CONSEQUENCES OF INTERSPECIES CULTURAL INTERSECTION IN NATURE DOCUMENTARY

by

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ABSTRACT

Nature Documentary films routinely center around the behaviors of animals, rarely focusing on cultural interspecies interactions with humans. Using *Grizzly Man, Blackfish, Forty Ton Mirror, and The Lost Tapes of Dian Fossey*, this paper explores the cultural collision of people, their expectations, and animals in both captivity and the wild. The approach each film takes will be examined and highlight the details used to reach their conclusions. With one exception, the underlying them concludes that such interactions result in a detrimental outcome to both humans and animals.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Nature documentary film, throughout its history, has implemented several approaches in portraying the relationships between people and animals. These relationships constitute, in many cases, an intersection of culture between species; when two or more species cultures are influenced by the presence of another culture. These sometimes present themselves as changes to psyche, language/communication, and movement/migration patterns. There are several possible outcomes for these interactions, however this paper will concentrate on one specific outcome that presents itself often under cultural pressures: the volatile and often tragic results which manifest in several cases. Nature documentary films have the power to capture and showcase such instances where and when this occurs. In addition to giving examples, I will demonstrate the tactics these films use to emphasize their messaging on the subject. A hand-full of methods for highlighting interspecies cultural interactions are used in documentary film. In this paper, the focus will be on those utilized in the following films.

In Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man* (2005) and National Geographic's *The Lost Tapes of Diane Fossey* (2002) the result of stepping into a foreign environment to interact with bears and gorillas respectively, leads to the deaths of both researchers and animals. This is a representation of humans in an animal's environment, and in cases such as these, the person is attempting to integrate themselves into another species cultural territory and

draws upon the consequences of interspecies interactions. In contrast, *Blackfish* (2013) approaches the effects of cultural interactions highlighting the consequences but changes the narrative. In this and similar films, humans are trying to adjust the behavior and cultural patterns of another animal to fit within their own ideals, specifically the expectations of orcas through the lens of anthropomorphism and human confinement. Lastly, my short film *Forty Ton Mirror* (2019), will prove as an example representing films which highlight specific interspecies cultural intersection as neutral.

The importance of examining cultural interspecies relationships in nature documentary film, is framed around how humans describe our relationships with animals. Film is an important tool for understanding these descriptions because it presents the unique opportunity to view recorded interspecies interactions as well as communicate them. Dissecting the films in this paper will require to take a look at how each film is framed within the subject matter it tackles. What specifically is being communicated in regards to interspecies relationships? What kind of footage is used and how is it used to emphasize points? How are characters presented? What are the connotations and denotations contained in each film? Certain characteristics and patterns will present themselves throughout these films; such as anthropomorphic traits and cultural dissociation. At their most basic, small changes in behavioral patterns, such as avoiding certain small areas of occupancy will appear. In the more extreme cases, populations will adapt entirely new aspects of their culture, populations may diminish or flourish, and certain behaviors can be lost or gained.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND

Culture in Humans and Animals

Different populations of people often have their own unique sets of rules to govern behavior and interactions within a society or group. These groups can be merged into larger populations or separated into much smaller populations in a overarching community. Beliefs, customs, knowledge, language, art, food all fall within the realm of cultural identity and distinguish cultural populations. Like music subcultures, humans involved in specific scientific fields have evolved and continue to evolve their own culture. In the case of Diane Fossey, field researcher on mountain gorillas in Congo, the pressures of isolation, environment, and poachers, dictated a change in her behavior and interactions with other researchers who came to the area to aide her. In many cases these other researchers often fell to the same pressures that resulted in amplified behavioral changes, sometimes on their own, or through peer influence in the extremely small community (Fowler, 15). These changes eventually led to a more direct interaction with the nearby gorilla population, affecting both human and animal populations. Similarly, individuals in the fields of marine biology are often exposed to conditions distant from those present in most contemporary western human community settings. As an example, extended periods of time on the ocean establishes a sanctuary from dominant cultures on land and encourages the formation of new cultural behaviors.

Despite the sometimes confusing definitions of what constitutes culture, scientists in the biological field often have a simple, even if sometimes ambiguous, definition. “To biologists like us,” state Hal Whitehead and Luke Rendell, both researchers in the field of cetacean culture, “culture is the flow of information moving from animal to animal.” (Whitehead, Rendell, 6) Our modern-day ape cousins have also shown to exhibit complex cultural behaviors. Based on more than fifty years of research and observations, it is clear that other, primates are cultural beings, just as we are. Their use of tools, communication, and passing along learned behaviors, meet the criteria for cultural classification (Boesch, 14). The passing of information among peers and to descendants also leads to cultural branching. In some cases, apes that live on one side of a river exhibit different behaviors than those living on the opposite bank. In more confined settings, such as in human captivity, behaviors vary from group to group, as cliques often determine which behaviors are picked up and transmitted from individual to individual. These behaviors may not always appear to be signs of culture from a human perspective standard where cultural behaviors are more complex; however, they do in part define separations of groups within the species.

A Brief History of Nature Documentary

In the latter half of the 19th century, photographer Eadweard Muybridge set up a series of cameras set to trigger electromagnetically in order to document a horse's gait (Chris, 6). By setting the cameras along a track he, with the help of engineer John Isaacs, recorded an animal running in slow motion, a precursor to cinema filmmaking that would gain momentum decades later. After the success of his motion image, named *Sallie Gardner at the Gallop*, he would continue to work recording movements in both animals and people. This pursuit of documenting the anatomical and behavioral patterns in animals and humans would gain momentum, becoming one of the most popular sub-genres in film.

Filmmakers have sought to educate, sensationalize, and engage spectators in topics about science, natural history, and cultural and behavioral conditions in humans and animals. As nature documentary genre emerged in the early 20th century, it moved beyond the simple images gathered by early filmmakers such as Muybridge and other naturalists. Portraying animals as outright hostile monsters to romanticized models of anthropomorphism, films have sought to appeal to a certain type of audience, often at great expense to the reality of a situation. It became an avenue for fame, self-promotion, and monetary gain. In 1903, Thomas Edison released the film *Electrocuting an Elephant*, in which Topsy, a circus elephant, was electrocuted to death to promote direct current standards. Other films would outright fake narratives and locations. *Hunting Big Game in*

Africa (1909) was filmed on a set and an elderly zoo lion, which was portrayed as being wild, was shot and killed by a gunman off set as Theodore Roosevelt pretended to kill the frail animal on camera (Chris, 11). The spectacle of abuse of animals and deceit was common to early film and would mark the beginning of human-animal relationships in nature documentary.

With the rising success of documentaries in the early to mid-20th century, the focus of the genre began to shift, instead of daring exotic adventures, films embraced the drama of animal behaviors. Disney released fourteen theatrical nature documentaries under the umbrella of *True Life Adventures* (1948). A popular success, this coincided with the broadcast format of nature shows including *Wild Kingdom* and *Zoo Quest*. As a result of appealing to drama, much of the footage is misleading. In Disney's *White Wilderness*(1958), lemmings were pushed off a cliff to create the false narrative that the animals would hurl themselves to their deaths in the water and on the rocks below. As a consequence, the myth that lemmings commit suicide persists to this day. In a 1986 New York Times article noted that, "One way or another, a filmmaker says, faking is 'a fundamental tool of the wildlife film industry'." This manipulation takes on many forms in nature documentaries as audience-driven films require entertainment value.

During the late 20th century, animal rights laws, groups, and cultural practices protecting animals became more popular in western mainstream culture. Groups such as the American Humane Society, gained momentum in protecting the welfare and rights of animals in film. This mentality would spill over into nature documentaries, and a new kind of approach to filmmaking emerged. Animal Planet's *Meerkat Manor* (2005) took the popular soap opera format and applied it to their series, which followed a group of

meerkats in the Kalahari Desert in conjunction with a scientific study on the animals. Animals were given individual names and developed their own story arcs and personalities. Filming was often close and personal giving the meerkats not only anthropomorphized characters, but also yielding a filming style similar to that on narrative shows. They were given an on screen culture by the filmmakers. Bands of meerkats would "go to war", love storylines would play out, and death became a tragic spectacle which, in some cases, led to public outcry over the refusal of the production crew to step in a save certain members of the meerkat colony. The presence of the crew would lure the curious meerkats, even to the point of the small animals crawling on people. The success of *Meerkat Manor* led the similarly produced *Lemur Street* (2007), which centers on lemurs roving the streets of Madagascar. In a similar vein, *Monkey Kingdom*(2014), *March of The Penguins*(2005), and *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill* (2003) all use human characteristics in association with animals to tell a story. This application of human characteristics has been a key component when portraying the cultural dynamics of people and animals in film and in human views of animal culture generally. This anthropomorphic pattern is present in each of the films this paper will examine.

CHAPTER THREE

CASE STUDIES

The Lost Film of Dian Fossey

In order to obtain accurate and useful data , scientists and researchers must often put themselves within the environments of their subjects, sometimes at risk to themselves or other animals occupying the same space. What happens in select cases are direct or indirect interactions and influences between the human observers and the subject population. As behaviors of individuals of one group change due to prolonged interspecies influence, so can certain aspects of the other group's or individual's behaviors, resulting in a form of cultural co-evolution.

Studies observing the behavior of wildlife for scientific research often use video and audio recordings to document activities. This is performed in some cases by the researchers themselves or by professional filmmakers. The use of these recordings is used primarily to record the behaviors of the animals. However, some footage gives insight to interactions and behaviors of the researchers and between researchers and subjects. These cases illuminate to culture of the animals, the culture of the researchers, and ultimately the interaction of these two cultures.

One of the most famous instances of animal-human cultural intersection in the name of research is that of Dian Fossey and the mountain gorillas in the Virunga mountains of Rwanda. More than seventy thousand feet of footage recording Fossey's

interactions with the great apes and her own daily cultural habits are featured in several documentary films. As photographer Bob Campbell said, "It was an extraordinary experience." Campbell, hired by National Geographic to document Fossey and the gorillas, spent nearly three years in the jungle with her. Traveling to the isolated environment in 1986 to replace the previous photographer who had been bitten by a venomous snake, he was curious to see what sort of person Dian Fossey was.

National Geographic's documentary special *The Lost Film of Dian Fossey* (2002) describes Fossey and Campbell's first meeting. Campbell relates that Fossey was covered head to foot with dirt and mud. This visual representation of Fossey hints the sort of person the film later reveals she is: someone who lived for her work and was aloof in relationships with other people. This specific documentary portrays its two main characters, Campbell and Fossey, as important pioneers who exhibited streaks of irresponsible behavior. Using footage not previously released to the public as a draw, most of its content reveals their blatant interaction with the groups of mountain gorillas in the area. The pair even go so far as to play with the animals and draw them out using items such as gloves, mirrors, and chocolate. It also captures a time in research when the risk of changing behaviors in a group was seen as acceptable. The footage of Fossey and Campbell bright eyed and amazed is juxtaposed with the curious nature of the gorillas within the same frame.

The other interesting behavioral point of the film revolves around Fossey and Campbell themselves, their relationship, and the stress of isolation on human behavior. During their handful of years together, a relationship that started out distant and aloof, transformed into a close professional and romantic one. *The Lost Film of Dian Fossey*

(2002) has no issue revealing the infidelity of Campbell and the manipulative practices of Fossey. While it offers no excuse, the film often puts and emphasis on the lonely and isolated nature of research that is a inherent in studying animals in remote and hard to reach locations. It also alludes to this being a factor in the Fossey's and Campbell's affinity toward the gorillas as they describe them as "friends" and "family." This acceptance of, and perhaps preference for animal "kinship" is a running theme in many similar films.

During the course of the study, Fossey and Campbell became doting on a specific member of the gorilla group, who they named Digit. Frequently, they would look for this specific individual as a source of interaction. The relationship become so intimate that they would allow the gorilla to climb on them, play with them, and share food with him. Dian Fossey was not empathetic with poachers, understandably, and would often terrorize them, threaten them, and even kidnap them to torture. It comes as no surprise, as the film alludes, that they would come looking for Digit and his family as a means of revenge, killing him and severing his hands. Upon finding the body of the gorilla she had cared some much about, she grew depressed and even more unpredictable.

The conclusion of the film praises their work, asking the question "Where would the gorillas be if not for Dian Fossey and Bob Campbell?" While there is no doubt that Dian Fossey conducted important scientific research on the gorilla populations in the Virungas, the film importantly addresses the contrasting mode of research compared with more contemporary field work. In a scene with Fossey and a gorilla, she uses toys to and chocolate to interact with the animal. The narrator seems to scold Fossey, "Scenes like this might seem a little shocking today, because modern researchers know better…" This

sentiment is then backed up by a primatologist who alludes to Fossey's somewhat reckless behavior.

Dian Fossey's life story culminates in her murder in her bungalow where she spent a large portion of her isolated life. Hacked several times with a machete, the investigation did not bring up any conclusive evidence of a motive or a suspect. *The Lost Tapes of Dian Fossey* brings up the mystery, hinting at the possibility of poachers wanting revenge or information illicit trading being the motive. Having made enemies with poachers, government officials, and even her peers, the culture she built for herself put her and the gorillas in danger.

Grizzly Man

In 2003, the death of bear enthusiast and filmmaker Timothy Treadwell prompted documentary filmmaker Werner Herzog to direct the 2005 film *Grizzly Man*. Herzog, who is known for his often overly philosophical, dramatic, and a sometimes seemingly staged interviews and narration, approaches the life and death of Treadwell in this same theatrical manner. The clips chosen throughout the film often come from the footage of Treadwell's own film stash that he captured during his time with the bears. In addition to filming the bears, he also filmed himself narrating what is assumed to be his eventual TV series. The footage also contains his conversations with the camera, explaining his frustration or conversing as though the camera itself was human. While Treadwell would occasionally bring a female companion along on his trips, the majority of the time he was alone spending months in the wilderness. Similar, yet on a more extreme level, Treadwell saw the animals in his study areas as family and would often converse with them, telling

them “I love you.” Treadwell was building a cultural bond with the bears and other animals to fill the void of human contact. The longer he spent time there, the more he began to embrace the wilderness as his home and increasingly grew to disdain the human world and its cultures. *Grizzly Man* is not shy to approach and point this out sometimes directly confronting the evolving turmoil within Treadwell’s outlook on the world he came from and the world he imbedded himself in. At one point, seemingly out of nowhere, Treadwell goes on a expletives filled rant about the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the people he once worked with. The film is not reluctant in depicting a man, who at times, must reassure himself that he was succeeding and making the best choices in an environment that would not protect him.

Treadwell did manage to survive for years in the wilderness and in the confines of bear territory, more luck than the outcome of skill as he was prone to getting dangerously close to the bears as they bathed, foraged for food, and moved around. The intrusion of his presence no doubt affected the behavior of the bears toward himself and other people. The continued presence may have reduced the fear or hesitation the giant mammals normally display. Since Treadwell camped along the bear trails and often encountered and interacted with bears who found their way into his camp, the bears in the area would be quite familiar with his presence. Bears usually avoid human camps if not already conditioned to be around humans and any possible food they might have with them. Treadwell’s blatant disregard for his own safety, his anthropomorphizing of the animals, and his habit of breaking regulations not only culminated in getting himself and Aime Huguenard, but also resulted in the deaths of two bears, killed when a team came to investigate the scene of the attack. Treadwell has the look and feel of a less aware and

responsible less Steve Irwin. The first scene opens with Treadwell in dirty, loose fitted clothing, long stringy blonde hair laying across his forehead, as he bursts into excitement about the bears he encounters, much like a child, repeating words and talking about the animals as though they are family. “I would die for them”, he happily exclaims, foreshadowing his grim demise at the end of the movie. This sets Treadwell up as a man who is unpredictable when dealing with the nature and habits of bears. He adopts what he has learned from his own culture in dealing with human-human and animal-human relationships. He then applies these experiences to his new environment with a tragic outcome. To characterize Treadwell’s frame of mind, Herzog interviews several other people, some of who claim they thought what Treadwell was doing was simply insane.

Herzog likes to go back to the scene of the crime to create a sense of surrealism, often having people point to specific items or places as though the event took place just recently. When he and the pilot, who helped supply and transport Treadwell, return to the area where Treadwell was killed, the pilot points to a seemingly random pile of bones as though they are from the bear that killed the two campers. The bones look suspiciously small to be from a thousand pound 28 year old bear, and as much of Herzog’s work, things seem staged. What works in this film regarding the interviews, is that it makes Treadwell’s footage seems all that more real, as though the fabricated world in his mind is more real than the people telling the story. By the time the film ends, Treadwell has fully embraced a romanticized view of living with bears and other animals in the wild. His tirade about human culture has been the outcome of his isolation and continued loss of the cultural identity he belonged to in human civilization. He, rejects his place in human culture, and finds refuge with the bears. Unfortunately for him, this integration did

not make him accepted into the fold of an imaginary bear society, but only made the bears more comfortable with his presence; a dangerous situation to be in.

There are similarities between Treadwell and Fossey, a comparison not often imagined, in that both decided to live under the pressures and within the realm of another species. In both examples, this led to the deaths of people and, it can be argued, the deaths of individual animals they were studying. However, Treadwell was killed by the animals and Fossey was not. This detail is important because the contrasting situations of enthusiast and trained researcher emphasizes the increase of danger when an untrained enthusiast inserts themselves into a situation they foolishly think they have some control over.

Blackfish

Before exploring the next film, it is important to take a brief moment and look at behavioral patterns and culture in orcas. Without this context, the gravity of the consequences discussed will be blunted. Our understanding of cetaceans has changed greatly over the last hundred years, accelerating to its current state. Discarding the notion of whales as unpredictable and dangerous beasts, they are now seen as capable of culture and considerable cognitive ability (Whitehead, Rendell 65).

Orcas live their lives in highly sophisticated groups, with each pod exhibiting unique cultural markers. The habitat range of these cetaceans cover a large portion of waters all over the world, and cultures are divided by geographic locations (3). It is necessary, when understanding how the cultures between people and orcas interact, to

have a grasp of how different cultures are from one pod to another. These differences include hunting patterns, individual interactions, and even dialect (Pyenson, 12). One member of an orca pod that spends a period of time in the western Canadian seas, would have a different language than an individual on the opposite side of the continent. Take into consideration how these differences might affect two such foreign individuals interacting or how the removal of an individual from its culture might impact its behavior.

In 2013, *Blackfish,* directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite, became one of the most important documentaries of the 21st century by generating widespread debate concerning the irresponsible treatment of orcas by the Seaworld corporation that contributed to the injuries and deaths of several trainers and performers at their parks. Similar to *Grizzly Man*, the film centers around the tragic death of a human, in this case Dawn Brancheau, who was drowned and partially eaten by a large male orca named Tilikum. Throughout the film, Tilikum serves as a convincing case study for the film's message of the effects of Seaworld's capricious and sometimes nefarious behavior. The company's profit is put ahead of the welfare of animals and trainers, to the point where laws are broken. The film opens shifting through footage and sound from the attack, and very quickly, so that within the first few minutes there is a lot of content to unpack relating to the volatile intersection, destruction, and injection of culture between humans and orcas. In conjunction with the slow-motion footage of captive orcas and trainers, a shocked and sad voice explains "a whale has eaten one of the trainers." Moments later a trainer is lifted up into the air on the nose of a whale as the audience claps and cheers. Within this brief amount of time, *Blackfish* has already put into context the contrast of what park

visitors and most of the film audience expect from Sea World and what is actually going on in relation to the orcas, the people who train them, and the park.

Blackfish uses a simple yet very effective tactic that manifests throughout most of the film. Scattered throughout the film are old Seaworld commercials filled with grinning families, and majestic whales paired with exuberant trainers. This is the imagery associated with these parks, and why they are advertised and thought of as family oriented. Visitors get to enter world where animals and people are happily side by side, being a part of something unique. The film contrasts this by following up with clips that can be separated into three categories. First, there are a lot of clips of stressed whales. The large animals swim in strange patterns, they isolate themselves and hover motionless in the tanks, harassment of other whales, and they often rebel against the trainers. There are also the cases of the mistreatment of the orcas: withholding of food, confined spaces, separation of calves from mothers, and the whales' violent acquisition from the wild. The most effective category of clips are the attacks. Unpredictable, sudden, and violent, trainers are at the mercy of the giant animals. These images pull back the curtain sold to us by the park. Blackfish doesn't just give us exclusive behind the scenes access, it juxtaposes the illusion with the reality.

Humans have always been awed by larger more powerful animals and the mystery that is associated with them. Reinforcing the romanticism associated the whales, Seaworld has turned the confinement and breakdown of the creatures into a financially-motivated spectacle. The trainers, when first exposed to the whales, are filled with a sense of wonder, and for many of them it is their dream job that they have wanted to attain since childhood. There already is a cultural connection between these animals and

the trainers from a young age and *Blackfish* spends a good portion of the film subtly reminding us what these animals mean to individual humans. Archival footage of grinning Seaworld trainers pantomiming with seals, swimming with dolphins, and feeding whales, accompanied by happy carefree music, puts the audience into a familiar space when thinking about marine mammal parks. The connotation that these animals can live like us, be with us, and they are privileged to be a part of our culture is the egocentric context that puts the film into motion, and jumpstarts its takedown of these ideals.

It is apparent, that unlike *Grizzly Man* and other stories centered around humans trying to put themselves into another species environment and culture, *Blackfish* is about the destruction of culture of another species and trying to replace it with a culture centered around serving the whims of humans. The whales lose the cultural bonds associated with specific pods, instead they are expected to bond with and entertain people. They lose the capability to communicate with their own language, as orca language is specific to regions and pods, and are expected to learn communication patterns of people. This frustration builds and culminates to the destruction of the whale psyche. This results in the deaths of people, and the deaths of whales.

Forty Ton Mirror

Previous examples of films in this paper hinge on a dramatic event or events which prompt the viewer to look at a subject in a new light or to expose an underlying problem with how humans and animals interact on a cultural level. My short film *Forty*

Ton Mirror (2019), completed as part of my MFA in Science and Natural History Filmmaking at Montana State University, takes a different approach to exploring such events. Following the trips of a small humpback whale research team on Maui, Hawaii, it examines the culture of the crew while alluding to the influence and similarities they share with the whales they are following in the early Spring of 2018.

The culture of cetacean researchers has specific qualities that are a result of the environment in which the conduct research and that of the academic field to which they belong to. The field of cetacean research is in its early stages, only really gaining public notice in the last couple of decades. Lack of educational programs focused on cetacean-related research has, to date, produced only a small community and generally those within it tend to be well known among peers (Pyenson). Dr. Jim Darling and Dr. Megan Jones, two of the three investigators profiled in Forty Ton Mirror, both marine biologists, specialize in whale identification using markings on the tales of whales and bioacoustics. This research is critical to understanding the migration patterns of humpback whales, and equally important, the unraveling of the mystery of why whales sing.

Studying whales presents unique challenges that other animal behaviorists do not have to deal with. These animals spend virtually all of their lives underwater; the time they come to the surface is minimal. In addition, they spend most of their time far from human civilization, hidden from curious eyes. Usually, people think of them in relation to coastal waters, visible from the side of a boat (4). “The logistics of studying whales places them in a realm truly apart from every other large mammal on land or at sea. To know anything about them in the wild takes time on a boat, sticking a tag on their back, sliding a camera underwater, or spying overhead with a drone..”, explains Nick Pyenson

(Pyenson 15). *Forty Ton Mirror* addresses this challenge and how these behaviors affect the way researchers behave in comparison to other fields of large mammal research. Those who study elephants, Jim Darling explains, can have visual contact for long periods of time because the animals live on land. In comparison, as seen in the film, those doing research on whales do field research by boat, sometimes for extended periods of time. As a result, the amount of time needed to collect a comparative amount of data is longer, known data is skewed toward surface behaviors, and there are more unknowns needed to be filled in. These challenges cultivate a culture which is tight knit, dedicated to spending large amounts of time in confined spaces, and make progression of the field drawn out over longer periods of time. It is a very distinct subculture in science.

The greater part of Forty Ton Mirror deals with time on a smaller research boat. As the characters look for whales, the boat rocks with the waves. This continuous movement generates a learned behavior in humans as the movement can easily throw a person off balance. In comparison to other documentary films centered around whales, Forty Ton Mirror designates much of its time toward looking for whales rather than seeing them, as is normal for research. Throughout the film a pattern arises; look at the horizon for blows or breaches, travel to the location when spotted, drop a hydrophone into the water, record the whale's singing, look to the horizon for a new whale to record. As a reminder, the purpose of the film is not to showcase the whales, but to engage the habits and experiences of the people studying them. The habits of the researchers puts an emphasis on their relationship to the whales; what behaviors are present in response to collecting data from whales. This is the most observable link to the cultural intersection between the two species.

Forty Ton Mirror centers on the cultural convergence of people and whales by hitting on a number of visual points. The opening image is of a whale, motionless, its song emerging from the abyss. It cuts to researchers on a boat, our main characters, listening and thrilled. The film's opening credit scenes contain man-made murals of whales on the sides of buildings as people and cars pass by. This alludes to the current cultural view people have towards whales, beautiful otherworldly, art worthy animals, and the normalization of such views. Throughout the film there is a juxtaposition between the makeup of the whale groups and the three researchers. Instead of separating the culture of the researchers and the whales, parts of the film suggest a similarity in some aspects. As mentioned earlier, the transference of information is an essential part of how we think about culture, such transference can be accomplished through vocals or visual behavioral learning. In the very beginning of the film, scientist Dr. Megan Jones puts the headphones onto the intern so she can take in the sounds of the whales and learn by exposure. This recurring theme presents itself throughout the film. The intern continues to gain insight and knowledge from the senior scientists, specifically regarding the behavior of the whales.

The culture of the three researchers manifests itself in more ways than "spying on whales", other events included in Forty Ton Mirror serve as examples of culture. Twice during the film the teams pulls out sea debris from the water's surface. The impact of debris on marine life makes it a priority to remove such trash. There is little doubt that the experiences of witnessing whale entanglement has an impact on this behavior.

Unlike the previous films in this paper, *Forty Ton Mirror* does not conclude with concerns about interspecies cultural interactions related to the observation of whales.

Instead, it alludes to the romanticism of the whale and researcher relationship. Mesmerizing music accompanies footage of "dancing" whales, slapping tales with thunderous sounds, and the exotic sounds of their breathing. To Jones, there is an importance of passing along her passion and cultural knowledge to the next generation of researchers.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Films that have taken a look at the interactions between people and animals in wild spaces, or from wild spaces, point to common conclusions, that the crossing of cultural spaces between species can have serious implications for the well-being of animals and humans and/or that immersion into another culture can change behaviors accordingly. These films arrive at this conclusion through the portrayal of characters, the animals, or the tone of the story itself. Some characters lack a sense of responsibility, others have a keen insight into the issues they confront, and others are merely in a state of naivety.

A critical component to these films are the cinematic techniques used to arrive to a specific conclusion. For example, Werner Herzog chooses to use clips of Treadwell interacting in often foolish positions with bears. Throughout *Grizzly Man*, Treadwell addresses the real dangers of bears and getting within their proximity. Within minutes of such clips, Treadwell is with the bears close enough to pet them and continuously "getting in their way" as the bears go about their business sometimes ambling over to Treadwell to get a reaction out of him. *Blackfish* uses the deaths and injuries of orca trainers to highlight the complications of moving cultural animals from their own environments into a new and foreign world. The romanticism of whales is juxtaposed to an orca's forcefully changed behaviors leading to tragic outcomes. In the cases of *The*

Lost Film of Dian Fossey and *Forty Ton Mirror*, researchers' behaviors are shaped by the conditions in which they study, and in one case leads to a tragic outcome. These examinations provide insight into the representation of animal and human cultural conflict in nature documentary film.

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