the human eye, thus do not disturb the wildlife. We took great measures to lessen our effect on wildlife. Despite these efforts, many methods still can be ruled invasive in some

respects. Technology such as infra-red cameras emit a light that is invisible to nocturnal species; however, camera placement still invades the space of the animal.

For the thesis, I produced all audio mixing, video editing, storyboarding, and script writing. The segment was edited using Adobe Software such as Premier Pro and Audition. Music beds selected to accommodate the visual portions were provided through *Back Traxx Tracks*, licensed music provided for student use by the Broadcasting Department at West Texas A&M. Ambient audio recorded in the field is also used. The ending credits reflect donors' contributions, WTAMU departments that gave support to the production of the series, and *Zugunruhe LLC*, which is the author's limited liability film company. Also, cited in the credits is the proper securement of permits through IACUC.

Concept

The short film segment takes audiences into the lives of Texas bats, particularly Mexican Free-tailed Bats. Narration in the segment draws upon the personal perspective of one videographer and takes audiences through the ecological importance and the life cycle of bats. Background information of how I came to film bats will be injected into the film. Such reasoning is to help build a relationship between narrator and audience and transport audience members into the film (Kim, Ratneshwar & Thorson, 2017). Within the bat segment, the roosting sites of bats, their predation of crop pest, agricultural value, and the safety threats posed by green-energy technology such as wind turbines is included in the narrative. A disclaimer appears in the credits stating no captive animals were used and no wildlife was harmed during filming. Additionally, any research drawn upon or paraphrased in the narration is cited in the credits. Links to Bat Conservation

International (BCI) appear in the credits. Major donors who supported the production of the project are also noted.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERFORMANCE

Film Viewing

Film viewing was advertised via placement of a film trailer on social media. The viewing was held in the AT&T HD Studio where attendees viewed the film on a large projector with surround sound. All promotion was initiated by the author and committee members.

The allotted time frame was one hour and included an introduction to the author and the film to the audience by the committee chair. I then provided an explanation of the background and concept of Texas Wild and started the viewing of the short film. The viewing was followed by a question and answer portion. The following presents the script used to accompany the video and audio footage.

Performance Script: Echoes in the Night

As long as I can remember, I've been infatuated with wildlife.

While studying Wildlife Biology as an undergrad, I began working with Dr. Ray Matlack at West Texas A&M University. I was asked to travel and film to showcase the diversity of wildlife in the Lone Star state.

We conducted research on various projects which opened many doors.

We gained access to species of animals that normally are not encountered, of these, bats are a rarity.

People fear bats which is odd considering most people will probably never see a bat or have contact with one. To me, they are majestic. Not varmints cutting through skies on wings of pestilence landing in your hair.

Scientifically, what we have learned about bats paints an entirely different story than the ones generally associated with bats.

Most bats are small creatures, weighing as much as a few nickels and are capable of great feats.

Bats are the only mammal capable of true flight as their wings, simple in structure, are merely no more than elongated hands. Each species of bat possesses wings specifically evolved in shape and structure to suit roosting habitat, feeding routines, and flight patterns.

Bats roost in a variety of places, manmade structures, crevices and in foliage.

Bats drink and hunt on the wing, meaning they carry out such processes while in flight.

Worldwide, bats specialize in diverse diets ranging from insects, fish, fruits and flowers. They serve as pollinators and protectors of crops. Only three or so species feed on blood, and none of these call Texas home.

My first experience with bats occurred in a cave located in Armstrong Co. This cave would become a place we visited a lot.

Outside temperatures in the surrounding canyon were scorching but as the descent occurred, frigid air greeted you, and if your timing was correct, so did the chattering of 10,000 Mexican Free-tailed bats from within the cave.

Heavy, cumbersome equipment had to be transported through the winding claustrophobic tunnel, across stagnate waters and lugged over large rock piles before reaching the colony.

Bats are sensitive to light, so we filmed in pitch darkness.

A look through the monitor of the IR camera revealed the bat covered dome was constantly moving as individuals chattered madly and squirmed to find room among the dense numbers.

From above, fecal droppings, fleas and bed bugs would rain down and crawl across the guano. The falling of fecal matter and parasites emulated the faint sound of rain as it hit the guano. The cave seemed to constantly be moving.

The squirming of bats hits an all-time high as time for the colony to emerge approached.

Dropping down from the dome, the cave became filled with bats who seemed anxious to emerge.

Hundreds or thousands of bats join into a circle, emitting echolocation calls while predators may be lurking outside the roost waiting for the bats to emerge.

The most exciting part of filming bats is getting caught up in the emergence. Though emergence is systematic, chaos can result. Sometimes, when engulfed in the swarm, we found ourselves to be in the way.

Some people seem awfully worried about a bat landing on them. But they've got it all wrong. In my experience, if a bat lands on you, it's because you are in its path and its more of a collision than a landing.

33 species of bats have been recorded in Texas, more than any other state. Given the diversity of bats the lone star state boasts, it can safely be said that bats are one of the state's more iconic wildlife species.

Declared the official flying mammal of Texas, the Mexican Free-tailed bat is the bat of Texas. Drab in color, these bats live up to their name, as they have a tail that extends beyond the patagium.

Ranging statewide, these bats are a friend of the farmer. Historically, guano produced from massive Free-tailed bat colonies was harvested as a rich fertilizer. One prey item that these bats fancy is the corn earworm moth, a notorious crop pest. A 2006 study showed that the consumption of agricultural pest by Mexican Free-tailed bats saved farmers more than \$700,000 per year in crop value alone in an eight county region in South-Central Texas.

With the exclusion of colonies in far East Texas, Mexican Free-tailed bats migrate down south where they overwinter in Mexico to avoid wintry weather in October. Around late February, the bats reclaim their Texas roosts.

The return of Mexican Free-tailed bats to Texas has become a welcomed spectacle. This species comprises the largest bat colony in the world, Bracken Cave. The cave which

harbors more than 15 million Mexican Free-tails is just a short drive from San Antonio. These colonies and others throughout Texas, are so large, they can be seen on weather radar during emergence.

As the bats start to circle in the cave, momentum outside the cave grows. The crowd begins to rise to their feet. Hawks are seen cruising nearby in the skies and snakes take their place near the mouth of the cave.

Once the bats breach the opening, 15 million bats pour out, appearing as a smog, choking out the sunset. Grouped together in a giant vortex they swarm in synchrony. They swarm as one giant entity.

Down in front of the cave entrance, I laid on my back and looked up at the vortex of bats swarming above me. The center of the bat vortex shifts its course, winding from left to right. From the vortex, separate rivers of bat stream off into the distance.

Hawks continue to circle.

Bats fill the humid air and rise higher and higher, concerned only with the foraging ahead of them. Unaware or fearless of the predators and crowd that now surround their roost, the bats emerge to reclaim the night sky.

Weighing the equivalent of three nickels, Mexican Free-tails reach altitudes as high as 10,000 feet and use high-tail winds to clock speeds as high as 60 mph. The utilization of altitudes and winds has seen these bats disperse more than 50 miles from roosts.

However, more than distance is needed for a forage to be successful. Once in the air, a game of aerial warfare begins.

Bats use a variety of cues to navigate our world, from smell, vision, and echolocation. Echolocation is the process of producing ultrasonic sounds or pulses. Once

emitted, these pulses rebound off foreign substrates and are interpreted by the bat. Bats can interpret distance, direction, shape, speed, and the texture of substrates including their prey items. The night air is full of signals, some audible to us. Mexican Free-tails will spend dusk to dawn on wing foraging for prey items like flying ants, beetles, and the notorious crop pest, corn earworm.

To forage, they must emit echolocation signals and decipher the signals in milliseconds. As a bat approaches prey, echolocation pulses become more rapid until they form what is referred to as a feeding buzz. A bat can emit up to 200 pulses per second. Should two bats become pitted against one-another in the chase for prey, they will engage in aerial sabotage with the hopes of gaining one-up on the other.

Mexican Free-tailed bats use interference calls to jam the signals of others. This particular call, if well timed, can lower another free-tailed bat's ability to capture prey by more than 80%.

It's a battlefield out there.

Not only must bats be weary of winged predators such as hawks and owls, they must avoid wind farms, for if bats venture too close to the blades, certain death will follow. Proximity to the blades can cause a rapid change in air pressure that ruptures blood vessels or results in a collision with the swirling blades.

Undaunted by the challenges that lay ahead, the bats sally forth from the cave and do what nature intended for them to do.

Before first light, the bats return to the cave. Entry into the roost sounds entirely different than the emergence. Wings are locked back as the bats, like a wave, drop into the mouth

of the cave. Instead of the loud fluttering of wings, the return of the colony mimics the rustling of leaves. A light rainfall on dust.

Their physiological abilities and perseverance in a challenging world as well as their ecological importance add to the fascination surrounding these phenomenal creatures.

While working to complete my Master's degree, I continue to travel and film the common, endangered, and even private wildlife within the state lines.

No matter how intriguing the species, nothing has left me in awe, quite like bats. I consider myself fortunate to have worked with them.

Great progress has been made in the way of bat conservation. Still, our understanding of bats, their behavior and how they fit into our fragile ecosystem is lacking in many regards. Much stands to be learned.

As a little girl, I was always drawn to the more feared, undesirable wildlife. An attraction that has yet to fade. Climbing through caves, sitting beside ponds and laying underneath the stars listening for echolocation calls, I still seek out bats where ever I go.

CHAPTER V

EVALUATION

Evaluation of *Echoes in the Night* from Jessie D. Story

The finished product was the result of filming efforts by myself and Dr. Ray Matlack. For several years, we filmed countless hours of wildlife across the state of Texas. This thesis provided me with the opportunity to piece together complete segments of video. Originally, it was my desire to complete six segments that told a comprehensive story. As it would turn out, my preliminary goals were too large for the time frame. With that said, I take pride in the completed product, *Echoes in the Night*.

Aside from this point, I feel there is still some progress to be made. My decision to insert a five-second clip of stock footage into the film proved to be a mistake. The footage itself was not liked by the audience and several members voiced favor for removing the scene so that the entire documentary could be my original footage. The scene's purpose was to illustrate the result of a bat colliding with a wind turbine. Additionally, there are a few seconds of audio throughout the film that I believe could be toned down more to make the sound less abrasive.

I was surprised by the opinions from those within my committee. The outpouring of positive feedback and genuine enjoyment of the film was more than I could have expected. Throughout my thesis, I have received continued encouragement from committee members. As this is my first attempt at making a short film, I was discouraged by the quality of product I was capable of producing. Having encouraging results from the film viewing far exceeding my expectations.

Important to note through this whole process of producing a short film is that I had never before put together segments spanning more than 5 minutes. For me, the goal was to piece together a comprehensive piece, with narration, music beds, and scenes that told a story. The concept of story was composed of topics related to bats such as narration that discusses their ecological contributions and roost sites. Additionally, the concept was composed of topics that informed viewers of how I began to work with bats and the affection I developed for them. The result was a storyline focusing on bats that's told through my experiences working with these creatures. For example, viewers learn about the process of flight through the narrative of me studying bats as a biologist.

One misstep I feel I made was the decision to insert a 5-second clip of stock footage to portray the carnage of a bat colliding with a wind turbine. I feel the tactic of using stock footage cheapened the film. My committee expressed similar sentiment. Another drawback was the date of the presentation. Because my defense took place during summer semester, none of my fellow classmates could attend. Instead, classmates expressed their support through text and instant messaging.

The decision to showcase the film in the AT&T studio proved fruitful as the studio provided surround sound as well as a full HD projector to view the film. A

question and answer portion took place post-viewing. Questions pertained to technique, accumulation of footage as well as what I learned from a filmmakers' perspective.

Overall, I was surprised at the reactions to my film. Committee members expressed genuine interest in bats as well as my experience working with the animals. Many of the inquiries about bats extended beyond what committee members witnessed during the film. From this, I found opportunities to insert more explanation of bats and their behaviors. The initial reaction from the viewing built my confidence that a film can induce interest in wildlife that is typically thought of as undesirable

Evaluation of *Echoes in the Night* from Dr. Emily S. Kinsky

After an introduction by her chair, Dr. Kristina Drumheller, Jessie Story began her thesis defense with background information about Texas Wild and the 3 years she worked with Dr. Ray Matlack on that endeavor. The two of them were biologists who became self-taught filmmakers to raise awareness and appreciation of nature, ecology and wildlife issues.

Jessie and Dr. Matlack shot hundreds of hours of footage at multiple locations across the state with the desire of educating the public about wildlife in Texas. Although several interstitials had been created and aired by the local PBS station, no long-form edits had been made of their collected footage. Jessie accomplished something enormous by sorting through all of the video content and finding relevant sections about bats and about her background to include in this wildlife documentary she created for her thesis.

The film Jessie produced for her thesis, *Echoes in the Night*, was played for

the audience in the AT&T HD Studio in the Sybil B. Harrington Fine Arts Complex on the campus of West Texas A&M University, which had been set up with several rows of theatre seats, a large screen and a maroon velvet curtain. The film presentation was followed by a period of questions and answers from her committee as well as guests. Questions included inquiries about the locations, the order of some shots, the use of one scene from stock footage that her committee suggested she could do without so that the entire film was her own, the surprising facts about bats included in the film, and whether the footage during the end credits was looping or not (it was not – the bats leaving the cave actually took several hours).

I was impressed with the quality of footage she had and with the way she stitched the scenes together to tell a story – her story. She strategically chose her music bed to go with each scene and went with natural sounds at certain appropriate points, too. She chose shots that focused on the bats and other animals, and she included shots that gave behind-the-scenes insights into how the footage of animals was filmed.

The process of gathering, sorting, organizing, scriptwriting, editing and tweaking text on the screen was a mammoth undertaking, and she accomplished it. I applaud Jessie for her countless hours of effort, and I look forward to seeing where her film plays next and what other edited footage she pulls together in the future.

Evaluation of Echoes in the Night from Dr. Kristina Drumheller

Watching Jessie's film come together from raw material to the finished product was fascinating. I knew the footage was beautiful but to be in on the transformation from lengthy, silent shots to more purposeful shorter choices, mixed with nature sounds and music, was a privilege as a committee member.

Early on, Jessie's vision was larger than what can, and should, be accomplished for a thesis. What started as six videos on different topics became an extended film about bats and her passion for what she does. In the end, this was a much better project than I think any of us realized it could be. The project became about Jessie as much as it was about the bats, which I think helped her better define her vision as a filmmaker.

My expertise is not in filmmaking, so I must give a lot of credit to committee member, Randy Ray, for helping Jessie's vision and talent grow by leaps during this project. My first glimpse at the project was this beautiful, silent footage Jessie intended to use in the final film. I wasn't sure what to expect when it transitioned to the final cut, complete with audio. The nature sounds were stimulating and added depth to what the viewer sees on screen. The music Jessie chose was perfect for propelling the story forward and drawing in the audience.

The narrative was one of the key changes as this project progressed from a film about bats, to one about Jessie's work with bats. Making the decision to focus more on Jessie and using her own voice for the storytelling transformed this film in ways I had not expected. It was so much more.

Watching the film with audience members who had not previewed the film affirmed my reaction to the film. They similarly saw the beauty in the film and the personal touch in using Jessie's story as the background for the film. The questions showed genuine interest in both the subject matter and the filming process. They were interested in learning more about bats, particularly those from the region, and what Jessie hopes to do with this film and her future film goals.

I am glad I was part of this process and able to see the product from start to finish. It is clear that Jessie's skills as a filmmaker were greatly enhanced through this process, giving her a thesis that demonstrates what she has learned and provides the hope of what she will do in the future.

Evaluation of Echoes in the Night from Randy Ray

For her performance thesis, Jessie created a 19.5 minute documentary on bats in Texas entitled *Echoes in the Night*. Jessie's completed film is an excellent example of high quality graduate level work. It contained some *very* impressive footage of wildlife in Texas. From a production perspective, the footage was well shot, framed, and when needed, lit. The editing on Jessie's documentary was good but not the same caliber as her shooting. Here are some of my observations:

Shooting. As mentioned, Jessie shoots at a professional level. Her shots are well framed and she knows how to use various video cameras very well. The colors are always rich and vibrant, except when she is shooting with an IR camera. Still, in that case, the shots are always interesting and well thought out. Her use of field gear, such as jib and various other camera mounts, always adds to the finished product.

Editing. Jessie's editing skills are good and she has shown improvement throughout the process. She has a working knowledge of Adobe Premier and used that program quite well. I would encourage Jessie to also get familiar with Adobe After Effects as motion graphics would add a great deal to her documentaries.

Storytelling. Jessie demonstrated great improvement in her storytelling skills throughout the process of making this film. Her first draft was haphazard and hard to follow with a narrative that did not make sense. As she edited and rewrote she learned how better to tell her story. I would encourage her to continue honing those skills. Her narrative skipped around a bit in her film and a more sequenced story line would help make her narratives easier to follow by the viewer.

Workability. Jessie was very easy to work with and the kind of student that any professor would like to have under their tutelage. She is very respectful and courteous and mindful of other's time. She took critique well and would take the constructive criticism and apply it without hesitation. She was a pleasure to mentor.

There are two areas that I would encourage Jessie to work on. First, work on telling a story without trying to add too much. Keep your stories simple but always let your passion for wildlife show through. Second, have self-confidence! I have been teaching video production for over a decade and Jessie's footage is some of the most amazing video I have seen. There are many production companies and networks that would be lucky to have her on their team!

CHAPTER VI

CLOSING

The whole thesis process has been a valuable and redefining experience. An aspect that may be the most influential force within this entire process was the aspect of creation. I stepped into this entire process as a self-taught videographer who had edited together short minute-long segments. The process of creating a script and pairing it with shots that illustrated the narration, shifting through music tracks and creating a finished product, strengthened me as a videographer and as a person. Confidence in my ability to write and illustrate a short story was gained over the course of this thesis.

An unforeseen lesson learned during the crafting of this film, was the ways in which ethics shape wildlife documentaries. If anything, I hoped to have conveyed how ethics guide filmmaking, especially about how documentaries impact our schemas of the natural world. Discussions on filming techniques, false portrayals of animals in documentaries, pseudo-documentaries and their influence on audiences, are examined in relation to ethics. Ethics guide the production of a documentary including what subject matter will be discussed in the documentary and how the documentary will be shot.

Efforts to not deceive audiences and to not harm animals have grown since networks such as *BBC* began filming wildlife documentaries. Further, my understanding of ethics was broadened in my examination of the approach taken during the filming of this project. Throughout the process, choices to use infra-red cameras to avoid causing disturbance to bats, the placement of cameras and the behaviors of videographers during filming were thoroughly planned.

After having spent considerable time filming bats, it is beyond satisfying to see a finished, cohesive product emerge. A major force in the success of this thesis and film, is the support and insight given by my committee members on the quality of shots obtained and my potential to accomplish a short film. I give my deepest gratitude for them during this entire journey. Additionally, I cannot convey how critical my family has been in their support of me as a student and as an amateur videographer. Their endless encouragement and advice has led me to completing my master's degree and the short film.

A sense of relief results from having completed the process of creating a short film. From the filming of scenes, to the showing of the film, much knowledge has been gained on the process of breathing life into a story and defining a narrative. This process of creating a short film became a pivotal event shaping my confidence as a filmmaker and storyteller.

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