

'Danger! Danger! Danger!' or When Animals Might Attack: Adventure Activism and Wildlife Film and Television

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In the Animal Planet series *The Crocodile Hunter* and Peter Lynch's 1996 documentary *Project Grizzly*, Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter and Troy Hurtubise, the subject of Lynch's film, reason that action-packed, close encounters with animals are the mainstay of their respective work. Irwin states at the end of an episode titled "Steve's Story":

I have to get right, fair smack into the action because this day has come where the audience, you, need to come with me and be there with that animal because if we can touch people with wildlife then they want to save it. Gone are the days of sitting back on the long lens tripod and looking at wildlife way over there. Uh-uh. Come with me.

According to Irwin, again in "Steve's Story", his ability to track, grab and even wrestle with animals is secondary to his command of zoology and biology and only serves to advance his mission of "Conservation, Enthusiasm, and Passion".

Hurtubise's description of what he calls "close-quarter bear research" occurs in the middle of *Project Grizzly* when he appears in the Mattawa, Ontario Town Dump (named in a subtitle) while black bears scavenge for food around him. Hurtubise is dressed for the "bush" in what functions as his uniform in the film -- a buckskin fringe jacket and a red beret with hunting knives strapped to his thigh and his back. In a voice-over Hurtubise explains:

You wanna learn the behavioral aspects of bears, you gotta live with them. You've gotta see what they see. It's different from just studying them, from films. It's different from studying them even on location, but from an obstacle point. You have to sit with them. Be there. They're walking around ya. You're seeing what they're seeing. You're smelling what they're smelling. You're watching how they interact with each other, three-four feet away. That's close-quarter bear research.

Hurtubise does not describe the results that will be produced by close-quarter bear research but his general idea seems to be to advance our knowledge of grizzly bears. Before he explains close-quarter bear research, however, we see his main research tool; a series of homemade enormous metal and plastic suits that should allow him to approach grizzly bears and withstand their attacks. The film includes images of the construction and testing of the several versions of the suit and the latest incarnation shown is the seven foot tall, 147 pound Ursus Mark VI. A viewing of *RoboCop* inspired the suit and this connection is shown in the

documentary when Hurtubise, wearing the Ursus Mark VI, walks through a drive-in theater while the film plays in the background.

Irwin and Hurtubise are not formally trained as scientists, nor do they appear to consider themselves to be scientists, but they do aspire to deliver accurate scientific representations of animals through a mix of naturalist methods and experiential knowledge. They thereby correspond with the historical development of ethology, the biological study of natural behavior, that Eileen Crist describes as a:

methodology of long-term, close observation and [the] interest in the natural lives of animals [that has] often not [been] regarded as 'proper science'. The founders of ethology preserved much of the methodology of naturalists but introduced a theoretical framework and an accompanying technical vocabulary modeled on the physical sciences. (Crist, 1999: 8-9)

Irwin's and Hurtubise's descriptions call upon this history and emphasize their shared notion that animal research depends upon observational research conducted in close proximity. On a weekly basis Irwin captures animals, holds them close to the camera and to his face and is usually attacked by the creatures as he delivers a mini-lecture about them. Lynch's documentary shows Hurtubise stalk black bears in garbage dumps as he, in his own words, pursues "the edge"; "I've got to have something that gives me the edge. And when I run out of the edge, I'm in big trouble". Such actions appear to place Irwin and Hurtubise in harm's way for reasons that follow from their similar methodologies and both men interpret the potential injury that they face as a part of their calling.

Another aspect of Irwin's and Hurtubise's vocation that they view as a necessity is to capture the dangerous nature of their exploits on film and video. This need might be explained as a way to 'spread the word' about their work, though neither man states this. To capture the danger and the excitement involved with their close observation of wild animals is implicit and is akin to ethological drawings, photographs and written observations. In *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions*, Lisa Bloom discusses a portion of this ethological history that includes *National Geographic* and that sets the stage for, and later competed with, motion picture representation. Bloom writes that:

Playing a similar role to Hollywood's, the National Geographic Society would entertain its audience by adding the flavor of adventure to an otherwise tasteless recipe of science. Yet instead of fabricating fictions for its audience it would entertain with facts. It would use photographs rather than moving pictures and would feature explorers, travelers, and scientists as its stars rather than actors. Its educational purpose made it morally superior to Hollywood. Yet its subject matter would be equally thrilling. It, too, would make the exotic seem familiar, although most of its members preferred to be armchair travelers, others would one day want to become explorers. National Geographic saw that this profession would have a great deal of appeal, especially to men [since] exploration offered an assurance of masculinity. The figure of the explorer came to embody an enviable kind of masculinist identity. (Bloom, 1993: 72)

Bloom rightly identifies a standard feature of earlier wildlife texts that also describes an aspect of contemporary wildlife texts, to "entertain with facts", thrills and exoticism that

coexists with traditional notions of active, rugged, heterosexual masculinity. *National Geographic* itself endures as an educational text not from outside Hollywood but from within a multimedia environment that includes Hollywood -- *nationalgeographic.com*; *National Geographic Explorer* on MSNBC; the National Geographic Channel, U.S and International; five magazines and numerous books and television specials. [1]

An analysis that resembles Bloom's consideration of literary and photographic texts is found in Gregg Mitman's *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film*, a survey of nature film and television, most of which blend "scientific research and vernacular knowledge, education and entertainment" (Mitman, 1999: 3). Mitman writes that:

Nature on the silent screen within early twentieth-century America [was] framed as the antipode of civilization. Wilderness was a landscape of authenticity, a place where masculine virtues were honed and restored, a place where individual character was laid bare. The camera was a means of recreating this wilderness experience, but only if truthfulness could be assured. (Mitman, 1999: 25)

Mitman's comments about early cinema suggest the degree to which earlier wildlife and adventure tropes continue to inform contemporary narratives such as Irwin's, Hurtubise's and their (male) predecessors and contemporaries -- Marlin Perkins, Peter Benchley, Mark O'Shea and Jeff Corwin to name but a few. [2] In each case education and entertainment justify the customary representation of wilderness, authenticity and all things "natural" set against civilization/the domestic sphere, artifice and all things 'technological'.

Education and entertainment function as the defining dyad for a trend that I want to call adventure activism; representations that mingle wildlife conservation with dangerous, exciting and sometimes violent human-animal interactions. This mixture of education, entertainment, adventure and activism can be uneasy if the emphasis on filmed entertainment outweighs thoughtful discussion about, and depiction of, wildlife conservation (including natural environments) and/or animal rights and welfare. Problems arise when the spectacular display of the risk-taking male adventurer in pursuit of wild animals, or even action-adventure in general, becomes the standard form of wildlife representation. In *Wildlife Films*, Derek Bousé raises important questions about just such issues:

Research in visual communication suggests that viewers often interpret attributes of film form as attributes of content, for example, mistaking *editing* speed for *event speed*. What might be the implications, then of widespread perceptions of nature and wildlife *in television terms* -- that is, as being characterized by nearly incessant motion, action, and dynamism? Might viewers, especially heavy viewers, see the natural world as dangerous, threatening, even hostile? Might there already be a sort of 'mean world syndrome' in some of our perceptions of it? Consider the techniques of visual intensification used in television advertisement for four-wheel drive vehicles, or in depictions of skiing, snowboarding, and so-called 'extreme' outdoor sports. The effect of the images is nearly always intensified by rapid cutting among sharply contrasting oblique camera angles, as if the worst tendencies of MTV and *Outdoor* magazine had run amuck. Yet if the contemplative experience of nature (of the sort reflected in landscape painting, for example) has given way to its perception as merely a spectacular backdrop for rapid,

heart-pounding action, for a vicarious 'rush,' it seems fairly clearly driven by larger commercial forces. [3] (Bouse, 2000: 5-6)

The formal attributes and commercial concerns that Bousé outlines are central to the adventure activist text (though he does not use the term). In turn, Bousé helps describe the manner in which adventure activist texts create narrative tension first and foremost, but do not elide the "educational entertainment value" noted by Bloom and Mitman. With these authors' ideas in mind, I want to offer an extended consideration of *The Crocodile Hunter* and *Project Grizzly* as examples of adventure activism. [4]

Conservation, Enthusiasm, and Bodily Harm

The Crocodile Hunter invokes adventure activism from its title onward, with the crocodile included as the object to be investigated. The inclusion of the hunt interprets the crocodile as elusive, unseen and unknown while Irwin's persona is defined by the dangerous qualities associated with the animal. Irwin is not, after all, the 'Kangaroo' or 'Koala Hunter', even though his program has devoted entire episodes to these native Australian species. Yet while the title proposes adventure related to elusive animals, what we see in *The Crocodile Hunter* is an attempt to re-establish the physical presence of animals through the prominent display of human-animal encounters. In Irwin's terms, "to get right smack into the action" is to promote wildlife conservation regardless of the fact that the ever-increasing close proximity between animals and humans is the major threat to wildlife. While Irwin often notes this, he fails to appreciate the irony of his own actions and does not reflect on his own invasions into the wilderness or his possible complicity in promoting human-wild animal encounters (e.g. adventure tours that allow people to approach and/or feed animals in the wild).

The narrative action of *The Crocodile Hunter* is all climax and success on the part of the protagonist. Nearly every time that Irwin grabs an animal he exclaims "Danger! Danger! Danger!" and then discusses the particularities of the creature. Irwin's actions are meant to bridge the distance between wild and domestic or tame spheres which Arnold Arluke and Clifton Sanders describe, "as social designations":

'wildness' comes to mean distance and danger with 'tameness' as its converse. Many learn what a 'tame' animal is by owning one themselves [and] come to view what constitutes a wild or tame animal as a hard and fast 'fact'. (Arluke and Sanders, 1996: 10)

In Irwin's performance, grabbing an animal for viewers becomes an odd assertion of ownership until he releases the animal, sometimes into the wild or sometimes into a captive habitat. Irwin's mini-lectures are the informative backbone of the program to be sure but the program's popularity resides in his transgression of the wild-domestic divide. His interactions with animals overshadow the informative non-fictional portion of the program as the violence of animal-human action moves the program toward the fictional and adventure drama. Irwin's only feature film to date, *The Crocodile Hunter: Collision Course*, released in summer 2002, highlights the importance of action and adventure as it mixes genres and includes the most overt example of fiction in *The Crocodile Hunter* franchise. The film's premise pits Irwin against rogue CIA agents sent to track a crocodile that has ingested a top-secret weapon but Irwin believes that they are poachers and protects the crocodile from them while filming his television program. The CIA-Irwin narratives barely intersect and because the film is shot in two distinct styles -- standard cinematic style for the CIA narrative and

"Croc-Vision", a modified televisual-digital video format, for Irwin's -- it seems to be two different films run together.

Viewers expect that the animal Irwin holds may attack him but that he will survive and prevail, just as he does in *Collision Course*, which perhaps reveals more about the fictional nature of the television program than had been intended. The "Danger! Danger! Danger!" tagline underscores his transgression and the hazardous nature of his work while it also serves as a warning to viewers to respect the wild-domestic divide. Indeed, the exception to this pattern notably occurs outside of *The Crocodile Hunter's* official narrative and is instead shown in a television advertisement for Federal Express titled *Fierce Snake*. Irwin is shown in direct address as he holds a snake and says, "Now this is a fierce snake, the most venomous snake in the world. One bite from him and it's all over". The snake then bites Irwin but he says not to worry since the anti-venom will arrive within minutes via FedEx. An unnamed person appears on screen and whispers in Irwin's ear at which point Irwin tells the audience that the anti-venom is with another carrier and then drops dead. [5]

Irwin prides himself on being a rough-and-tumble zoological encyclopedia and self-consciously presents himself as an entertainer who is serious about his research. "Steve's Story" includes home-movie footage of Irwin trapping crocodiles that suggests this characterization and indicates how *The Crocodile Hunter* program developed. Irwin explains that he began to shoot video footage of his trapping in the late 1980s as a way to share his exploits with his father, Bob, another rogue crocodile trapper and, "to capture a piece of history [and] crocodile conservation in its rawest form." But we can also see the development of the Crocodile Hunter character within these videos.

In one short video we see a wide static shot of Irwin as he climbs into a coffin-like box that is used to transport crocodiles. A crocodile sits behind him entangled in a net and when Irwin's legs are left sticking out of the box the crocodile bites him. The immediate muffled but audible response from Irwin is "Hey, you get that on video?" It is unclear if Irwin is speaking to someone filming this event since he notes that he often lodged a video camera in a tree or set it on his truck. This video is ostensibly included to show how Irwin, according to his father and his own self-assessment, had become "complacent" around crocodiles but it also indicates Irwin's appreciation of wildlife film and television conventions. "Hey, you get that on video?" can be understood as a question for the camera operator but also as a cue to the audience: Irwin's been attacked but he is all right and still able to deliver. The next shot from this video advances the proto-formula of *The Crocodile Hunter's* pattern of action when an extreme close-up of Irwin's bloody heel and ankle is shown as he narrates the details of his wound. Again, Irwin's commitment to "Conservation, Enthusiasm and Passion" has put him in harm's way but the dangerous animal hasn't stopped him.

Along with Irwin's attempts to close the distance between his domestic self and wild animals, viewers of *The Crocodile Hunter* see that the distance between his professional endeavors and his private family life has also been collapsed. Regular viewers of *The Crocodile Hunter* know that Irwin's parents started an animal refuge named the Australia Zoo, which he now runs with his wife Terri who acts as his sidekick on the program. In Sarah Simpson's interview with Irwin, *Method to his Madness*, Irwin describes his research, conservation efforts and *The Crocodile Hunter* as being one and the same because each role stems from his father's influence:

I'm doing exactly what I've done from when I was a small boy. You can blame my dad for that. He started it. He created me. He nurtured my instincts and he caused me to be who I am, so I've followed in his footsteps. All I ever wanted was to be my dad. (Simpson, 2001: website)

But the involvement of Irwin's domestic family in his work doesn't end with his father's contributions as Terri explains in *Method to his Madness*:

Steve's natural behavior in the wild happens to be fascinating! What you have in our academic arena is a lot of people who are brilliant at what they do -- and boring as the day is long. And you would never sit down and watch a lecture from any of them if you are a football fan, if you like watching *Melrose Place*, if you tune into your regular soap opera everyday, if you think Jacques Cousteau is still alive -- because you don't know anything about documentaries. These are the kind of people that, by default, we are reaching. All Steve wants to do is save these animals. He lives it, he breathes it, he sleeps it. [He is this] exciting person who can be sent up on *Saturday Night Live* and *South Park*. He's a nut! That is what's so exciting, and that's why people tune in. They tune in 'cause they want to see this guy die or get badly hurt. And instead they get a message about wildlife. (Simpson, 2001: website)

Unlike Irwin, Terri indicates that her husband's character is not the result of paternal creation but is instead innate "natural behavior" in which conservation, excitement and nutty actions complement each other. The cinematic and televisual elements all fit within "Conservation, Enthusiasm and Passion" according to Terri's transgeneric sense of *The Crocodile Hunter*, as does her own role; "I am the business side, I am the marketing and promotion side. I'm the straight man who plays off of the wild man. I'm Jane, he's Tarzan. It's always been like that" (Simpson, 2001: website). Again, Terri invokes fictional texts to characterize the 'documentary' address of the program. Viewers know Terri as the Jane to Irwin's Tarzan who marvels at his bravery and possibly reckless behavior.^[6]

The *Saturday Night Live* spoofs that Terri refers to seize upon this public perception of her. Two skits show animals attacking Terri (Lucy Lawless and Calista Flockhart respectively) while she smiles, laughs and agrees with Irwin's (Chris Kattan) excited assessment of the attacks. The joke highlights the link between the role that Terri plays within *The Crocodile Hunter* and a common televisual and cinematic type -- the level-headed wife who expresses incredulity at her husband's wacky plots and activities but does not thwart them. Terri subsequently stands in for viewers who are amazed and excited by Irwin's confrontation of danger while she also acts as a concrete contrast between the wild world of spectacular animal adventure and the safe, domestic space of the family. Although she may become involved in dangerous interactions with animals such instances only occur at Irwin's invitation and usually end with Terri expressing fear, exhaustion and a desire to avoid such contact in the future.

Perhaps the best, or most bizarre, example of the collusion of the wild, the domestic, animals and the family within *The Crocodile Hunter* circulates around Terri and Steve's daughter Bindi Sue. The most out-of-place set of sequences in "Steve's Story" cross-cut between individual, direct-address interviews with Terri and Steve and footage of the birth of Bindi that was shot by *The Crocodile Hunter* production crew (the set-up is that Steve was filming for the program when Terri went into labor). As the action of the birth (a wild adventure?)

sequence increases, the interview camera zooms closer to Steve's face until he is shown in a tight close-up with his hands cradled in front of his face in a re-enactment of his assistance with Bindi Sue's birth. This, of course, is his standard way of displaying animals. Over this climax Irwin says in voice-over, "Whack! And here's this little baby girl. I was flabbergasted. And it was then that her name evolved. I've gone Bindi, after my favorite crocodile, Bindi. And Terri's gone Bindi Sue, of course Sue after my dog, Sui." Irwin reinterprets the tradition of honorific, ancestral naming to underscore the lack of distinction between animals and humans within his (and presumably Terri's) conception of family.

Bindi the crocodile resides at Australia Zoo along with Agro, Acco, Lucy, Sharon, Angel, Charlie, Connie and Nobbie, each of whom are featured on the compilation episode titled "Greatest Crocodile Captures". Within this episode, Irwin presents the crocodiles' individual histories and, through the individualizing and naming method, creates what, in another context, Arluke and Sanders call "tie signs"; naming [a] pet [to] minimize the social boundaries between pets and humans" (Arluke and Sanders, 1996: 11). The names that Irwin bestows upon 'his' crocodiles situate the wild animals in the zoo (a captive but hardly domestic space) as pets and then as family through the name Bindi Sue. Activism and conservation get lost in passion, enthusiasm and the hybrid wild-domestic sphere where a crocodile and a dog are girl's ancestors. [7]

Testing the Edge

Similar to *The Crocodile Hunter's* title, *Project Grizzly* focuses our attention on a dangerous animal as an object of study while also using a tradition from military and governmental history; the 'animal naming' of operations (e.g., the 1962 U.S. plot to assassinate Fidel Castro named 'Operation Mongoose'). Yet while Irwin's hunt for violent encounters with animals never ends, Hurtubise is unable to demonstrate close-quarter bear research because his dramatic encounters with bears never happen. The grizzlies that do appear in the documentary are either dead, in cages, on found footage and, late in the film, in a field near Hurtubise's research camp in Banff. Of course, the bear appears after Hurtubise has decided to abort his work because he cannot walk in the suit while in the field.

Instead of bear attacks, Lynch includes the action involved with the suit's strength and safety tests. The first test sequence shows Hurtubise in the suit as he walks in a forest and approaches a log suspended from a rope. Hurtubise's suit is clearly Canadian since its red and white motif exactly matches the Canadian flag, yet another way that Hurtubise's project gives off the impression of official governmental/military research. [8] The camera then jump cuts to a shot of Hurtubise in a stationary position in front of the suspended log which is then dropped and slammed into his chest, knocking him to the ground. After a quick cutaway in which Hurtubise and his research team (his friends and brother, Blair) are shown in a coffee shop discussing fatalities within medieval jousting, we see another log-dropping test. When Hurtubise again is knocked to the ground, a hand-held camera approaches him and a subtitle introduces him as the expedition leader of "Project Grizzly". He then explains the test we have just seen; "according to the doctors of Physics at McMasters University [a] three to four hundred pound log, elevated to forty feet would simulate a grizzly's swat with its paw".

This sequence anticipates the appearance of a grizzly as it focuses on the astounding image of Hurtubise's tests, the stand-ins for close-quarter bear encounters. Later in the film we see home-movie video footage of Hurtubise's tests on earlier versions of the suit in which he is hit by a speeding truck that has a mattress attached to its front grill, beaten with two-by-fours

and thrown down the Niagara Escarpment in Hamilton, Ontario. What viewers might not fully appreciate when viewing the film is that the tests will be the only 'action' in the film. There will be no contact with grizzlies in the wild.

Lynch hints at this 'test action-adventure' trajectory within the *Project Grizzly's* opening sequence, portions of which are repeated near the end of the film after Hurtubise has given up his research in Banff. These two sequences depict Hurtubise's elaborate description of a near-death encounter with a grizzly in 1984, the experience that set him on his quest to build a research suit. The opening sequence starts with a wide shot that shows Hurtubise, dressed in his bush gear, in a snowy forest clearing that he says is "similar to the area" where he met the grizzly while camping. The film cuts to found footage of two grizzlies fighting along with an exaggerated soundtrack of bears growling and then cuts back to Hurtubise who is now shown in a medium shot as he gestures with two knives that he has drawn. He states:

From that day forward I never figured out why it happened. From the medicine men to the psychologists to the dream analysts to everybody, it just happened because it happened. In that the bear didn't kill me I've been on its trail ever since.

When the documentary returns to this sequence during its conclusion we hear the details of the encounter that have been omitted in the opening sequence. The bear, Hurtubise says, charged but pulled up short of him only then to hit him in the chest with its snout and knock him onto his back. When Hurtubise narrates this action, he throws himself to the ground where he continues to tell part of his story and then gets up to conclude that, while on the ground, "All of the theories of all the experts are coming through [his] mind". He continues, speaking in the present and past tense about this past moment:

I haven't read nothing on grizzly bears but from what I've watched on TV, they say play dead. I'm trying to contemplate playing dead with this four hundred or five hundred pound grizzly coming over and raking me with claws and teeth. And I say, bullshit, its not gonna happen. All the sudden this calm comes over top my whole body because I knew right then I'm gonna die. So what I do is draw a blade half out of sheath and then say, 'All right old man you're gonna kill me as sure as I'm standing here. But I am so pissed off with all the bullshit you've put me through that I'm gonna take both of these [knives] before I go down, sure as God made little green apples and I'm gonna shove them right up your ass. And that's a fact.

We then learn that the bear paused, perhaps smiled and walked away, at which point we see the same shot of Hurtubise from the opening of the documentary as he repeats his statement about medicine men and psychologists.

These opening and closing sequences are central to Lynch's documentary and the slightly incredulous tone that defines its representation of Hurtubise. The juxtaposition of the grizzlies fighting and the overdone soundtrack of their growls with the shots of Hurtubise with his knives drawn nowhere near a bear is not a mocking portrait of him but one that begins to question the direction and nature of his research. This incredulous tone seems on target when we learn the details of Hurtubise's encounter -- that he wanted to kill the bear. It seems that the goal of Hurtubise's work, unstated when he first explains close-quarter bear research, is to destroy his subjects and is motivated by a tremendous fear of them. [9]

This is a far cry from "Conservation, Enthusiasm and Passion." Lynch further presents Hurtubise's excessive justifications about the legitimacy of work as also stemming from fear - fear of questions about his work -- even though there is no apparent source for this fear. Lynch never includes his own questions for Hurtubise and only shows people whose support of Hurtubise's project is unwavering -- his mother, his brother and his research team. Yet the scrutiny that Hurtubise reacts against is hinted at within the representational strategies that Lynch uses to depict 'missing' members of the Hurtubise family.

Shown in front of a stuffed and mounted grizzly bear near the film's beginning, Hurtubise strokes the bear's chin tuft and refers to his first encounter with a grizzly, the origin of "Project Grizzly":

See all the grizzlies have the little tuft? Well his was pure white and he looked like an old man with a beard. Before he hit me I had to give him a name so I could associate with him. Now whenever I see a grizzly, it's the old man.

What Hurtubise does not mention is that he also consistently uses "old man" to refer to his father who does not appear in the film and remains nameless throughout.

The human "old man," similar to the grizzly, looms over the film as a violet and challenging specter who propels Hurtubise's work, much like the original grizzly that inspired Hurtubise's edge-quest. We learn that Hurtubise's father is an amateur anthropologist who has constructed a replica of an Iroquois village that, for Hurtubise, is the equivalent of his own bear suit. Hurtubise's father's history, which Hurtubise discusses in reverential tones at the replica village, is contrasted with the history of the suit; the old man destroyed the first version of the suit, a buckskin and hockey pad combination, to prove that it would not withstand a grizzly attack. In another sequence, Hurtubise articulates the "problem" with his father:

I can never bring [my father] on my expeditions. We brought him once and it was a nightmare. I love him but, ah, too many chiefs. My father likes to be in command too, so when I go with my father it's always like you're pitting against each other (sic).

Again, the militaristic undertone of "Project Grizzly" is apparent as Hurtubise explains yet another dangerous conflict that is inherent in his work. If his father were to come along, the violent close encounter that would provide the edge would be between father and son not human and animal. One wonders just how much the grizzly is indeed the object of study or is instead a stand-in for the father. Similar to the bear encounter that never happens, the film leaves the father-son conflict open. As Lynch states in the press kit, "I hope that a lot of people who see the film will have their own opinions about what Troy's suit is really supposed to protect him from" (Lynch, 1996: press kit).

Another family member omitted from the bear research and the documentary is Hurtubise's wife, whom he refers to as "the wife". "The wife," Lori, is named and thanked by Lynch in an end title and joins the father as the skeptics to whom Hurtubise directs his defense of the project. According to Hurtubise, Lori thinks he is "nuts", and her dissent is made apparent in one sequence at Country Style Donut Shop. This recurring locale is where Hurtubise and his team meet, which is the reason, he explains, that he, "get[s] shit from the wife". They have worked a compromise and he is "allowed out every second night from eleven to one-thirty".

At a screening of the documentary in Rochester, New York in 1996, Lynch confirmed what Hurtubise suggests in the film -- that Lori is not a supporter of her husband's project. Hurtubise excludes Lori from most conversations or events related to it, and Lynch decides to continue the exclusion to underscore Hurtubise's myopic, male-dominated conception of his work.

Adventure Activism and Hollywood's Wilderness

By way of conclusion, I want to draw on a final comment from Lynch; "I think there's something very Canadian about Troy's suit. It's kind of a makeshift defense against wilderness. I think every Canadian should own a suit like Hurtubise's to protect us from the barrage of images from Hollywood" (Lynch, 1996: press kit). Lynch's conflation of wilderness and Hollywood gets to the heart of his documentary since he produces a film that does not celebrate the genius of Hurtubise nor mock him as a failure but rather points up the oddities of this sympathetic character in a way that challenges standard cinematic heroics. I propose that Lynch's statement is reflected in the work of Irwin and Hurtubise but not quite as Lynch suggests. Within Irwin's and Hurtubise's texts the wilderness and Hollywood are mutually supportive -- the wilderness as a way to "break into" Hollywood and Hollywood as a way to "protect" the wilderness.

In what can be read as a blueprint for adventure activism, Irwin summarizes his Hollywood-wilderness outlook:

I want to create history. So we've gone beyond the media that we're working with now, and we've got a movie coming up [*The Crocodile Hunter: Collision Course*, released summer 2002], we've got animation on a roll, we've got another couple of things on the burner, as far as television, as far as big-screen cinemas, we're taking the *Croc Hunter* message, we're taking conservation and the greening of our planet to kids toys, to shirts -- you know, our shirts will be an advertisement of conservation. It's like we're taking it to the nth degree. (Simpson, 2001: website)

This statement and my interpretation of Lynch's sentiment seem to me to be accurate outlines of adventure activism. Even though Irwin and Hurtubise occupy different levels of the multimedia food chain they both engage in adventure activism as educational entertainment. The nth degree is Irwin's boundary while for Hurtubise, the challenge is to create a research team out of his friends and suits out of scrap. Hurtubise's appearances on talk shows after the release of the film indicate that he wanted to create a "Project Grizzly" empire of sorts, similar to Irwin's franchise, and that he planned to use the suit to film the birth of grizzly cubs and stream it over the World Wide Web. Hurtubise's website has not been updated since March 2002 and there are rumors that he lost the suit in a bankruptcy case. But in Lynch's documentary, Hurtubise's image as the hero of his own adventure activist film remains intact since, as is the case for Irwin as well, activism always makes for good entertainment.

Notes

[1] The title of a *National Geographic* story encapsulates the complicated marketing of adventure activism. *National Geographic*'s July 2001 cover displays the title 'Grizzly Cornered!' over a close-up photograph of a bear with its jaws open, apparently roaring. The article itself, however, is titled 'Grizzlies' in the Table of Contents and 'Grizz Survival: Their Fate is in Our Hands' on the article itself. This latter title runs on the bottom of a two-page landscape photograph that looks to be a cropped close-up of the cover photograph. The photograph is now contextualized by a caption that starts, "Don't be afraid" and continues to explain that, "Brody the trained bear opens wide on command". (Chadwick, 2001: 2-3)

[2] The texts include Marlin Perkins in *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*; Peter Benchley's television specials and his recent book, *Shark Trouble*; Mark O'Shea in *O'Shea's Big Adventure* and Jeff Corwin in *The Jeff Corwin Experience*. Variants on the adventure activist narrative also include the comedic -- the *Jackass* spin-off, *Wildboyz*, in which the hosts enact extreme stunts involving animals while serious-toned voice-over 'educates' audiences about the animals -- and the crime-fighting adventure found on *Animal Precinct*. On Perkins, see Mitman's chapter *Domesticating Nature in the Television Set*, 132-156. On Benchley, see Nigel Rothfels's Introduction, *Representing Animals*, vii-xv. In 2002 Animal Planet reintroduced a new version of *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* as a series and a set of specials. Finally, one game show reality program hosted by Corwin, *King of the Jungle*, appears on Animal Planet as a contest to recruit a new host skilled in adventure and animal conservation.

[3] For "research in visual communication," Bousé cites Paul Messaris's *Visual "Literacy": Image, Mind and Reality* (1994) and *Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising* (1997). On the 'mean world', he cites George Gerbner et al., The 'Mainstreaming' of America: Violence Profile. no. 11, *Journal of Communications* 30 (1980) and *Growing Up with Television: The Cultivation Perspective, Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (1994).

[4] On adventure, education and animals in motion pictures see also Jonathan Burt's *Animals in Film* and Cynthia Erb's *Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in World Culture*.

[5] Marcelle Heath has pointed out to me that the humor of this advertisement not only depends upon the reversal of Irwin's usual ability to cheat death but also his inability to make the 'right' consumer choices for global shipping.

[6] Terri's characterization of their dynamic also is informed by her sense of their respective nationalities. Steve, the untamed Australian who speaks in manic tones and uses excessive slang, is set against Terri, the laid-back American from Oregon whose composed demeanor and careful speech interpret Steve for an assumed US audience (though *The Crocodile Hunter* was first popular in Australia). Terri notes that Steve's "short-shorts" are "normal [for an] Aussie" and that he "happens to make a great role model. He's an Australian who doesn't drink" (Simpson, 2001: website). These observations are presumably contextualized by popular motion picture images of Australia, Fosters Beer and Outback Steakhouse television commercials and *Crocodile Dundee*. Irwin and Mick Dundee (Paul Hogan) bear striking similarities as semi-tame men who are able to traverse the wilderness and engage with wild animals but are also at home with their American wives.

[7] As I prepared this essay for publication Irwin was in the news for a controversial incident that highlights the blurring of family and animals in his work. Animal Planet released the following description of the incident:

On New Year's Day, with a capacity crowd watching at the Australia Zoo, Steve fed Murry, his 12-foot, 770-pound croc, with one hand, while holding one-month-old [son] Bob in the other. Bob was born Dec. 1, weighing just over 7 pounds (Animal Planet, 2004: website).

Animal Planet's statement continues to state that Irwin made a mistake but that the network knows that his family is the most important thing in his life. Irwin's unapologetic response states that the only mistake that he made is to take Bob into the crocodile pen with cameras around. In his public statement Irwin denies this was a stunt and claims that the reason he fed the crocodile with Bob was to begin a process of education because the family "live[s] in the middle of Australia Zoo. I will continue to educate my children and the children of the world so they don't go into the water with crocs". Irwin noted further that his father had educated him in the exact same fashion and that he possesses a videotape from the Australia Zoo camera that "will give another angle so all that ugly stacked-up vision of [him] looking like [he] endangered [his] child will be put to bed very quickly". (AFP, 2004: website)

[8] To underscore Hurtubise's false allusions to the 'official' nature of 'Project Grizzly', Lynch includes military marching music often heard in spy or action films before a mission begins. Lynch characterizes the film's genre mixing:

I, like Troy, grew up on Jacques Cousteau and *Wild Kingdom* -- and miles of Westerns. *Project Grizzly* gave me a chance to really make a genre bender; a gonzo nature film that says more about man than about animals and a reinvention of the western genre in the Canadian North. I like to think of this film as a 'Northern'. (Lynch, 1996: press kit)

[9] Evidence of *Project Grizzly*'s circulation in popular culture appears in *The Simpsons*' episode "The Fat and the Furriest" (2003), a thinly veiled version of *Project Grizzly*. The episode captures the underlying suggestion of Lynch's film, that Hurtubise's makes the suit as a way to attack a grizzly. In the episode, Homer is attacked by a grizzly and the attack is videotaped and then aired on the nightly news in a segment that labels him a coward. Homer builds a red and white suit as a vehicle for revenge but he and the bear become friends when he removes a tracking tag from the bear. Homer then lets the bear wear the suit so as to enter a wildlife sanctuary -- the suit disguises the bear as Homer and deflects bullets fired from hunters waiting near the gates.

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