

An Argument across Time and Space: Mediated Meetings in *Grizzly Man*

TRENT GRIFFITHS, *Deakin University, Melbourne*

ABSTRACT

In Werner Herzog's 2005 documentary *Grizzly Man*, charting the life and tragic death of grizzly bear protectionist Timothy Treadwell, the medium of documentary film becomes a place for the metaphysical meeting of two filmmakers otherwise separated by time and space. The film is structured as a kind of 'argument' between Herzog and Treadwell, reimagining the temporal divide of past and present through the technologies of documentary filmmaking. Herzog's use of Treadwell's archive of video footage highlights the complex status of the filmic trace in documentary film, and the possibilities of documentary traces to create distinct affective experiences of time. This paper focuses on how Treadwell is simultaneously present and absent in *Grizzly Man*, and how Herzog's decision to structure the film as a 'virtual argument' with Treadwell also turns the film into a self-reflexive project in which Herzog reconsiders and re-presents his own image as a filmmaker. With reference to Herzog's notion of the 'ecstatic truth' lying beneath the surface of what the documentary camera records, this article also considers the ethical implications of Herzog's use of Treadwell's archive material to both tell Treadwell's story and work through his own authorial identity.

KEYWORDS

Documentary time, self-representation, digital film, trace, authorship, Werner Herzog.

Introduction

The opening scene of *Grizzly Man* (2005), Werner Herzog's documentary about the life and tragic death of grizzly bear protectionist and amateur filmmaker Timothy Treadwell, shows Treadwell filming himself in front of bears grazing in a pasture, addressing the camera as though a wildlife documentary presenter. A caption underneath him appears with the simple text, 'Timothy Treadwell (1957-2003)'. This small detail immediately raises the tension between past and present at work in the film: Treadwell is framed as the subject of the film, addressing 'us' – the imagined audience – as if we are with him in the present moment, yet Herzog's authorial gesture of the caption also reminds us that he is gone, speaking to us from the past. The tension between Treadwell's presence on screen and the captioned reminder of his death is a telling example of the complex way time is represented in *Grizzly Man*, raising further questions that this article aims to address about the power of the documentary trace and the possibility of documentary film for restructuring time and space.

Treadwell spent thirteen summers camping in the bear's habitat, and for the final five years took a video camera with him, recording over 100 hours of footage. He turned his

experiences into educational presentations and screened his footage in schools throughout Alaska as part of his overall mission to protect the Alaskan grizzly bear. In the summer of 2003, Treadwell and his partner Amie Huguenard (who had also accompanied him for the previous few summers) were attacked and killed by a grizzly bear. *Grizzly Man* is Herzog's take on Treadwell's story, charting his life and tragic death in the wilderness and searching for the motivation that drove him to repeatedly put himself in such obvious danger. More than a straightforward telling of Treadwell's story, however, Herzog's film becomes a place for the metaphysical meeting of these two filmmakers working in different times, reimagining the relationship between the past and present through documentary film. *Grizzly Man* is comprised almost as much of Treadwell's handcam footage as Herzog's own filmed material. These sources are distinguished by the different qualities of digital video and professional film respectively, and by the seen and heard presence of each respective filmmaker: Treadwell appears in his footage alternately in first-person confessions and in nature documentary-style commentary; Herzog is felt throughout the film through his voiceover, narrating and reflecting on Treadwell's story. The strong felt presence of both filmmakers throughout the film brings the past into contact with the present through the technology of film. Reviewing the film for *Variety*, Scott Foundas described the structure of the film in terms of this intersection of the work of two different authors, emphasising the unique temporal quality that results from their meeting. Foundas argued that, 'In making *Grizzly Man*, Herzog has opened a kind of portal through which he can talk to, and even argue with, Treadwell across time and space' (2005). The 'argument across time' that structures the film reframes the complex temporal dimensions of documentary – using footage of the past, made in the present, aimed at the future (audience) – as a space in which a virtual dialogue between the present filmmaker and the absent subject can be opened.

The 'virtual argument' between Herzog and Treadwell is about their differing views on nature. For Treadwell, the bears were almost human and he treated them as friends, seen again and again in his footage as he reaches out to touch them or talks to them fondly; by contrast, Herzog tells us in voiceover that he sees only 'cold indifference' in their eyes. As Benjamin Noys notes, Herzog sees Treadwell's view of nature as 'sentimentalised' and implies throughout *Grizzly Man* that such sentimentality lead to his tragic end (2007, 39). Beyond a simple difference of opinion, throughout the film Herzog explicitly criticises Treadwell's naïve approach and chastises him for the example he sets for other nature enthusiasts in anthropomorphising dangerous and undomesticated animals. Thomas Austin notes that Herzog's judgement of Treadwell's actions underlines his perspective as the authoritative take on this story despite how much we see Treadwell speaking for himself: 'Herzog's voice is privileged as the locus of authority [...] even while it avoids the conventional claims to objectivity of the documentary 'voice of God' by repeatedly stressing the subjectivity of the speaker' (2008, 55). It is important to stress that Herzog's judgement of Treadwell's naïveté is based only on Treadwell's archival footage and other records of his life; Herzog and Treadwell never met in real life. Herzog's authority to tell Treadwell's story – and his authority to judge Treadwell's motivations and actions – is self-appointed. Herzog found out about Treadwell story by chance, presented with a newspaper article about his death by a producer friend Erik Nelson (Herzog 2009). Herzog recalls, 'I read it and I knew that that was a film for me. No matter what, I had to do it. I had the feeling there was something much, much bigger in Treadwell's story' (ibid.). This quote reveals both his affinity with Treadwell and his belief in the authority of his own perspective on the story, even before having seen a second of Treadwell's footage. In *Grizzly Man* itself, Herzog does gain co-operation from Treadwell's friends and family to be interviewed for the film which

lends credibility to his version of events. Nonetheless (and staying true to his initial claim that he could see something bigger to the story), Herzog's version of events goes far beyond the facts of the story. Herzog both criticises Treadwell's perspective and speculates on his motivations.

On one level, such judgement can be seen as Herzog exploiting the power imbalance between filmmaker and subject that often exists between the filmmaker and the people they film for the sake of telling a good story. (I return to the ethical dimension of this power imbalance in more detail later in this article; see also Pryluck 1976 and Nash 2010.) Yet on another level, the degree to which Herzog personally engages with Treadwell also works against such straightforward judgement. Herzog repeatedly expresses his respect and admiration of Treadwell's commitment and skill as a filmmaker. At one point, in response to letters criticising Treadwell's actions read out by one of his friends, Herzog interjects, 'I too would like to step in here in his defense, not as an ecologist but as a filmmaker. He captured such glorious improvised moments, the likes of which the studio directors with their unionised crews could never dream of.' While not redressing the imbalance of power where Herzog assumes the right to interpret and make meaning of the life of someone who can no longer speak for himself, Treadwell's felt presence in *Grizzly Man* complicates the judgement Herzog advances that his behaviour was irrational.

Key to Treadwell's virtual presence resisting Herzog's judgement of his actions is the degree to which these conflicting judgements ground a tension in the way Herzog represents Treadwell in different moments; those where he is acting primarily as a filmmaker, and those where he is acting primarily as a conservationist, or using the camera as his interlocutor. Throughout the film, then, Herzog alternates between respect for Treadwell's commitment and resourcefulness, admiration for his aesthetic sensibility on display in his footage, and judgement of Treadwell's cavalier approach and lack of respect for what Herzog sees as the more primal and bleakly unsentimental laws of nature. In a feature article for *Film Comment*, Paul Arthur notes this uneasy negotiation of authorship simmering below the surface of the film: 'an issue entirely foreign to the director's ethos, that of divided or decentered authorship, slips in like a postmodern visitor' (2005, 46). In these parallel tensions of authorship and philosophical outlook, *Grizzly Man* becomes a dialogue between the two filmmakers, representing Herzog reflecting on his own identity as a filmmaker through trying to understand the work of another.

This article argues that the structure of *Grizzly Man* as an 'argument across time and space' offers a unique experience of documentary time that alternately engages and distances the viewer from identifying with the reality represented. The analysis of the distinct experience of time offered in *Grizzly Man* follows Elizabeth Cowie's work exploring how documentary film can affectively restructure our sense of 'real time' (see Cowie 2007, 88; Cowie 2011, 101-2). In her phenomenological reading of the experience of documentary time, Cowie argues that a key power of documentary film is the potential for filmic representations of reality to disrupt our everyday sense of time as a linear unfolding of events in continuous space. The intersection of past and present that was once confined to the abstract imagining of memory is made concrete in the duration of documentary time (Cowie 2011, 102). According to Cowie, this potential to restructure everyday experiences of time retains the sense of 'posthumous shock' that Walter Benjamin argued occurs when the past is

encountered through a photograph, but our emotional and intellectual connection with the past is also given new structure by the unfolding time of the documentary film itself (2007, 88).

This article focuses on the way in which the structure of *Grizzly Man* as a virtual dialogue between Herzog and Treadwell is alternately distancing and engaging. I also consider how Herzog's interpretation and mediation of Treadwell's story, juxtaposed with Treadwell's presence in archive footage seeming to 'speak back' to Herzog, raises significant ethical issues. These issues revolve around the use of documentary traces, and how documentaries can speak on behalf of those no longer able to speak for themselves. By utilising the extensive archive of footage Treadwell left behind, I argue that Herzog is able to treat Treadwell's death as something not relegated to the past but an event open to re-thinking, re-living, and conversing with through the technologies of documentary film. Reviving the relationship between past and present through the technology of documentary in this way produces a film that is at once poetic and realist, allegorical and literal, and that also spans an experience of both past and present time, which teases out a complex relationship between documentary time, the desire to record reality, and the possibilities of documentary representation to use past images to explore the present.

Treadwell's presence-through-absence

The film opens with credits over a black screen, announcing this as 'A film by Werner Herzog'. This title fades and the first image is a long shot of grizzly bears grazing a green pasture. The film's title is superimposed over this static shot, followed by Timothy's entrance from left of screen crossing to squat down in the foreground on the right of screen. Timothy locates himself in a part of the National Park he calls the 'Prime Cod' and enthusiastically delivers an explanation of the territorial instincts of the two grizzlies behind him ('Ed' and 'Rowdy' as he called them). As he delivers his address, the caption giving the years of his birth and death appears and disappears. Treadwell goes on to explain, 'They're challenging everything, including me – goes with the territory. If I show weakness, if I retreat, I may be hurt, I may be killed'. He then describes the gruesome end he can expect if he backs down from the bears, before confidently asserting, 'But I will not die at their claws and paws'. This last assertion, coming soon after the caption that announces Treadwell's death in 2003, ironically underlines the fact that this footage is archival and that the film we are watching is not produced by Treadwell but by Herzog. Herzog's authorship and his authority over the telling of this story is reinforced by his voiceover that follows: 'All these majestic animals were filmed by Timothy Treadwell, who lived among wild grizzlies for thirteen summers', Herzog tells the viewer. 'He went to remote areas of the Alaskan peninsula believing that he was needed there to protect these animals and educate the public'. The use of the term 'believing' here subtly but clearly signals a negative judgement of Treadwell's take on reality, emphasising a gap between what Treadwell 'believed' and the fact that the area of wilderness Treadwell sought to protect was already protected by the National Parks service. From this point onward, Herzog's voiceover constantly challenges Treadwell's on-camera statements that he is needed to protect the bears and that they were his friends. In one sequence, Treadwell is reaching out to touch a bear cub while Herzog's commentary says he crossed an 'invisible border line,' implying his fate was inevitable. In another sequence, Treadwell rages against the park rangers for what he perceives as their complacency and uselessness. Herzog mutes Treadwell's voice and reprimands him: 'It is clear to me that the

Parks Service is not Treadwell's real enemy. There is a larger, more implacable adversary out there – the people's world, and civilisation'.

Running counter to these moments of negative judgement, however, Herzog also displays a level of sympathy for Treadwell's cause and a deep respect for his dedication to filmmaking. Following the opening scenes of Treadwell in front of the grazing bears, Herzog's voiceover explains what drew him to Treadwell as a character and as a filmmaker:

Having myself filmed in the wilderness of jungle, I found that beyond a wildlife film in his material lay dormant a story of astonishing beauty and depth. I discovered a film of human ecstasies and darkest inner turmoil.

Within this evident respect for Treadwell's filmmaking ability, however, there is also an implicit assertion of his own filmmaking prowess – the visionary director who 'discovers' the dormant story because of his powers of directorial perception. The double move of giving credit to Treadwell's footage, while also asserting his own vision as a filmmaker, highlights how Herzog's respect for Treadwell itself entails levels of contradiction and tension that further decentre authorship in the film. In his respect for the 'beauty' and 'depth' of Treadwell's own footage, the question is raised of how much of that 'beauty' and 'depth' revealed in *Grizzly Man* is the result of Herzog's hand, and how much is inherent to Treadwell's material?

The decentralised authorship that arises from the tension between Herzog's judgement of and respect for Treadwell is the conceptual ground on which the 'argument across time and space' takes place. The film is framed as a communicative exchange between two filmmakers, where meaning is negotiated by collapsing the conceptual distance between the perspective of the present filmmaker and the perspective of the past amateur videographer. In structuring the film as this kind of virtual exchange, Herzog brings Treadwell into the frame in a way more immediate and palpable than usually accompanies documentary traces. Through the indexical relationship between film and the reality it records, documentary sounds and images of real people have always entailed an uncanny quality of re-animation and presence-through-absence. In *Grizzly Man*, however, Herzog extends that inherent indexical quality of cinematic archive material, making Treadwell 'present' in conversation as well as trace.

The digital record and the documentary trace

While Herzog and Treadwell's virtual interaction in *Grizzly Man* creates a unique sense of both filmmakers' presence in the frame, time and technology have always been inextricably linked in documentary film. The relationship between time and technology converges around the notion of documentary film as a trace of the shared historical world. The documentary trace relies on the technology of the camera producing sounds and images that have a direct indexical relationship to the reality they record, and both celluloid film and digital video produce records of events *in time* (the former captures an indexical record of the scene in the camera's frame as emulsion on celluloid, the latter records of the scene as a specifically structured binary sequence).¹ Unlike the still camera that 'freezes' time, the film and digital video camera respectively engage directly with the temporality of experience by also recording duration. Over 50 years ago, André Bazin argued that representing duration was the

defining quality of cinema, considering how crucial duration is to the sense of re-presenting lived experiences:

In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. [...] The cinema is objectivity in time. [...] Now for the first time, the image of things is also the image of their duration. (1960, 8)

The objectivity that Bazin speaks of exists apart from the intent or interventions of the filmmaker; ‘objectivity’ in this sense refers to the ontological correspondence between something having happened and the indexical filmic record of that thing. While the technology of photography entails the same kind of indexical relationship, the objectivity Bazin spoke of unique to cinema because of the element of time; seeing events as they unfold rather than as a single point in time lends greater depth to the ‘reality’ captured.

Despite the direct relationship of documentary images to the world they represent, however, the ‘reality’ presented by documentary is not an unmediated window onto the world but a perspective, produced and structured by specific processes of authorship. Bill Nichols’ influential work on documentary realism argues that the notion of documentary re-presenting reality in an objective way is an effect produced by specific filmmaking conventions (1991, 165-98). Techniques of framing, editing and narrative structuring in traditional documentary forms emphasise the world represented as ‘speaking for itself’ rather than the subjective aspects of documentary representation, creating the effect that the argument conveyed by the film is as objective and reliable as the images. According to Nichols, these conventions of realism form the basis of documentary’s fundamental proposition about the world it represents; the claim, ‘This is so, isn’t it,’ which asks the viewer’s assent that not only do the images directly re-present the historical world, but also that the claims a film makes about that world are also true (1991, 114-5). In short, realism emphasises the objective quality of the raw sounds and images, and uses that objectivity as a guarantee of the truthfulness of the argument the film delivers. The dual investment in documentary objectively re-presenting reality at the same time as it structures that reality into an argument was seeded in John Grierson’s famous foundational definition of documentary as ‘the creative treatment of actuality’ (quoted in Hardy 1979, 11). Dai Vaughan characterised the tension that has persisted since this early definition between the competing investments of documentary to both *present* and *re-present* reality as ‘[d]ocumentary appear[ing] to express attitudes toward the world by appearing to allow the world to speak for itself’ (1999, 90).

Time is crucial to the effect of documentary realism that allows documentary to appear to speak about the world while allowing the world to speak for itself. Recalling Bazin’s argument that the power of film lies in ‘images of duration,’ the relationship in documentary between the duration of a recording and the duration of its re-presentation acts as a guarantee of its objectivity and an assertion of its status as an authentic recording of real past events. Put another way, duration reinforces the proposition ‘This is so, isn’t it’ where the perceived correspondence between the duration of the recorded event and the duration of its re-presentation emphasises the film’s authenticity. However, the containment of these sounds and images in a structured narrative also asserts the historical time of those sounds and images as belonging to the past. The proposition that ‘This is so’ in documentary is on some

level also the proposition that ‘This *was* so.’ The ‘creative treatment’ or recordings of reality (to appropriate Grierson’s phrase) in a documentary film usually underlines the sense that the reality re-presented belongs to the past.

The structure of *Grizzly Man* complicates the traditional relationship between documentary traces, how traces are structured into an argument, and how such structuring draws a line between past events and the present film. Herzog’s film simultaneously asserts Treadwell’s footage as a trace of the past – a past definitively divided from the present by the death of the authoring subject – and invokes Treadwell’s presence in the frame as a partner in dialogue and a kind of co-author. Treadwell’s traces are both *of* the past and *in* the present, and in the tension between these two poles the use of Treadwell’s footage in Herzog’s film offers a unique image of documentary time. *Grizzly Man* realises the potential of documentary film to both rupture and transcend ‘everyday’ experiences of time by interleaving sounds and images from different temporalities as noted by Cowie, bringing the past into contact with the present in distinctly affecting ways (2007, 105-6). The sense of the film as a dialogue is itself complicated by moments that underline the gap in time that separates the two men, inscribed in the filmic material itself. Treadwell’s images have the grainy quality of digital video while the sections Herzog filmed have a resolution characteristic of professional film. This temporal distinction is also emphasised by Treadwell speaking in the present tense over his own footage, while Herzog’s voiceover speaks of Treadwell in the past tense. The tension between Treadwell’s dual presence and absence creates an uncanny affective quality to the film, in the sense described by Malin Wahlberg:

In film, the trace has the complicated status of referring to the inscription of images and sounds, to the uncanny presence of the past invoked in photographs and archive film, as well as to the banal sense employed by historians and documentary filmmakers, according to which the trace is the source material [...] out of which events of the past may be reconstructed as narratives. (2008, 35)

Herzog’s use of Treadwell’s footage traverses all of these senses of the documentary trace. The archival footage attests to the fact of Treadwell’s existence as an amateur documentarian, and is also used as the building blocks for Herzog’s narrative of Treadwell’s life. Most powerfully, however, is Herzog’s use of Treadwell’s material to invoke Treadwell as a *present* figure, in a sense telling his own story alongside the narrative told by Herzog.² The virtual meeting of Herzog and Treadwell through the medium of film invokes a particularly strong sense of the presence of the past, highlighting the complex movement of traces in documentary film.

Self-presentation through filmmaking

The complex function of the trace in *Grizzly Man* is ironic in relation to Herzog’s stated relationship to documentary. Eric Ames emphasises how Herzog’s relationship to documentary as the representation of reality is fundamentally paradoxical: ‘Herzog dismisses documentary as a mode of filmmaking to creatively intervene and participate in it’ (2012, 3). This dismissal largely revolves around his rejection of cinema vérité – a style of filmmaking that uniquely emphasises the indexical quality of documentary sounds and images as evidence of historical events – as anything more than the most banal kind of audiovisual account keeping. Herzog has repeated his criticism of cinema vérité throughout his career, most famously in the *Minnesota Declaration*, a manifesto on documentary filmmaking

delivered at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 1999. Point 1 of Herzog's manifesto reads, 'By dint of declaration the so-called Cinema Verité is devoid of vérité. It reaches a merely superficial truth, the truth of accountants' (1999).

As Herzog defines it, cinema vérité refers to the tradition of observational filmmaking begun with the direct cinema movement in the US in the early 1960s. Direct cinema is a so-called 'fly-on-the-wall' approach to filmmaking, where the intervening presence of the filmmakers is minimised (or at least *shown* minimally), re-presenting reality as it unfolded, often effacing the presence of the camera in the scene as though it was never there. In other words, direct cinema emphasises the quality of the sounds/images it presents *as indexical trace* – a trace of real events that unfold over real time. Significantly, the assumption of direct cinema to reveal truth through observation echoes Bazin's argument about the inherent power of the ontology of the cinematographic image, that 'the objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility', and that there is an 'irrational power of the photograph to bear away our faith' (1960, 7-8). Contrary to Bazin, who celebrates the indexical quality of filmic images as affording particular epistemological power, Herzog dismisses the significance of observational filmmaking. While not denying that the direct cinema camera captures life 'as it happens,' Herzog argues that such unadorned recordings amount to a prosaic representation of things already known. Instead, he advocates a 'poetic, ecstatic truth [that is] mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization' (1999).

Herzog's objections to cinema vérité/direct cinema are especially interesting in light of his ongoing project of self-presentation as a uniquely committed auteur, dedicated to challenging the boundaries of filmmaking. He has eaten his own shoe to honour a bet (depicted in Les Blank's 1980 short film *Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe*), hauled a steamship over a mountain in the Amazon jungle to create an authentic period shot in his 1982 biopic *Fitzcarraldo* (shown in Blank's making-of documentary *Burden of Dreams* from the same year), and continued an interview with a BBC journalist after being shot with an air rifle during an interview, dismissing the puncture wound with the offhanded comment, 'It's not significant' (see Ames 2012, 317). In the context of the extent to which Herzog has deliberately curated his auteurist image, his objection to cinema vérité/direct cinema can be seen not only as an objection to the kind of 'truth' these films present, but also an objection to the way this filmmaking approach seeks to erase the figure of the filmmaker.

Considering Herzog's paradoxical relationship towards documentary cinema in general, and his dismissal of cinema vérité/direct cinema more specifically, *Grizzly Man* highlights interesting contradictions between Herzog's conceptual framework and his approach to filmmaking. His admiration of Treadwell's footage – especially moments where the camera is allowed to run on after Treadwell has delivered a 'take' that Herzog finds poetic and beautiful—is contrary to his dismissal of the truth captured in observational cinema. At one point in the film, for example, Herzog shows an extended sequence of Treadwell running in and out of frame between takes; rather than focus on Treadwell's performance in the frame, however, Herzog draws the viewer's attention to the backdrop and to the frame itself:

In his action movie mode, Treadwell probably did not realise that seemingly empty moments had a strange secret beauty. Sometimes images themselves develop their own life. Their own mysterious stardom.

Here Herzog reinforces his own authorial vision – he recognises that ‘seemingly empty moments’ have a ‘strange secret beauty’ – but at the same time what Herzog admires is the image of wilderness that Treadwell’s camera captures simply by the fact of being there. Rather than undermining Treadwell’s skill as a filmmaker, asserting the accidental beauty of these moments highlights their status as indexical trace while at the same time suggesting something of Treadwell’s intuitive aesthetic sensibility – exactly the kind of aesthetic beauty that Herzog claims is only accessible via fabrication, imagination, and stylisation.

In *Grizzly Man*, then, more than any other of his films, the contradictory dimensions of Herzog’s notion of documentary truth are foregrounded. The film represents Herzog encountering a filmmaker whose physical commitment to filmmaking rivals his own but whose perspective stands in stark opposition. Moreover, the beauty Herzog sees in Treadwell’s footage is more often than not in its *verité* quality. This footage often shows Treadwell in intimate, offhanded moments that speak in terms of the ‘superficial truth’ found by ‘taking a camera and trying to be honest’ – an approach Herzog rejects so strenuously in his *Minnesota Declaration* yet here embraces as revelatory. I suggest that it is precisely the tension between the ordinariness of Treadwell’s footage and the extraordinariness of the commitment it represents that engages Herzog, and the contradictions of personality and style that define the relationship between the two filmmakers are what Herzog seeks to resolve in opening up an ‘argument’ with Treadwell. The film then becomes a complex interplay between Herzog *speaking for* Treadwell in telling his story, and *speaking with* Treadwell about their respective approaches to filmmaking; in one moment emphasising their temporal separation and in the next emphasising their co-existence in the time and space of the film.

Ethics and documentary re-presentation

The tension between Herzog speaking for Treadwell and speaking with Treadwell highlights that the distinct aesthetic issues of Herzog’s ‘argument across time and space’ with Treadwell also entail distinct ethical problems. Herzog’s declaration at the start of the film to have discovered Treadwell’s ‘human ecstasies and darkest inner turmoil’ not only assumes a self-appointed authority to tell Treadwell’s story, but also to reveal the ‘ecstatic truth’ of Treadwell’s life. Herzog assumes this authorial power despite never having met Treadwell, only knowing him through his trace on film and the testimony of others. In Herzog’s defence, he only had traces and testimonies to work with in order to tell Treadwell’s story, but nonetheless the degree to which Herzog judges Treadwell’s ideology and assumes to make meaning of his actions is ethically problematic. On one level, the degree to which Herzog passes judgement on Treadwell is a conspicuous case of what Jay Ruby calls ‘speaking for’ – a form of documentary that offers the definitive truth of someone else’s reality (1991, 53). While Herzog’s interpretation is not presented as ‘objective’ in the traditional sense of presenting facts as though they are self-evident, his persona as a unique cinematic visionary and his claim to have found the hidden meaning in Treadwell’s footage still implicitly asserts his take on Treadwell’s story as definitive. Ruby argues that such definitiveness in representing the other not only risks simplifying and essentialising complex historical and social situations, but can also exploit that other at the service of advancing the filmmaker’s perspective – in this case, Herzog’s own take on nature as chaotic and tragic as opposed to

the romantic view of nature Treadwell held. In his analysis of the film, Eric Ames argues that *Grizzly Man* also becomes a project about Herzog's self-enactment of authorial identity, and the relationship between Herzog and Treadwell becomes ethically problematic because Herzog uses that relationship to speak about himself, but what is at stake is also the representation of someone no longer able to speak for himself (2012, 246).

Yet, as I have argued above, the degree that Treadwell himself is felt in the frame as both a co-author and a subject of empathy resists taking Herzog's perspective as quite so definitive. Kate Nash argues that the complex power relationships underpinning documentary film are obscured by focusing on the exploitation by the filmmaker of the people they film, and that the power relationship between the two sides of the camera while never stable or evenly balanced can nonetheless also involve productive challenges and creative exchanges (2010, 26-27). Extending Austin's argument that Herzog stamps his own voice as the authoritative perspective (2008, 52-56), and without dismissing the highly problematic way in which Herzog uses Treadwell's story to negotiate his own authorial identity, I want to suggest that looking at the film as an argument between these two filmmakers involves reading it as a more complex negotiation of authorship and authority. Treadwell's relationship with the camera – using it as a kind of confessional interlocutor and companion as much as a tool to record the world around him – opens up ethical questions that extend beyond simply interrogating Herzog's authorial role; Treadwell is also felt asserting his own voice, which becomes crucial to the construction of meaning in the film.

The power of Treadwell's presence in *Grizzly Man* is paradoxically most felt in the moment when his absence may be most acutely signified, and particular ethical questions about Herzog's use of Treadwell's footage are foregrounded. Just before the fatal attack that took his and Huguenard's life, Treadwell reached for his camera and turned it on. He did not have time to take the lens cap off the camera, and the tape recorded sound but not images of the tragic scene. The climactic scene of *Grizzly Man* shows Herzog sitting with Treadwell's long-time friend, Jewel Palovak, listening to the audio of this attack through headphones as Palovak watches him closely. Rather than playing the audio of the attack for the viewer, Herzog channels the experience of the recorded event through his reaction to it, and Palovak's reaction to him. Herzog's presence here – the only time in which he is physically seen in the frame – mediates between the viewer and the indexical record of the moment that serves as the tragic climax of Treadwell's story. Herzog explained his reasoning for appearing in the frame at this particular moment in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*:

I did not want to appear in person in the movie with the exception of one key moment where I'm listening to the tape. [...] And, actually, I'm not important in this moment. You see me from the back with earphones on. But you see the face of the woman who owns the tape who was very close to Treadwell. She's trying to read my face. Like almost a mirror image of my face and the anguish on her face. It has great intensity and great anguish. (Robinson 2005)

This explanation emphasises the link between the aesthetic quality of the scene and its ethical dimensions; that the emotional stakes are known through the composition of the image. While Herzog is not seen face-on but with his back partly to the camera, his hesitant commentary, the wavering of his voice, holding his head in concentration, and his slumped posture nonetheless all serve as cues to the horror of the tape and become

symbols standing in for the specific events recorded on the tape. Despite his protests that he is ‘not important in this moment’, through his reactions Herzog becomes central to interpreting the scene, giving material and temporal shape to the event that cannot be otherwise accessed.

Reflecting the paradoxes of presence and absence in the film, in the above quotation Herzog betrays an awareness of his centrality to the scene even while he explicitly denies the significance of his framing. In one moment he offers his face being obscured as evidence that he is not important; in the next moment he admits that it is through his reactions reflected in the face of Palovak that the viewer understands the ‘great intensity’ and ‘great anguish’ of the moment. Herzog’s presence fills the void left by Treadwell’s absence to become the material focus the scene, offering the viewer not the event itself but his interpretation of the event, made available through his own embodied response.

In offering only offset and mediated evidence of the event, Herzog complicates the possibility of either sympathising with or judging Treadwell’s actions in this moment. Herzog’s aesthetic decision of how to re-present the evidence of the attack on Treadwell and Huguenard therefore becomes a distinctly ethical choice. Herzog’s presence in the frame carries with it the ethical decision he makes on the viewer’s behalf that the footage is too traumatic to be (re-)experienced. In an essay on his website explaining his experience of listening to the tape and decision not to replay it in the film, Herzog links the traumatic content it records with its aesthetic uniqueness, making that link an ethical problem:

When I listened to it, it was so horrifying, it is beyond all description, I’ve never heard anything like this. And it was instantly clear, number one, I’m not going to do a snuff movie; number two: there is such a thing as dignity and privacy of an individual’s death. So you just do not show it, you just do not do it. And I said only over my dead body is this going to end up in the film. (BBC 2006)

While Herzog claims he made this decision to spare the viewer from the experience of the tape, Treadwell’s absence in trace paradoxically positions him more forcefully in space left by his absence – the centrality of the attack to Treadwell’s story means it cannot be ignored, and in lieu of concrete evidence, Treadwell’s presence and the moment of the attack is given life in the imagination of the viewer. There is therefore a sharp irony to Herzog’s assertion that ‘you just do not show’ the death, since he still offers the viewer the experience of the duration of the attack and a sense of its detail in his reactions, and in these moments Treadwell returns as imagined.

Moreover, what Herzog chose not to ‘show’ in this moment is an open question; there was no image of the attack, and Herzog’s presence in the frame in place of the absent visual record becomes, paradoxically, *the* image of the event. The viewer is left to read the significance of the tape in his movement and tone which become sites of meaning in their own right rather than simply indexes of something else. In this moment the film becomes about Herzog as much as it is about Treadwell, and the relationship between the two filmmakers is made concrete in both time and space through the act of Herzog’s listening.

Documentary as self-representation

Herzog's placement of himself at the centre of *Grizzly Man* is in keeping with his body of documentary work, which has tended to focus on characters that live at the edges of society. Eric Ames argues that Herzog uses those characters and the 'outsider' perspective they offer as a lens through which to consider his own identity as a filmmaker (2012, 215–22). In particular, Ames argues that Herzog's documentary work can be seen as part of an ongoing autobiographical project, performing himself through his films, even those films in which he is only incidentally seen or heard. Of *Grizzly Man*, Ames suggests that on the surface it seems to be a film about Treadwell's life, but soon shows itself 'doubled' as a self-reflexive investigation by Herzog of his attitude towards nature, his own filmmaking ability, and his performance as the provocative auteur.

Seen as part of Herzog's wider autobiographical project, *Grizzly Man* is a particularly interesting film in terms of how Treadwell's romantic view of nature, commitment to his cause, and skill as a filmmaker challenges Herzog's identification as a uniquely committed and visionary filmmaker. In a review of the film linking Herzog's recent body of documentary work to the wider context of contemporary media practices, Nick James notes that this film fits 'more easily in a world in which media entertainment has become fascinated with the 'reality' of testing people to the extreme' (2006, 26). *Grizzly Man* represents Treadwell testing his own resolve in the wilderness, but can also be seen as Herzog testing his own cinematic sensibility and achievements against a filmmaker he sees as having taken commitment to his cause to the extreme. In opening up the 'portal' to talk to and argue with Treadwell in *Grizzly Man*, Herzog sets his own cinematic achievements against a man who literally lost his life for his cause, and whose own relationship to the camera was so powerful that he reached for the recording device in the face of his own death.

In *Grizzly Man*, then, both filmmakers are performing themselves for the camera: Treadwell alternately acting out the persona of environmentalist crusader and using the camera as a confessional tool, and Herzog performing his own identity as a filmmaker through his engagement with and judgement of Treadwell. The degree of self-representation and performance in *Grizzly Man* places the film in a broader historical context where non-fiction representation is characterised by a concern with subjectivity and self-expression (see for example Dovey 2002; Renov 2004; Ellis and McLane 2005; Renov 2008). Anne Jerslev succinctly links the subjective emphasis of the contemporary media landscape with the performance of self for the documentary camera, claiming that

mediation is part of the everyday experience of life and [...] the camera is communicative device like so many other daily things. In the same way as people perform their daily routines in their social group, they perform in front of a camera. (2005, 101–2)

Treadwell's footage is emblematic of how recording and being recorded has become a part of everyday life. *Grizzly Man* shows him using the camera as a part of his daily routine, alternately communicating to an imagined audience and to no one in particular; his everyday interactions with the bears, foxes, and landscapes around him are mediated but no less 'authentic' for their mediation. Further than the routineness of self-representation, however,

Treadwell's relationship to the camera is consolidated by the fact that he recorded his own death. This commitment to the documenting of reality rivals Herzog's public persona as a filmmaker of extremes, uniquely committed to doing whatever it takes to articulate his cinematic vision.

Compared to Treadwell's relationship to the camera, which alternates between fevered performance and introspective reflection, Herzog's presence in *Grizzly Man* is more considered, but retains that same sense of the camera being an instrument of personal reflection as much as it is an instrument to represent historical reality. Treadwell's filmmaking represents a quest for self-actualisation through the process of recording that resonates with Herzog on a personal level, and reflects contemporary practices of self-expression through the apparatus of film.

Technology is key to the quest for self-actualisation represented in *Grizzly Man*. Without the cheap and accessible technology of digital video, Treadwell's archive would not have been so extensive, nor featured the video-diary moments that reveal his poetic and romantic sensibility so alien to Herzog's pragmatism. Recalling his disbelief upon discovering the extent of Treadwell's archive, Herzog said, 'It couldn't have been our wildest fantasy to find something like this. [...] It was one of the great experiences I've ever had with film footage. It was so beautiful' (Herzog 2009). The conversation across time and space that Herzog stages with Treadwell out of the hours and hours of raw footage brings the absent filmmaker into the frame as a felt presence, collapsing the distance of space and time that separates the two filmmakers and, in a representational sense, defying Treadwell's death. The result is a film that uniquely foregrounds the complex dimensions of the relationship between documentary time and filmic traces. Ultimately, *Grizzly Man* finds meaning precisely in the tensions between past and present, memory and history, and testimony and archive, beyond the perspective of either filmmaker, made possible because of Treadwell's relationship to the camera and the extent to which he recorded his time in the wilderness.

¹ There is considerable debate within contemporary film theory as to whether digital images bear the same kind of indexical relationship to the reality they record as images recorded on celluloid film, whether digital recording entails an indexical relationship but of a different order to film, or whether we cannot speak of indexicality at all in relation to the digital. Steven Shaviro, following D. N. Rodowick, argues that the division of digital into binary coded poles interrupts and translates the direct relationship to the reality imaged (2010, 16-18). On the other hand, Mark Wolf argues that the binary code of digital images are produced as an indivisible sequence that is directly reliant on the light entering the lens issuing from the objects in front of it, therefore a conceptual indexicality persists (2000, 258-62). This article assumes that there is a meaningful indexical link between digital recording and the scene it records, albeit of a different nature to celluloid film.

² Interestingly, in an interview after the release of the film, Herzog still spoke of Treadwell as though he had agency in telling his own story through Herzog's film: 'Actually Treadwell somehow stumbled into me, like many other of these figures' (BBC, 2006).

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