Gazing at *Other* Animals: A Deconstruction of the Anthropocentric Gaze in the Representation of Apex Predators

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DECLARATION

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Abstract

This research deconstructs representations of large apex predator animals within film and wildlife documentaries, examining the influence of mainstream narratives on public perceptions of wildlife behaviour. Through the cultural studies field of Critical Animal Media Studies (CAMS), the research considers the influence of film genres, and the plethora of representations disseminated to the public through film and wildlife documentaries and the influence these representations have upon a human understanding of non-human animals. Animals have appeared throughout the media as variations of the 'other', constructed and produced as a result of anthropocentric ideas. This research analyses apex predator representations within the context of anthropocentrism, a perspective that places the human at the centre of experience and knowledge. Anthropocentrism is a concept integrally linked to the human gaze, a mode of viewing that produces an anthropocentric perception of non-human animals. Using CAMS literature, this research also establishes parallels between non-human animals and historically oppressed groups, using the theory of the male gaze developed by British feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey to consider the impact of a subjugating gaze on perceptions of the non-human animal in films and wildlife documentaries. These perspectives will be elucidated and applied in three case studies: *The Monstrous Other*, *The Anthropomorphic Other* and *The Companion Other,* focusing on representations of sharks, bears, and wolves in mainstream media. The selected representations articulate how the anthropocentric gaze has influenced a cultural understanding and knowledge of apex predators by classifying such representations into three different iterations of the 'other'. The research hypothesis suggests that if we critically view representations of apex predators using CAMS and a critique of anthropocentric methods, then a more accurate perception of animals may be established in the visuals and narratives seen in films and wildlife documentaries. The practice-based research presents a series of approaches and strategies for filmmakers that deconstruct anthropocentric modes of looking at apex predators. The research suggests that in order to improve viewers 'understanding of non-human animals, filmmakers should reject human centred representations and alternatively adopt more rigorous strategies and modes of thought that resist the hierarchical dynamics of the anthropocentric gaze.

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Introduction

This research is conducted against a backdrop of rapidly advancing technology which enables the global dissemination of images and ideas through a variety of digital platforms, including established television channels and film together with more informal media, Google searches and internet sites. Thus, the contemporary world is one of global accessibility. A century ago, distant ecosystems and societies appeared inaccessible and remote; however, in a contemporary age these environments and their inhabitants can be viewed from anywhere in the world from the comfort of one's home. Over the last twenty years culture has been saturated with visual images of animals from all over the world from wildlife programmes to documentaries such as *March of the Penguins* (Jacquet, 2005), BBC's *Planet Earth* (2006), *Planet Earth II* (2016) and *Planet Earth III* (2023). When our understanding of the world is influenced by representations put forward by media reports, social media channels and mainstream cinema, we must consider whether what we are viewing is an accurate and indeed ethical representation of events. An understanding of 'ethics 'can be subject to interpretation, and in the context of media production "to be ethical means resisting the temptation to relate to the world as if we were directors of our own personal Hollywood film, forcing others to play prescribed roles or reducing them to depthless characters in pursuit of our predetermined but, from others 'perspectives, fictional ends" (Smith, 2011). If we question the ethical representation of what is disseminated via the media screen, then we must also question the lasting impact and influence these representations have on human actions and reactions to non-humans:

> In Western societies, from a very young age, people's perception of animals and the state of their environments are likely influenced by media portrayals, whether blockbuster movies, documentaries or print media […] film-makers and journalists must portray animals and environments in more accurate and responsible ways. Otherwise, current myths and misperceptions about species critical to healthy ecosystems and the real state of environments may impact negatively on conservation efforts relying on human behaviour for change (Litchfield, 2013, p.153).

This research focuses on the representation of sharks, bears, and wolves in mainstream films and documentaries. The research hypothesis suggests that if we critically view representations of apex predators using paradigms associated with feminist theory and Critical Animal Media Studies (CAMS), we can deconstruct the non-human animal imagery

of the anthropocentric gaze and generate more accurate perceptions of animals in order to establish representations without hyperrealism, speciesism and clear derivatives of the *other*. This research is conducted at the height of the anthropocentric era, when the human's detrimental impact upon the natural world has been identified and continues to influence the non-human animal world. Critical Animal Studies (CAS) is an interdisciplinary field that examines how non-human animals are treated, with a focus on dismantling systems of oppression like *speciesism* or a form of prejudice that systematically privileges the interests of one's own species while marginalizing or disregarding the interests of other species (Singer, 2001). CAS scholars aim to promote equity in human-animal relationships, challenge anthropocentric narratives, and inspire activism and social change. CAMS is situated within the broad framework of CAS, and this is where focus is placed on the media, animal ethics, and an examination of how media representations influence public understanding, behaviour, and policies toward non-human animals. The research analyses the asymmetric power dynamic of three examples of the anthropocentric gaze and how the theory operates within the context of animal representations, drawing parallels between the human gaze and the male gaze, a concept developed by British feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey. Anthropocentrism is also a pivotal term in this research and is a philosophical perspective that places the human at the centre of all phenomena; thus, anthropocentrism is integrally linked to a human gaze. The research considers the impact and influence of the anthropocentric gaze and the hierarchical dynamics established when humans view animals. The anthropocentric gaze may be identified as the way in which we choose to categorise non-human animals in media representations, a perspective reflected upon in the examination of power and dominance in CAMS literature.

This thesis includes a literature review that details the theoretical framework for the analysis and deconstruction of film and documentary representations of sharks, bears and wolves. The methodologies supporting this research will be outlined in Chapter 4, providing a detailed account of the theoretical frameworks, analytical tools, and methods employed to film and examine representations of apex predators. Specific focus will be placed upon human hierarchy over non-human animals in order to establish and maintain power, dominance and control. This is highlighted through CAMS, women and gender studies, and media and cultural studies, drawing parallels between feminist theory and the representation of non-human animals in the media. Notably, theorist Rosi Braidotti speaks of the discernible link

between animal studies and feminism in her contemplation of the self: “Becoming animal […] speaks to my feminist self, partly because my sex, historically speaking, never made it into full humanity, so my allegiance to that category is at best negotiable and never to be taken for granted.” (Braidotti 2006, p.130) Braidotti highlights the historical oppression of women and explicitly draws a parallel between the marginalisation of non-human animals as minority subjects within an anthropocentric framework. This parallel highlights how systems of domination operate across both gender and species, underscoring the importance of examining representations that reinforce these hierarchies.

CAS challenges the anthropocentric view that sees non-human animals as mere resources, commodities, or property. Through, highlighting the anthropocentric gaze as a method of *othering*, the research will draw attention to the roles that non-human animals are subjected and limited to, and these perspectives will be elucidated and applied to three case studies. Chapter 4, *The Monstrous Other*, presents a case study on representations of sharks, with a particular focus on the iconic film *Jaws* (1975). The research argues that designating the shark as ‘monstrous’ is an act of othering that positions the human at the centre of experience and the shark as an animal that must be excluded. Chapter 5, *The Anthropomorphic Other*, presents a case study on the representation of bears, with a particular focus on the documentary *Bears* (2014). The research considers the use of anthropomorphism as a method to bring the bear, an apex predator, under the control of the anthropocentric gaze. Chapter 6, *The Companion Other*, raises complex questions relating to our relationships with animals, specifically the wolf. This chapter analyses the film *Dances With Wolves* (1990), and contemplates the human desire to form a relationship with certain animals and how this search for companionship may paradoxically be both an oppression of the wolf’s animality and a significant gesture from the human to ‘meet’ rather than control the animal other.

The research reveals parallels between filmic and documentary representations of apex predators. The cinematic experience is one of spectacle and the use of post-productive methods is implicit in the simulation of the real. However, wildlife documentaries are assumed to occupy a more veracious cultural space. The practice-based research proposes a series of pragmatic approaches to filming and representing apex predators that deconstruct media mythologies. These methods elucidate the pervasive techniques employed in media

representations and present a series of alternative approaches to challenge the power of the anthropocentric gaze.

Literature Review

This chapter begins by establishing connections between key theoretical frameworks and existing literature in order to deconstruct the anthropocentric gaze in the cinematic and documentary portrayal of apex predators. The analysis first considers how the film and media industries have historically constructed highly dramatized animal representations, often demonizing or glamorizing specific species (Litchfield, 2013). This will be contextualized through an overview of the rising popularity of wildlife documentaries, such as the BBC's *Planet Earth* (2006) and *Frozen Planet* (2011), which have made visually rich portrayals of once-remote animals (such as sharks, bears, and wolves) widely accessible to mainstream audiences. As moving images become increasingly central to how humans encounter wildlife, our understanding of these species becomes heavily mediated through an anthropocentric lens. Drawing on John Berger's (2009) writing, the analysis will explore how screen representations frame animals in ways that reinforce human superiority and sustain speciesist hierarchies. Through this, the act of viewing becomes more than passive observation, it is a form of cultural consumption that constructs animals as objects of spectacle and reinforces their status as 'other'. In his paper, *Animals on Film*, Randy Malamud writes that; "The nomination of looking at animals in visual culture is predicated upon the assumption that the viewer is human and the object is animal. The practice of consuming visual culture embodies an unbridled omniscient lust ensuring the visual object's absolute subalternity" (2010, p.7). This act of looking places animals in positions of absolute subalternity, transforming them into narrative objects, one of three forms of the 'other', crafted for human entertainment and understanding. The animal is handled in an object-like manner while being absorbed into a narrative that is edited for the purpose of presenting it to the viewers (2010, p.7). Ultimately, the animals are completing a narrative that is anthropocentric in nature, in an effort to satisfy a public desire to consume images of non-human animals as 'others' in order to fulfill an understanding of human nature. The othering of the animal is often achieved through hyperreal representations in film and wildlife documentaries Furthermore, these exaggerated or stylized hyperreal representations detach animals from their real-world contexts and place them within the scope of the anthropocentric gaze. These hyperreal portrayals are deconstructed and analysed as method to identify the asymmetric power dynamic between

humans and non-human animals and how this is translated through film and wildlife documentaries.

Critical Animal Media Studies

Throughout this research, the assertion is made that non-human characters in films should not be viewed as accurate representations of non-human animals, but rather as anthropomorphic or dramatised versions of non-humans that have been altered and exploited by the anthropocentric gaze. The theoretical framework of Critical Animal Media Studies (CAMS) focuses on the representation and treatment of animals in various media forms and draws on knowledge from various disciplines of study (Merskin, 2016, p.12). This interdisciplinary field combines elements of Critical Animal Studies (CAS) and Media Studies to analyse how media not only reflects but also influences societal attitudes towards non-human animals. CAMS scholars argue that media plays a crucial role in constructing and dismantling ideologies that influence public perceptions and understanding of non-human animals.

CAMS explores the intricate intersections between non-human animal advocacy and broader sociopolitical and ethical inquiries. It underscores the goals and knowledge of ecofeminism, animal welfare, and occasionally animal rights movements (Merskin, 2016, p.13). Scholars such as Carol J. Adams, Matthew Cole, Kate Stewart, Linda Kalof, Carrie P. Freeman, Debra Merskin, Randy Malamud, and Peter Singer have examined the moral status of animals within human society, drawing attention to how anthropocentric narratives within media often devalue animals' significance. Cole and Steward contemplate themes of speciesism promoted to children in various mediums (2016) and the social norms that influence children's perceptions where they accept the exploitation of non-human animals as a "cultural artefact: the promotional tie-in meal offered by fast food chains that juxtapose nonhuman animal 'characters' as images and toys alongside the mangled body parts of other animals" (Cole and Stewart, 2014, p.4). Commercial media reinforces the "acceptance of speciesism" that is instilled in children from an early age (Cole and Stewart, 2014). Media perpetuates and actively constructs non-human animal representations, embedding speciesist views that position non-human animals as the perpetual 'other' or objects to be used rather than subjects with rights and emotions (Cole and Stewart, 2016). This aligns with Adams' text *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, which examines how media language and imagery

contribute to the objectification of both women and non-human animals, which reinforces a broader culture of consumption and exploitation (1990).

Speciesism

The idea of human hierarchy over non-human animals in cultural representations through *speciesism* identifies the significance of the *hyperreal* in this phenomenon. Speciesism, a term coined by Richard D. Ryder (1970) and popularised by Peter Singer (2001), refers to the discrimination of non-human animals based on the idea that humans are the superior species. Speciesist media narratives promote a hierarchy where non-human animals are systematically oppressed, depicted as inferior beings whose primary purpose is to serve human needs (Taylor, 2016).

> Speciesism – the word is not an attractive one, but I can think of no better term – is a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interest of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species. It should be obvious that the fundamental objections to racism and sexism made by Thomas Jefferson and Sojourner Truth apply equally to speciesism (Singer, 2001, p.461).

Speciesism is rooted in history and economics, with media narratives being closely tied to capitalist interests that prioritise economic gains over ethical considerations, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and marginalisation of non-human animals (Taylor, 2016). Speciesism can be traced back to the rise of capitalist economies, where animals were increasingly commodified for profit. This commodification has been reinforced through media, which often portrays animals as resources or products, thereby normalising their exploitation (Taylor, 2016). Representations of non-human animals in media are not passive reflections of societal attitudes but active components in maintaining economic systems that reinforce ideologies of speciesism. By continually presenting animals as commodities, media narratives help to entrench speciesist ideologies that justify and perpetuate their exploitation (Taylor, 2016; Khazaal and Almiron, 2014). This perspective emphasises the structural and systemic nature of speciesism, suggesting that challenging these deeply embedded narratives requires a critical examination of both societal motivations and media practices.

Speciesism, like sexism and racism, relies on a logic of domination that is deeply embedded in cultural narratives and media representations. These narratives serve to justify the exploitation and oppression of non-human animals by portraying them as inherently inferior (Adams, 1990). This interconnection of various forms of oppression argues that speciesism cannot be understood in isolation but must be viewed in the context of other hierarchical systems of domination (Kemmerer, 2011). Narratives and imagery that devalue and marginalize both animals and oppressed human groups, perpetuating a worldview that justifies exploitation and violence (Taylor, 2016). Cultural narratives are powerful tools in maintaining systems of oppression, as they shape public perceptions and attitudes.

> Animals in visual culture are often disguised in some way – costumes, or masked, or distorted, or disguised, or disfigured. Mockery of animals is another common trope, as is decontextualization: displacing animals from their natural habitats, contexts, and lives, and reconfiguring them as players in a purely anthropocentric narrative (Malamud, 2010, p.4).

Media portrayals frequently prioritise symbolic interpretations of animals over their material existence. In film narratives, animals are often deployed as metaphors or narrative devices, which obscures their status as living beings with agency and lived realities. Non-human animals remain absent within discussions in film and the wider media that focus heavily on symbolism, reinforcing an anthropocentric framework in which animal presence is valued primarily for its representational function rather than its ethical or biological significance.

The Other

Unlike print and photography, films offer audiences visual storytelling. Non-human animals are filmed and viewed in a manner that transcends that which may be perceived by the naked eye and animal representations are attached to stories that centre on anthropocentric narratives. These hyperreal formulations of the animal invariably inform and affect the viewing audience and their understanding of the non-human animal in relation to the human (Kolker, 2012). Brett Mills, author of *Animals on Television: The Cultural Making of the Non-Human*, writes that; "Television is important here because it is the primary way in which many human cultures encounter many aspects of the 'natural world.' Wildlife documentaries represent perhaps the most visible way in which this happens, where the behaviour of non-human beings is depicted as exotic and strange, and thus as distinct from much human

experience as possible" (2017, p.95). The relationship between human and non-human animals is built upon the notion that "animals are resources whose value is defined in terms of their use to humans" (2017, p.96) and that this in turn reaffirms the human's power over non-human animals and the assertion of dominance over the animal 'other.'

> The notion of the Other is closely linked to those of identity and difference in that identity is understood to be defined in part by its difference from the Other. I am male because I am not female, I am heterosexual because I am not homosexual, I am white because I am not black and so forth. Such binaries of difference usually involve a relationship of power, of inclusion and exclusion, in that one of the pair is empowered with a positive identity [the human,] and the other side of the equation becomes the subordinated Other [the non-human animal] (Barker, 2004).

Barker's definition of otherness will be returned to throughout the thesis as an articulation of the binary logic that has informed the anthropocentric understanding of the human as dominant and the animal as other (not human). Schatz suggests that the act of viewing for entertainment is a social act that reflects the expressions and values of a society and what that society is willing to exploit (Schatz, 2016). Schatz states that "what we choose to consume on the screen shapes our cultural norms and discourse, as well as the consequences for those put on the screen. When those individuals are non/human animals it becomes imperative to consider the consequences that impact them." (Schatz, 2016, p.3).

> The media injects people with a vaccine of unthreatening, mediated violence which keeps fatality at bay by displaying its signs. This vaccine covers up the actual fragility of consumerism. It restores grandeur and sublimity to the everyday by making it seem under threat. At the same time, the media encourages a sense of security. Even when it presents violence or disaster, the fact of not 'being there' while watching it makes it reinforce security. Through the media, we never reach the real event, but only its informational stand-in, which is open to endless interpretation (McLaverty-Robinson, 2012).

The exploitation of animals within media finds a parallel with the objectification of women in film. In her essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey develops the feminist theory of the male gaze that proposes that cinematic portrayals of women present images of women in objectifying narratives that are influenced by the fantasies of a determining male and patriarchal society that, through representation, constructs women's identities. It is a fantasy defined by the male gaze, whereby a movie viewer is positioned as male, wielding dominance for the sake of visual enjoyment, because he is an agent of

patriarchy (1975). Mulvey conceptualises the male gaze as the gaze of desire that is comprised of the objectification of women, the on-screen object of desire.

The Anthropocentric Gaze

In the context of non-human animals on screen, the male gaze may be substituted for the anthropocentric gaze, and woman replaced with animal, thus the animal is objectified through the anthropocentric gaze or as Malamud terms it, the 'human's gaze'. This notion of the human or anthropocentric gaze applies to the various representations and the treatment of animals in media highlighted through CAMS. Randy Malamud (2010) proposes that the practice of consuming visual culture is a representation of an "unbridled omniscient lust" to reduce the subject to a position of inferiority. He writes that: "The animals we gaze upon in film, on the internet, in advertisements, are prized for their 'cuteness' in a way that is feminised, or derogatorily so: cute animals are like dumb blondes (note the parallel between the male gaze and the anthropocentric gaze). Animals are celebrated for their subservience, their entertainment value, and the extent to which they affirm an anthropocentric ethos (the unassailable conviction that it's all about us)" (2010, p.7). We know and understand what it is to be human and thus everything else is non-human/animal/other. As a result, the "decontextualisation and mockery function as disguises because they prevent us from seeing the authentic animal beneath the cultural frippery. Animals are disguised perhaps because the authentic animal would be too depressing, or too scary, or too boring, for the viewer to endure (Malamud, 2010, p.4).

The concept of the human gaze is pivotal in understanding how media representations of non-human animals are constructed and consumed. The human gaze (or what this researcher terms the anthropocentric gaze) refers to the perspective through which humans view and interpret animals, often imposing anthropocentric and exploitative viewpoints. Randy Malamud discusses this extensively in *Looking at Humans Looking at Animals*, arguing that the human gaze in the media perpetuates a view of animals as spectacles for human entertainment, stripping them of their agency and reducing them to mere objects of visual consumption (Malamud, 2016). This gaze reinforces power dynamics that marginalise animals, framing them within narratives that serve human interests rather than recognising their intrinsic value. To move towards a more ethical representation of animals, we must

critically examine and challenge the human gaze that dominates media portrayals, promoting a view that respects animals as sentient beings with their own perspectives (Malamud, 2016).

Feminist Theory and Animal Representation

Critical Animal Studies (CAS) and feminist theory intersect through a shared analytical focus on the interconnectedness of oppressive systems, particularly sexism and speciesism. This convergence investigates how the domination of non-human animals mirrors and reinforces the marginalization of human groups, drawing on frameworks such as ecofeminism and intersectionality (Merskin, 2016). These perspectives highlight the parallels of gender, race, colonialism, and species hierarchies, especially as they manifest in contexts such as food production, labour exploitation, and environmental degradation. CAS and feminist theory challenge human-centered thinking and promote a broader understanding of justice that includes both human and non-human animals (Hunter & Chubb, 2025).

Feminist theory is foundational to CAS providing essential conceptual tools for understanding and dismantling systems of domination that operate across species lines. CAS draws heavily on feminist critiques of patriarchy, hierarchy, and dualistic thinking particularly the human/animal, male/female, and culture/nature binaries that have historically justified both the subordination of women and the exploitation of non-human animals (Adams, 1990). Feminist methodologies, especially those rooted in intersectionality and ecofeminism, inform CAS's commitment to analysing how power operates simultaneously through gender, species, race, class, and other axes of identity. By foregrounding care ethics, embodied knowledge, and relationality, feminist theory not only shapes the ethical commitments of CAS but also reinforces its call for an integrated liberation that challenges all forms of systemic violence (Adams, 1990). Feminist theory, particularly ecofeminism, critiques the patriarchal structures that underpin both the oppression of women and non-human animals, suggesting that the liberation of one cannot be achieved without the liberation of the other. Ecofeminism argues that the same ideologies that justify the domination of women also support the exploitation of nature and animals, thus calling for a non-hierarchical view of the world (French, 2022). These frameworks question the dominant human-centered viewpoints often found in media and call for approaches that acknowledge nonhuman animals as sentient beings with their own agency and subjectivity (Merskin, 2016). Merskin elaborates: "Critics of animal treatment in the wild and as subjects of

experimentation in food production became part of the literature, for what would become CAMS" (2016, p.12). Postcolonial studies also contribute to this discussion by examining how colonial narratives have contributed to the objectification and marginalization of the 'other', whether human or non-human.

> Similar historical accounts of the importance of animals in the establishment of colonial regimes can be told for all the of the major instances of modern colonialism. Colonial displacements of Indigenous ways of life and human-animal relations are not, however, simple one-time events relegated to the past. Even in situations where colonial regimes have been effectively removed through decolonization, the effects of colonialism do not simply disappear. Postcolonial theorists and activists who examine these issues have noted that one of the key persisting consequences of colonialism is the decriminalization and animalization of formally colonized peoples. (Calarco, 2021, p.45).

An examination of how non-human animals are represented in media reveals the deep entanglement of multiple systems of oppression and domination. Binary thinking, particularly the privileging of rationality, colonial perspectives, and cis-heteropatriarchal norms, shapes our understanding of non-human animals (Fernández and Maria, 2024). This framework constructs animals as irrational, instinct-driven, wild, deviant, and uncontrollable, reinforcing a worldview in which the cisgender, heterosexual, white, able-bodied male is positioned as the normative subject. Such a perspective not only distorts how non-human animals are perceived and portrayed but also reinforces broader patterns of marginalisation. Those who are dehumanised or animalised - such as Black individuals, racialised groups, migrants, women and queer individuals, and disabled people – are similarly affected by these representational biases (Fernández and Maria, 2024). When media shifts from stereotypical portrayals to representations that acknowledge animal agency, public perceptions can significantly change, leading to greater empathy and advocacy. The gaze used to objectify marginalised groups parallels the anthropocentric gaze used in the objectification of non-human animals. In her essay *Consumer Vision: Speciesism, Misogyny, and Media,* Adams discusses how media perpetuates both speciesism and misogyny by objectifying women and animals. Adams writes:

> *Objectification* is viewing and treating a living being as an object: one is not granted an individual name, rather a generic name that is lowering. Nonhuman animal names (as they are already lowered) or women's body parts ('cunt' or 'boob') are used, providing a physical distance from the consequences of using a living being. The objectify disappears as a subject of their own lives. Once objectified, a being can be fragmented, and the entirety of the living being disappears. Physically the terminal

> animal is cut up and sold as body parts. Through fragmentation, the object is served not only from its body but from its ontological meaning'" (Adams, 2016, p.60).

This perspective highlights the intersectionality of various forms of oppression and the role of media in perpetuating them. Adams considers the way in which media narratives and imagery commodify bodies, creating a cultural landscape where the exploitation of both women and non-human animals is not only normalised but justified (2016). Hierarchical structures exploit vulnerability (non-human animals and the 'other' groups) and project authority that serves to maintain dominance and control over the oppressed (Merskin, 2016). The language used in media, where derogatory and dehumanising terms are applied to both women and non-human animals, further establishes their objectification (Adams, 2016). This verbal objectification strips the 'other' of their individuality and reduces them to mere commodities. Films and other forms of media often depict women and non-human animals in ways that emphasise their otherness, often for pleasure, consumption, or labour. This portrayal not only devalues their intrinsic worth but also desensitises audiences to the violence and exploitation (Taylor, 2016). By linking speciesism and misogyny, the parallels between the objectification of women through the male gaze and that of non-human animals through the anthropocentric gaze become apparent. The struggles of non-human animals, like women, are rooted in similar ideologies of domination and control (Kemmerer, 2011). By re-examining the cultural narratives that reinforce these notions of oppression, filmmakers and wildlife videographers can produce more inclusive and compassionate non-human animal media representations that recognise and respect the agency of non-human animals.

In the context of CAMS, the anthropocentric gaze is critical to deconstruction and understanding how the media reinforces speciesism and objectifying views of non-human animals. By recognising the anthropocentric gaze in media representations of non-human animals, filmmakers and wildlife videographers can shift the focus of their work from viewing animals as passive objects of human observation to recognising them as sentient beings with their own experiences and agency without exploiting them to human-centred narratives that project non-human animals in an oppressive and misrepresented light (Malamud, 2016).

> Issues of power and representation – of how to ethically provide space for the voiceless and marginalized to be heard – are extremely difficult to navigate when trying to consider other species who do not use human language. This has its own, particular, challenges when thinking through ways we might correct the omission of

> serious accounts of the violence done to them. All of this makes forays into this area both difficult and necessary. Difficult because we are in the position of forging ahead with new ideas with little to ground them, although it should be noted this can be an incredibly liberating position to be in. Necessary because if animals are to matter, and if we are to change the lives of billions routinely subjected to fear, abuse, and murder at our hands, then these discussions need to start somewhere (Taylor, 2016, p.44).

In order to shift the attitudes and thinking of society towards non-human animals, specifically apex predators, we must first change the way that we represent and communicate their stories in the media, for the media has the power to shape societal opinions (Tayor, 2016). The researcher suggests that authentic representations of animals may lack the sense of hyperreal spectacle that has become a cornerstone of contemporary entertainment and representations of animals on screen, including those in wildlife documentaries. Adhering to the demands of audience engagement, wildlife documentaries often create narratives around non-human animals that either place them in the role of 'hero 'or 'villain '(Malamud, 2010). Filmmakers may spend months or even years scouting and travelling to document a certain animal. However, what is shown to the public will be an edited film manipulated to adhere to the narrative being told. These narratives are commonly of prey narrowly escaping death by a predator or a predator escaping starvation by catching its prey. The roles of the 'hero' and 'villain' are clearly defined by the visual language, human narration, and soundtrack disseminated to the viewer. Apex predators, despite being predators in the wild, also fall victim to the objectification of the anthropocentric gaze. Debra Merskin, in her text *Seeing Species* (2018), suggests that when we look at representations of non-human animals, we are "seeing the connection between oppression of human beings and other species and exclusion from moral consideration on the basis of species membership" (2018, p.40). Human history reveals significant prejudice regarding 'difference' and 'otherness' and the derogatory and exoticised representations of animals may be likened to instances of racial, gender, and sexual objectification.

> The animal turn in media studies is thereby a reaction to the anthropocentrism inherent in language, verbal and visuals. Or what is narrowing of interpretations and meaning-making so that it fits the hierarchical structure that maintains a clear demarcation between Humans and Other Animals (Merskin, 2018, p.40).

In summary, the representation of apex predators in contemporary media reflects and reinforces anthropocentric hierarchies, shaping societal perceptions of animals in ways that mirror broader patterns of oppression and marginalisation. Film, wildlife documentaries and other forms visual media often reduce non-human animals to narrative devices by obscuring

their lived realities and agency, while the use of visual and auditory cues reinforces these notions. By examining these portrayals through a critical lens, it becomes clear that both language and imagery contribute to a systematic oppression of non-human animals. Recognising these dynamics highlights the need for critical analyses of media representations in order to promote more ethical and ecologically responsible perspectives of non-human animals.

Hyperreality

CAMS addresses how media representations of non-human animals contribute to their marginalisation and exploitation. The representation of animals in media often reinforces speciesist and anthropocentric views, depicting animals in ways that support their use and abuse by humans (Taylor, 2016). CAMS advocates a shift in these representations to recognise animals as sentient beings with their own rights and agency, challenging the dominant narratives that justify their mistreatment. Storytelling in media and narratives that emphasise the individuality and emotional lives of animals can help to humanise them in the eyes of viewers, breaking down entrenched speciesist attitudes. Power may also be motivated by affection, and the media functions "as a space where the norms of human and other animal relations are constructed" (Tuan, 1984, pp.1-2). The animals that we see in the media are there to say something about us, to serve our purposes, and thus any individuality is blurred into a mass of sameness and lack of identity to function as part of the human food production system or wildlife management paradigms (Merskin, 2018). Modern culture contains an abundance of animal representations. However, these representations are often distorted and removed from authentic visibility, resulting in animals that are both vital to the visual attention and entirely absent, as they are depictions that do not accurately reflect the real animal (Malamud, 2012). The representation of animals in media is not neutral; it carries significant ethical implications. Changing these representations is essential for promoting a more just and compassionate society (Merskin, 2016).

> Just as Marx articulated consumer capitalism focuses on alienating citizens from the means of production when it comes to knowing the full process of how a product is created and distributed, we are symbolically connected to that which appears to be the real animal and yet we are merely in relation to a simulation of the truth (Merskin, 2018, p.45).

Our media channels are filled with numerous representations of animals that establish a proximity to them, and as we engage with these depictions, we are able to reduce the distance between human and non-human animals by virtue of our engagement with these depictions. The anthropomorphic gaze is often used to make viewers believe that animals portrayed on screen are similar to humans regardless of the fact that they exist in a separate ecosystem.

> [W]hat we do see in media coverage of animals, and particularly in the lack of coverage of systematic violence done to them, is an underscoring of the status quo (Taylor, 2016, p.46)

This parallels the role media plays in sustaining these systems of domination, suggesting that challenging speciesism requires a broader critique of all forms of hierarchical oppression going against the "status quo" (Taylor, 2016). By drawing attention to the similarities between speciesism, sexism, and racism, activists call for a more comprehensive approach to social justice that addresses the root causes of all forms of exploitation and marginalisation (Adams, 2016) and an acknowledgement of how media representations that perpetuate speciesism are deeply intertwined with other forms of social injustice. Media portrayals that devalue non-human animals are not incidental; they are a deliberate strategy to uphold economic structures that benefit from their exploitation (Nibert, 2016). This analysis suggests that media plays a crucial role in perpetuating speciesism by aligning it with capitalist interests that prioritise profit over ethical considerations (Freeman, 2016). The use of speciesism in turn influences a notion of hyperreality in animal media representations. Hyperreality was coined by French sociologist and philosopher, Jean Baudrillard, and is "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (1994, p.1). Baudrillard explains that; "The impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real is of the same order as the impossibility of staging illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible" (1994, p.19).

Hyperreality is a form of social reality derived from cultural representations and their repetition. In an analysis of Baudrillard's theory, McLaverty-Robinson writes that "[t]he term has implications for 'too much reality – 'everything being on the surface, without mystery; 'more real than reality – 'too perfect and schematic to be true, like special effects; and 'para-reality', an extra layer laid over, or instead of, reality" (2012). The images of animals we see in films, news media, and wildlife documentaries are not 'real', but representations designed speciesist scenario that works to simulate images of non-human animals void the subject of

its individuality: Images captured using zoom lenses, layered and edited in postproduction with video filters, sound effects, and other intricate editing techniques (Marris, 2021). These are images that eliminate the 'real 'or authentic experience of viewing animals in their natural environment and alternatively offer a cushioned experience of viewing a beautiful and exotic world from one's living room. This is a hyperreality, a reality that does not exist (McLaverty-Robinson, 2012).

> Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal (Baudrillard, 1994, p.1).

Hyperreality, when viewed in the context of human narratives of animals, suggests that the 'reality 'of predatory animal behaviour is without origin, yet it is given agency within society due to the indistinct boundary between the real and the imaginary (Baudrillard, 1994). "If non-human images are simulacra that discredit the real, people must subscribe to the possibility of knowing non-human animals to maintain that reality exists beyond humanity's constructed orders" (Anderton, 2016, p.134). This suggests that when viewing hyperreal representations of non-human animals, we can no longer identify these representations as fictions and as such negative associations of our animal 'others 'are perpetuated.

> As with meat eating and the purchasing of sweatshop clothing, just because the other before us is not present doesn't mean there isn't an-other beyond those representations. It is paramount that those others are remembered when situating ethics to cut against the dismembering process. Otherwise non/humans will continuously be reduced to the consumable goods that vanish when the clothing is thrown away, or when the lights come back on after the movie ends (Schatz, 2016, p.4).

Our knowledge of 'other 'animals is commonly based on mediated representations, as such they often appear happy or healthy, sad or hungry, alone or dangerous, or friendly and playful (Merskin, 2018, p.45), characteristics associated with human behaviour Beneath familiar portrayals of wolves as enigmatic, bears as lighthearted, dogs as performers, and sharks as threatening, countless nonhuman animals are subjected to harm and death while being framed as workers or sources of entertainment. Seen through a human-centered lens, they are reduced to objects, creating a distance between these representations and the realities of human and nonhuman relationships (Merskin, 2016). The research suggests that this disconnection has consequences for the lived experience of animals in an anthropocentric era.

“The greatest concern is the blurring of the real and the representational, with no return to the real” (Merskin, 2018, p.47). Much of society’s understanding of the natural world is derived from knowledge disseminated through the anthropocentric gaze, which presents non-human animals through a structured human narrative, often anthropomorphising their behaviour into familiar, human-like characteristics. In order to shift non-human animal representations away from the anthropocentric gaze, this research deconstructs three instances of apex predator representations (sharks, bears, and wolves) in the media. This analysis ultimately aims to assess the influence of such representations and to consider how filmmaking might move toward more transparent and ethically responsible portrayals of non-human animals.

Deconstructing Non-Human Animal Representations

CAMS looks at how different forms of oppression (like speciesism, racism, and sexism) are reinforced through the way animals are portrayed in media. These portrayals often support existing power structures (speciesism), making the exploitation of marginalised groups, including nonhuman animals, seem normal or justified. CAMS emphasises the importance of media literacy in helping people to recognise and question these patterns. By encouraging audiences to think critically about how animals are represented, CAMS pushes for more thoughtful and ethical media consumption (Merskin, 2016). It also calls on media creators to move away from harmful stereotypes and alternatively tell stories that acknowledge animals ’ agency and inherent worth. At its core, CAMS challenges us to rethink the way we see and depict animals in media, with the goal of building a more empathetic and ethically aware society -not just for animals, but for everyone. The ethos of CAMS aligns with this research and its deconstruction of representations of large apex predator animals within film and wildlife documentaries, and its consideration of the influence of mainstream narratives on public perceptions of wildlife behaviour (Merskin, 2016).

In order to understand dramatised and distorted versions of predator animals (sharks, bears, and wolves) on screen it is necessary to consider historical representations of these non-human characters and how these interpretations have persisted in contemporary film and news media practices. Our misconceptions of these animals may be linked to mythological depictions in ancient folklore. For example, throughout Native American culture the bear and wolf have been regarded as spiritual, godlike creatures, while other cultures refer to these animals in a different manner; however, ancient tales of these animals as gods was arguably a

response to the animals‘ ’unpredictable ’nature when they encountered humans (Armstrong, 2002). For many indigenous people, past and present, animals and humans are constantly and eternally in a relationship in the world (Merskin 2018, p.90). One is not superior to the other. Unlike our present era where the view is anthropocentric, situating humans as superior to all other species, historically humans “in all probability, identif[ed] with other animals, perceive[ed] their kinship with them and develop[ed] a belief system around them” (Smith, 1992, p.128).

In several cultures the wolf is a symbol of the warrior, of death, evil, destruction, desolation, but also perceived as being a guide to man or man’s ancestor. While all cultures have different myths and legends, each response comes from human beings ’attempt to make sense of the animals ’reaction to man. Myths and folklore that encourage fear of, or respect for, apex predators are a result of humans' attempt to place animals in the context of a human world; a human world which materialises through systemised and structured behaviours which conform to idealised conceptions of civilisation. Noel Smith described the belief of shamanism as being grounded in the idea that “all things in the world are alive” and that all events are because of the “behaviour of life forces” (1992, p.34). The belief is that shamans possess special abilities that endow them with the ability to become guardians and seers, respectively. They are often described as taking animal forms or having animal helpers through which they connect the visible and invisible worlds. Observing animals was not just a pastime for early people, but also a matter of survival. There is, therefore, little doubt that ancient peoples were more closely connected to the natural world than we are today. Ancient paintings and statues depict the walk of animals in a lifelike manner because the artists observed their non-human animal subjects closely. An example of this phenomenon, and perhaps some of the most common animals represented in Native North American art and carvings, are wolves and bears. “Native American cultures may consider some identifications with animals honorable, it cannot be presumed that all species of animal are accorded this value, nor that all other colonized cultures do the same. Ultimately, then, such equations between the treatment of animals and humans fail to advance either postcolonial or animal studies very far” (Armstrong, 2002, p.414). Species can be identified from these images based on specific poses and naturalistic detail. In the anthropocentric era it may be argued that humans and non-human animals have become increasingly disconnected from one another.

> The European and American philosophical traditions as passed down from the Greeks and Romans are informed by a cosmology that puts the animal world on a hierarchical inferiority with respect to the human world as human beings are conceived of as the bearers of reason, speech, and agency. The animal is seen as unthinking, mute, and a being of reaction, rather than response. (Mazis, 2011, p.292).

Philip Armstrong discusses colonial themes where "absolute difference between the human and the animal (and the superiority of the former over the latter) owes a great deal to the colonial legacies of European modernity" and the idea that the "indigenous cultural knowledges that imperialism has attempted to efface continue to pose radical challenges to the dominance of Western value systems" (Armstrong, 2002, p.414). Research in animal studies suggests that the way “the animal” is defined is deeply entangled with the development of ideas central to colonialism. Representations of both animals and colonised worlds have together played a role in shaping some of the most influential intellectual frameworks within European thought. Armstrong writes that “postcolonial studies have shown little interest in the fate of the non-human animal. In identifying the costs borne by non-European ‘others ’in the pursuit of Western cultures ’sense of privileged entitlement, post-colonialists have concentrated upon ‘other ’humans, cultures, and territories but seldom upon animals” (2002, p.413).

> As human populations grew, the masses of people laboring in fields produce food also came to be devalued by powerful, armed elites. The underlying motivation for the oppression of humans and other animals was the material gain it produced for powerful elite males. Creation of early forms of the state permitted elites to establish forced customs and laws in order to entrench the exploitive practices. These elite-based, socially constructed sets of beliefs explaining the oppression of devalued humans and other animals – ideologies – were promulgated by the elite to reduce opposition to oppressive social systems (Nibert, 2016, p.76).

Interconnected systems of power and exploitation - such as class, race, species, and gender hierarchies - are maintained through deeply embedded ideologies that enforce the power and dominance of the patriarchy. Speciesism normalises inequality and shapes social attitudes in ways that blur the lines of violence toward the non-human animal while promoting human superiority. Both human and non-human animal groups of oppression are not natural or inevitable but strategically constructed and enforced. Through the oppressive lens of the anthropocentric gaze, apex predators (sharks, bears, and wolves), from this perspective, exist in three contexts: as a threat to the human, as a supplement that serves the human, or as an incarnation of the human. The first context, the ‘man killer,’ has become an attractive narrative for modern and postmodern filmmakers and speciesist in the horror genre because

the animal actors playing the villain require no motive or explanation for their actions; their only motive is to kill, and it is man's mission to conquer the evil that threatens their being. The second context, the 'friend of man '(the animal as a supplement to human existence), is expressed in films where animals exist to assist the human protagonist's story. Finally, the third context, the 'embodiment of man,' refers to anthropomorphic representations of animals, most commonly seen in cartoons and artworks. Steve Baker (2000), author of *The Postmodern Animal*, discusses the idea of an "awkwardness of thinking" in his writing on animals in a postmodern context. Baker suggests that when an object is described in writing, the image is left to the imagination of the reader; however, when an object is depicted through visual media, the viewer and the artist are interchangeable, as the viewer is observing the artist's interpretation of the subject matter. (Baker, 2000, p.8) This observation suggests the power of animal representations in visual form and the influence such depictions hold, with their potential to coerce the viewer into a particular mode of thought.

It may be argued that the role of printed text has also had a significant effect on animal narratives, and it may be observed that several media representations that promote stereotypical animal characters are based on characters from books (Winnie the Pooh in *Winnie-the-Pooh* [Milne 1926], the shark in *Jaws* [Benchley, 1974], and the Big Bad Wolf in *Grimms 'Fairy Tales* [J. Grimm and W. Grimm 1904]). However, the diversity of animal imagery offers up symbolic potential that may reflect a cultural desire for visually rich animal imagery (Burt, 2002). Burt proposes that "this diversity also means that we cannot assume a uniformity of response to animal imagery. To some extent this is inevitable, given the flexibility and variety of cultural codes to be found in most cultures, but it has a particular consequence for those cultures that are especially sensitised to animal issues, notably those with a long tradition of engagement with such issues" (2002, p.20). Burt cites the United Kingdom and legislations that monitor the appearance of animals in film, declaring this an "acknowledgement of the potentially powerful effects of animal imagery on film" (2002, p.20). The heightened influence visual media holds over print media is essentially due to film and television's ability to create a sense of *hyperreality* among its viewers (Baudrillard, 1994).

> There is a widespread perception that life is led differently now, faster and more precariously, both for humans and animals […] In art and in philosophy, postmodernism is both a theoretical and a practical enterprise, and its resistance to the dissolution of human and animals bodies often therefore takes the form of what has

> been called ‘an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in the construction’ (Baker, 2000, p.8).

Speciesism and the use of hyperrealistic or exaggerated representations of animals in film is directly linked to postmodernism as an attempt to “resist or displace fixed meaning” (Burt 2002), taking what is 'real' and morphing it into a distortion of reality. While Baker’s (2000) analysis of animals in a postmodern context is reflective of his dissection of contemporary art and performances, the same analysis can be applied to postmodern animals in film and media contexts. Media narratives that devalue non-human animals often mirror and reinforce those that devalue women and marginalised human groups, creating a mutually reinforcing cycle of oppression (Adams, 2016). This interconnectedness means that in efforts to address one form of objectification we need to consider the broader context of systemic inequality. The researcher recognises the power visual imagery and language holds in the presentation of non-human animals through the anthropocentric gaze and its translation into hyperrealistic representations in a way that rids them of the non-human animals’ identity in favour of grand theatrical productions that leave viewing audiences with unrealistic understandings of the animals and their environment (Baudrillard, 1994). This distortion of representation leads to misconceptions about non-human animals’ relationship to humans and how these species interact with each other when encountered. As explored in CAMS, such misrepresentations are not simply artistic choices but are deeply embedded in systems of power and knowledge. Therefore, understanding the politics of visual culture becomes crucial to deconstructing speciesist ideologies. By situating animal representations within broader postmodern critiques and feminist frameworks, we can begin to challenge the normalised hierarchies that shape the lives both human and non-human.

> The Anthropocene must arise from humans’ view of the world and their relationship to it […] the concept of ‘nature’ naturalizes the idea that humans are somehow distinct from non-human activity; and more than this, humans have power over ‘nature’ and a right to use it for anthropocentric purposes. Thus ‘nature’ and the Anthropocene are intertwined, the latter a consequence of centuries of (Western) human conceptualisations of a category deemed ‘nature’ whose assumed naturalness functions as its legitimacy (Mills, 2017, p.95).

Human understanding of non-human animals is commonly derived from mediated representations, such as those found in films and wildlife documentaries. This raises the question of how such representations shape perception. By reinforcing the divide between the human and animal worlds, anthropocentrism facilitates a process of normalisation. As Mills

explains, “normalization legitimizes categorising other living things primarily as resources” (2017, p. 95), highlighting how these representations reinforce human dominance by rendering animals as objects for human use.

Monstrous Animals

In the modern century and with the rise of visual storytelling, animals have been cast in supporting roles that exist to strengthen the identity of their human counterparts as either a supplement or enemy. This designation of animals can be viewed in parallel to the representation of women in film, which operates under the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975). Animals, through the subjugating lens of the anthropocentric gaze, are relegated to the position of object for the viewing pleasure of the subject. The anthropocentric gaze is not limited to portrayals of fantasy or desire and while pets and helpers (angels/the good) move to assist their human masters, apex predators (whores/the bad) are met with scorn and distrust (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979), “calling out to our basest drives and allowing us to satiate these drives by halting, or destroying these creatures” (Malamud, 2010). Although sharks, bears, and wolves appear in ‘family friendly’ films, the researcher suggests that the presence of these animals in horror/thriller films is perhaps the most influential representation of apex predators on human perception; a perception which invariably positions the animal as other.

To fully understand the anthropocentric gaze and its influence on animal narratives, it is necessary to reiterate speciesism and the parallels between the objectification of minority groups and non-human animals. CAMS draws on several fields of study to highlight the media’s position on shaping the ideologies about non-human animals (Merskin, 2016). Drawing on women and gender studies and the feminist theory of the male gaze, film practices position the viewer of the film in a masculine role while the object on screen is one of desire: ‘woman ’(Mulvey, 1975). In the context of Mulvey’s theory, the non-human animals represented are passive and female, whereas the human viewer is active and male. The non-human animal no longer exists within the sphere of its real life but appears as a spectacle through the screen in which we view them (Berger, 2009, p.30). Mulvey conveys this aspect of the objectified woman through a quotation by Budd Boetticher asserting that:

> What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way her does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance (Mulvey, 1975, p.809).

While the woman is subjugated to be viewed as an object of desire, she can also be subjugated to be perceived as a source of chaos and disruption. If the woman is more than an object to view, then she can be a threat or *castrator* (Creed 1993). Barbara Creed, author of *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993), examines the male's gaze and the objectifying roles women have been given in horror films. "Sexualization of animals, women, and weapons, as if the three are interchangeable sexual bodies in narratives of traditional masculinity" (Kalof, Fitzgerald, and Baralt, 2004, p.237). The non-human animal 'monstrous other' are demonstrates "how speciesism and the entangles oppression of humans other animals are reflected and reproduced by the mass media" (Nibert, 2016, p.84).

> The presence of the monstrous-feminine in popular horror films speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity. However, this presence does challenge the view that the male spectator is almost always situated in an active, sadistic position and the female spectator in a passive, masochistic one (Creed, 1993, p.7).

The objectification of women in horror films speaks of man's desire to overpower and control that which is viewed as a threat to their social order. The 'other 'Creed cites, as Julia Kristeva explains in *Powers of Horror* (1982), is an abject source of chaos, something that does not obey boundaries or rules, and thus is a threat to the subject's identity or life (1982). If the subject is male, then the abject female threatens the patriarchal order. Creed suggests that the abject appears in three ways in horror films: "1: The horror film abounds in images of abjection, foremost of which is the corpse, whole and mutilated, followed by an array of bodily wastes such as blood, vomit, saliva, sweat, tears, and putrefying flesh. 2: The concept of a border is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film; that which crosses or threatens to cross the 'border 'is abject. 3: The way the horror film illustrates the work of abjection is in the construction of the maternal as abject" (1993, p.10).

Through the anthropocentric gaze in horror films, hyperrealistic and postmodern animals leave a lasting impression on a human understanding of the non-human, by playing on the fears and desires of the viewing subject. Positioning the animal as abject reflects the human's desire to overcome, control, kill or conquer that which threatens our lives and demonstrates

the need for power and dominance (Merskin, 2016) over the other and the mistreatment of non-human animals.

The film *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975) is a cultural example of a representation of the animal as an abject other. The film has arguably had a long-term effect on influencing societies ' understanding and opinions of sharks (Pepin-Neff, 2015). *Jaws* created a lasting narrative that sharks are mindless killers (the abject), which only seek to destroy man and his way of life and can only be defeated in a battle in which man will reign victorious (an anthropocentric narrative). This depiction reinforced public fear and misunderstanding of sharks, casting them as dangerous villains rather than essential parts of marine ecosystems. This structural narrative is common and has subsequently been copied and referenced in postmodern animal imagery throughout popular culture. The title *Jaws*“ literally (through eating) and figuratively (through representations of them) reproduces future sharks and the fear humans have of sharks” (Lerberg, 2016, p.33). This concept of creating meaning and identity through repetition may be understood through a consideration of Judith Butler’s theory of ‘performativity’. Butler argues that one’s identity or social reality is not a given but is an illusion continually reproduced "through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social signs" (Butler, 1990, p.519).

> The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again (Butler, 1990, p.526).

Butler’s concept of performativity relates specifically to the construct of gender in society. Butler argues that pervasive representations and the social constructed-ness of gender ensure its continuance, and just as our expectations of masculine and feminine behaviours may be shaped by society, our expectations of animal behaviours may equally be influenced and determined by society. There is an asymmetric relationship in society between men and women, which is reflected in the relationship between animals and humans (Butler, 1990). Akin to the parallels of Creed’s (1993) analysis of women’s representation in horror films and animal representation, Butler’s theory of performativity of identity and gender relations can be applied to animals and the identities the media has given them through the anthropocentric gaze. This anthropocentric gaze may be considered the reason why society

associates certain characteristics and patterns of behaviour with certain animals. However, it is important to acknowledge that while Butler describes one's societal identity as something that has come from continuous repetition (1990), in the context of this research, animals' behaviours are not changed by human representation, but rather a human understanding of non-human animals is determined by the performative repetition of their characteristics in film and media contexts.

Jaws set the tone for decades of media that depicted sharks as aggressive and bloodthirsty. This influenced news coverage of shark attacks, making rare incidents seem common or intentional, thus emphasising fear. Sharks in a post-*Jaws* era have been defined by the characteristics of their 'jaws', a species defining feature that has come to differentiate sharks and designate them as 'other,' an association that arguably demonstrates a lack of understanding from society (Lerberg, 2016, p.33) and draws on fear and the eerie tone of the film *Jaws* (1975). In *Shark Tale* (Bergeron et al., 2011), we observe references to the infamous theme tune from *Jaws,* with the shark, Frankie, referring to it as his theme song, and in the Pixar film, *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003), though based on animated representations of sharks that arguably attempt to articulate a different identity for the predator, the audience is reminded of themes from *Jaws*: The sharks are portrayed as friendly vegetarians, which is contrasted by their large, wide, and jagged-toothed smiles. These repetitions of the cultural tropes associated with sharks, derived from the film *Jaws*, demonstrate the influence of film and media broadcasts on human perceptions of non-human animals, reinforcing their image based on their physical features rather than as sentient individuals. As a result, sharks and other non-human predator animals are shunned or disregarded by society with many citing 'irrational' fear of the animals as the reason for their distain. After the release of *Jaws*, there was a noticeable spike in recreational shark fishing. Many people, motivated by fear or thrill, participated in 'shark hunts' and trophy fishing, especially for large species like great whites. Local and national news outlets rarely report on the millions of sharks poached each year for their fins, and when this issue is mentioned, it is often a small reference included at the end of wildlife documentaries. Society rarely references the atrocities the 'monstrous' non-human animals are subjected to, with the narrative attention being reserved for instances where the animal is the catalyst for chaos and disruption to our social norms.

> The gendered pronouns she and he help to individualize nonhuman animals. A failure to see individuals as individuals is the essence of all bigotries. White racists see an individual Black as an embodiment of race. Sexist men see an individual woman primarily as female. Analogously, speciestists see a nonhuman individual as a mere representative of species of other biological group. Suffering and well-being are experienced at the level of individual. Therefore, it is important that advocates for nonhuman affirm nonhuman individuality (Dunayer, 2016, p.94).

The negative narrativisation of sharks is also apparent with regard to wolves and bears with their invariable casting as villains and monsters in horror films. Wolves are often viewed as rabid killer dogs (*The Grey* [Carnahan, 2011], *Wolf Town* [Reiné, 2011]) or are associated with werewolves and evil (*An American Werewolf in London* [Landis, 1981], *The Wolf Man* [Waggner, 1941], *Night of the Wolf: Late Phases* [2014]), while grizzly bears are shown as unstoppable predators when they come into contact with rogue wanderers (*The Edge*, 1997; *Grizzly*, 1976; *Into the Grizzly Maze*, 2015).

> This kind of objectification is dangerous not only because is it outmoded from a scientific and social perspective, but more fundamentally because it is reductionist. It circumscribes animals' existence in relation to the human gaze, appraising them only in terms of their usefulness or threat (to us). Such a perspective confounds an ecologically ethical ideology, in which all members of an ecosystem are interdependent and no single species is inherently privileged above any other (Malamud, 2010, p.7).

The asymmetric configuration of the human/animal relation may be observed in the overexaggerated caricatures of animals (sharks, bears, and wolves) in horror films. The influence of these narratives may be observed in the tone of news media reports relating to human/animal encounters and the assumption of 'truth 'in wildlife documentary representations.

Anthropomorphic Animals

Animal representations as perceived through the anthropocentric gaze as 'other 'may be that of the 'monstrous other '(as discussed in relation to *Jaws* [Spielberg, 1975]), however, this is not the sole example of animal otherness, when otherness is not limited to the human understanding and perception of non-human animals as a presumed threat to human society. The physical appearance of the non-human animal is likely to be viewed as 'other', however, animal personalities and actions that appear to share similarities with those qualities

attributed to humans, are highlighted and exaggerated in the form of anthropomorphic animal representations.

> In the great majority of animals there are traces of physical qualities and attitudes, which qualities are more markedly differentiated in the case of human beings […] so in a number of animals we observe gentleness and fierceness, mildness or cross-temper, courage or timidity, fear or confidence, high spirits or low cunning, and with regard to intelligence, something akin to sagacity (Berger, 2009, p.20).

From a young age, we are bombarded with images of animals acting and talking in a way that is identical to humans. While they often appear to be entirely animal in their physical appearance, their actions and mannerisms often parallel human behavior and characteristics. The anthropomorphic animal is left without meaning or secrecy and is "co-opted into the *family* and into the *spectacle*" (Berger, 2009, p.25) as images of cartoon characters, zoo animals and stuffed animal toys, flood society.

> Dominant practices involving other animals in childhood, include the feeding of 'animal products' and the selective exposure of children to particular 'types' of animals, for example 'pets' or 'zoo animals'. Children encounter dominant representations of other animals through, for instance, engagement with the mass media and social media; through playing with toys and games based on other animals; and in the formal education system (Cole and Stewart, 2014, p.6).

The word 'anthropomorphism' is derived from the Greek word for 'human form.' There is still no universally agreed upon definition of anthropomorphism. In broad terms, it is understood as the process of attributing human characteristics, behaviors, or emotions to nonhuman or even inanimate entities (Epley, et al., 2007). Anthropomorphised animals are examples of non-human animals that have been co-opted into the family (the human family). John Berger, in his text *Why Look at Animals?*, suggests that while these animals may appear to be pets, they have "no physical needs or limitations as pets do, they can be totally transformed into human puppets" (pp.25-26): The animals' likeness is apparent but their animal nature and being is lost or replaced with human characteristics in order to convey social commentary and practices. Recently sharks have become part of the plethora of anthropomorphic representations of animals. The film *Shark Tale* (Bergeron, et al., 2011) and the children's television show, *Baby Shark's Big Show* (DiRaffaele and Sica, 2021) are both examples of cartoon depictions of the shark's likeness being used as a form to communicate human practices. The anthropomorphic representations of sharks in the media are relatively new additions to the animals' already long-established catalog of media appearances that

mainly depict them as the monstrous other in the media. However, anthropomorphic representations of bears in the media are far more prevalent and occupy the space of the anthropomorphic other.

> Anthropomorphism can lead to an inaccurate understanding of biological processes in the natural world. It can also lead to inappropriate behaviors towards wild animals, such as trying to adopt a wild animal as a 'pet' or misinterpreting the actions of a wild animal (Ganea, 2015, quoted in Milman, 2016).

It should be noted that bears pose the same threat to humans as other apex predators, yet they are frequently depicted (almost degraded) as childlike creatures, a characteristic that can be attributed to the desire of humans to anthropomorphise the behaviour of animals as a means of exerting power over non-human animals in general. The ability of bears to appeal to human emotion and show traits which are associated with human characteristics has been translated into depictions, in which, through an anthropocentric gaze, bears are presented as anthropomorphic caricatures of their human counterparts, and objectified through human narratives.

> The animal is rendered vulnerable, free for the taking, in whatever way the human viewer chooses: the process metaphorically reiterates what is enacted literally in the culture of carnivorous agribusiness (Malamud, 2010, p.7).

Books such as *The Story of the Three Bears* (Southey, 1892), *Winnie the Pooh* (Milne, 1926), *A Bear Called Paddington* (Bond, 1958) (all of which have been recreated into films and/or television series) and the films *Brother Bear* (Blaise and Walker, 2003), *The Jungle Book* (Reitherman, 1967), *The Country Bears* (Hastings, 2002) and *Brave* (Andrews and Chapman, 2012), are just a few examples of anthropomorphic bears in media: Bears may look and live like animals, yet their personalities and actions are interpreted as human. Berger writes that, "[u]ntil the 19th century, however, anthropomorphism was integral to the relation between man and animal and was an expression of their proximity. Anthropomorphism was the residue of the continuous use of animal metaphor. In the last two centuries, animals have gradually disappeared" (2009, p.21). A gradual loss of the bear's identity has resulted in the non-human animal's individualism being devalued by speciesism, and all that is left is an anthropocentric representation of the animal as viewed through the anthropocentric gaze. The identity of the bear is closely linked to features that have evolved to become associated with human-like traits and behaviours. Critically, the more we attempt to construct a narrative

around the animal through and within the anthropocentric gaze, the more likely it is that the animal itself will disappear from the narrative (Baudrillard, 1994).

> While the oppression of devalues humans has been justified by assertions of their 'animal-like' nature, empathy for other animals sometimes is garnered by reports of their human like qualities (Nibert, 2016, p.81).

The concept of 'otherness' is vital to understanding the anthropocentric gaze and the power it reinforces upon non-human animals in media portrayals. Regarding representations of non-human animals through the anthropocentric gaze, 'otherness' refers to the process by which animals are depicted as fundamentally different and inferior to humans. This form of speciesism leads to the justification for the exploitation and mistreatment of non-human animals in and outside the media. This notion is deeply embedded in media representations, where animals are frequently shown as the 'other' – a category that dehumanises and diminishes their moral worth (Nibert, 2016). Objectification in media often manifests through the depiction of animals as passive and voiceless, reinforcing their status as mere commodities. This process strips animals of their individuality and agency while leaving the audience to view them as tools of entertainment (Baker, 2001).

> If minorities of Others are thus associated with properties of animals, we may assume that also the social representations about minorities are connected to representations of animals. This may imply that in racist ideologies, the Others are basically also represented as less human, so that attitudes and specific models about minorities will tend to be associated with the appropriate animals (Van Dijk, 2000, p.109).

The objectification of non-human animals in media is a significant issue that intersects with the concept of otherness. Objectification of non-human animals as mere entities or products, devoid non-human animals of individual identity or intrinsic value. Portrayal reduces animals to items for human use, whether for entertainment, consumption, or labour, and reinforces exploitative practices (Adams, 2016). Shifting the media narrative to portray non-human animals as subjects with their own stories and rights rather than as objects for human use is crucial for fostering societal change. Sune Borkfelt, in his text *Non-Human Otherness: Animals as Others and Devices for Othering*, writes:

> [I]f we are to speak of non-human animals as others, we should keep in mind that they are often embedded in an otherness which is deeper than that of marginalised or stereotyped humans. We simply tend to place non-human animals in an entirely different category from our human others […the] common tendency to assume a natural intrinsic difference between humans and other animals, which generally

> situates the human/animal binary beyond discussions of othering, is no less flawed than arbitrary categorisations that we apply to humans. Indeed, the relationship of humans to non-human animals […] is based on the same cultural features that play a part in the othering of human groups as well. (Borkfelt, 2011, p.138).

The otherness of animals is maintained by their physical appearance, but their actions and voices tend to be portrayed as human by the way they act and communicate. However, there still remains a perception that a distinction exists between a non-human animal and a human, and thus the condition of otherness is maintained, and thus the anthropomorphic other exists. The film, *The Country Bears* (Hastings, 2002), centres on a live-action anthropomorphic bear, Beary Barrington, raised by humans who sets out on a quest to reunite a music group, the Country Bears, for one final show after discovering that he has been adopted. Beary's journey ends with him and the band saving their former concert hall and Beary becoming the newest addition to the group. In the film, anthropomorphic bears are depicted as having human-like characteristics, except for their appearance, and as such, the movie focuses on their antics. While the bears are being accepted and praised for their musical talents as well as their adoption of human behaviour, the world still perceives them as 'others,' implying that they are still different from humans. The depiction of animals outside their natural environment who act as humans yet do not belong (Lutts, 1992, p.160) is a recurrent theme in Disney films and within popular culture characters such as Winnie the Pooh and Paddington Bear. Bears are considered to be the most anthropomorphised animals in popular culture, however, it may be argued that all non-human animals have been subjected to anthropomorphism through the anthropocentric gaze. Non-human animals are often represented as the anthropomorphic other in children's books, comic strips, greeting cards, advertisements, and news stories, usually conveying something about the human condition, rather than the animals depicted; they operate as metaphors that express or illuminate our own motivations and emotional states (Merskin, 2018). Erin McKenna, in her book *Pets, People, and Pragmatism* (2013), writes:

> Attributing human traits to other animal beings came to be seen as problematic as western science sought objectivity in the study of the behavior of other animal beings. Carried to its extreme, the avoidance of anthropomorphism results in seeing other animal beings as lacking emotions, intelligence, and interests. On the other hand, over-indulgence in anthropomorphism results in humans ignoring how the needs, interests, and intelligences of various other animal beings differ from those of human beings. This can lead to treating them as a kind of defective human—doted on but dependent (Mckenna, 2013, p.9).

The need for humans to anthropomorphise can be motivated by factors of loneliness and disconnect or by a need to feel in control of one's environment in times of uncertainty (Epley et al., 2008). While there are other examples of human tendencies to anthropomorphise (such as the anthropomorphising of unambiguous natural objects (Guthrie, 1993; Norenzayan, Hanson, and Cady, 2008), for the purpose of this research the primary focus will be on the human practice of anthropomorphism in relation to a desire for control over the animal or other, a reflection of the anthropocentric drive.

> Anthropomorphism represents just one of many examples of induction whereby people reason about an unknown stimulus based on a better–known representation of a related stimulus, in this case reasoning about a nonhuman agent based on representations of the self or humans (Epley et al., 2008, p.145).

The theory of *biophilia* supports the idea of the influence of human/animal relationships and the need to anthropomorphise. Edward O. Wilson described biophilia as "the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike process" (1984, p.1). In this regard, anthropomorphism in non-human animal representations can be rationalised as a desire to connect with non-human animals, which produces a rationale for the use of the anthropocentric gaze of the anthropomorphic other. People use the representations of self and humans to create reason about unknown stimuli, in this case reasoning about non-human agents based on representations of the self or others (Epley et al., 2007). Merskin explains that "[h]umans are drawn to the new, the novel, the different but no matter the pull of the exotic or other worldly, we naturally want to associate, to affiliate, with nature, and doing so is crucial to healthy psychological and physical development" (Merskin, 2018, p.61). Indeed, the reason we are curious about non-human animals in the world is because of our inherent human curiosity about life (Wilson, 1984). However, this research suggests that our understanding of the natural world and wildlife is derived from misinformation and hyperreal media depictions.

> [W]ithout some amount of anthropomorphism, human beings would not have been able to interact with other animal beings as successfully as we have. We would not have been successful hunters or trappers, we would not have been able to domesticate livestock, nor would we have been able to live with pets. Some amount of anthropomorphism allows us to understand other animal beings because we do share a lot in common (McKenna, 2013, p.9).

There is a tendency in popular culture to humanise non-human animals, sometimes to the extent that it becomes difficult to recognise that these are wild animals who may become

violent at times if provoked. Non-human animal representations in film and media are commonly humanised through the anthropocentric gaze. In CAMS non-human animals objectified as an object of human desire and confined to roles allocated and deemed acceptable for them is a discourse where the animal is confined to human roles and stripped of their wildness (Bousé, 2003). This containment and confinement co-opts the animal into the spectacle; completely visible but only existing for the viewing pleasure of humans, appearing like a "fish seen through the plate glass of an aquarium" (Berger, 2009, p.26); however, the plate glass of the aquarium has been replaced by the ubiquity of the television screen. The 'talking animals' that appear in films and television productions can be viewed as an example of literal anthropomorphism; non-human animals who are literally fashioned to look and behave like humans whilst performing human dialogue. De Waal also cites satirical anthropomorphism, "based on the assumption that no one wishes to be compared with an animal" (De Waal, 1999, p.260) As a result, people are more likely to interpret nonhuman animals in human-like terms when those kinds of representations are more readily available than non-anthropomorphic ones. (Epley, et al., 2008). Anthropomorphism projects human attributes, feelings and thoughts onto non-human animals (De Waal, 1999). In wildlife documentaries, this is accomplished by the role of the human narrator and the use voice-over.

> You take a wealth of astonishing wildlife cinematography, assign human names and traits to the animals you've filmed, fabricate an engaging storyline around their exploits (preferably involving a mother and newborn) and edit your footage together to serve that story, then hire a seasoned comic actor to deliver the lively narration (Scott, 2015).

Wildlife documentaries allow audiences to view wild animals from the comfort of their home. The animal and its environment are arguably romanticised and thus the 'animal object' becomes a hyperreal spectacle. According to Bousé, viewers who already have a strong sense of environmental awareness are more inclined to agree with the message of the narrator in a wildlife documentary if they are already environmentally conscious. Through a series of emotional 'triggers,' viewers are led on a visual and oral journey based on the assumption that certain narratives will elicit preconceived notions imposed by the anthropocentric gaze, which are presented in this research (2000, quoted in Palmer, 2015, p.40). "Our motives are unclear even to us, so just because someone claims in all sincerity that a film changed their life doesn't mean that this is necessarily true. Predisposition is almost always present in these cases" (Bousé, 2014, quoted in Palmer, 2015, p.40). The wildlife documentary genre invariably includes the prevalent character of a human narrator, acting as a translator for the

audience, anthropomorphising animal gestures through the anthropocentric gaze and thus constructing an illusory relationship between human and animal. When viewing such documentaries, it may be observed that the dialogue spoken is invariably human, spoken through the anthropocentric gaze, with little consideration for the animal's position.

> In a tradition going back to the folktales, Aesop, and La Fontaine, this kind of anthropomorphism serves human social purposes: to mock, educate, moralize, and recreate. Most of it satisfies the picture, cherished by many, of the animal kingdom as a peaceable and cozy place. The fact that animals kill and devour one another, die of starvation and disease, or are indifferent to one another does not fit the increasingly popular image of animals as noble savages. The general public is less and less aware of the discrepancies with the real world as fewer people grow up on farms or otherwise close to nature (De Waal, 1999, p.261).

The use of language in media reinforces objectification and speciesism by referring to non-human animals in terms that strip them of individuality and agency, thus reinforcing their status as commodities (Dunayer, 2016). "Numerous exploitive labels legitimize speciesist abuse by framing it as natural and inevitable. These labels characterize nonhumans in a particular *situation* as nonhumans of a particular *type*" (Dunayer, 2016, p.97). Dunayer highlights the use of language to catagorise and exploits non-human animals by reinforcing speciesism. The use of terms such as "farm animal' or "prey animal" exploit and catagorise animals based on their appeal or use to humans (Dunayer, 2016). The need for more conscious and ethical uses of language in media to challenge entrenched speciesist views is imperative. The terms and phrases commonly used in media often reflect and perpetuate a mindset that views animals as lesser beings, suitable only for human use and exploitation. While Dunayer used language to catagorise non-human animals in relation to humans (2016), the researcher has catagorised non-human animals' representations of apex predators in the media by deconstructing their image and narrative presented through the anthropocentric gaze. By using language that objectifies and commodifies animals, media not only reflects but also reinforces societal norms that legitimise their mistreatment (Hall, 1997).

Anthropomorphic portrayals can conflict with scientific and ecological understandings of bears as apex predators and wild animals with complex needs. When conservation campaigns try to convey real threats to bear survival (like habitat loss, climate change, or poaching), the message can be less effective if the public sees bears as fictional or symbolic characters rather than living beings requiring serious protection. Objectifying language takes the form of

the human narrator in films and wildlife documentaries. CAMS advocates for reforming media narratives about non-human animals, suggesting that language that dehumanise no-human animals be avoided in place of language that acknowledges their sentience and inherent value. A shift is the language and narrative is crucial for altering public perceptions and fostering a more ethical and respectful relationship with non-human animals. This need for change becomes even more pressing when considering the speciesism represented in television, film, and wildlife documentaries.

> The false intimacy of the para-social relationship is not the only kind of misapprehension of images that occurs as a result of regular TV viewing over time. Just as viewers' perceptions of social reality are influenced by long-term, regular exposure to its representation (or misrepresentation) on television (see Gerbner et al.1986), there seems little to argue that perceptions of nature cannot be influenced in a similar fashion. Viewers, especially heavy viewers, may embrace a number of TV-related misconceptions about nature and wildlife, just as they often to do in response to viewing other types of content (Bousé, 2003, p.125).

The animals we see in wildlife programmes are commonly depicted as exotic, living in remote landscapes which are distinguished from human society. Monbiot suggests that this familiar trope of the wildlife documentary is what we expect to see and therefore it is subject to a process of repetition and reiteration (2002). There is an abundance of wildlife documentaries and television channels featuring non-human animals that have gained popularity in recent years, resulting in hyperreal images of non-human animals appearing everywhere in the media. As a result of the oversaturated market for hyperreal anthropocentric representations in the media, there is an increasing disconnect between society and the natural world. As a result of this disconnection and distance from nature, we are subject to significant psychological, physical, and environmental consequences. Sociologists predicted more than 100 years ago that increased occupational and social specialisation would lead to psychological alienation, weakening social bonds, and anomie. Anomic individuals are not integrated into society, they are disconnected from nature (Merskin, 2018, p.61), this leads to "a deprived and diminished existence" (Kellert, 1997, p.9).

> We know the history of fabulization and how it remains an anthropomorphic taming, a moralizing subjection, a domestication. Always a discourse *of* man, on man, indeed on the animality of man, but for and in man (Derrida, 2008, p.37).

Derrida's articulation of 'anthropomorphic taming' emphasises the assumed centrality of man in perceptions of the animal. It may also be suggested that the demotion of the animal "supports a capitalist system built on the mass production of animals for consumption," a system intentionally removed from the "view of the critical, empathetic eye" (Merskin, 2018, p.63) and centred on the hierarchical position of the human over the non-human animal. Children arguably relate to animals as subjective others, seeing their behaviours reflected in their own thoughts through various anthropomorphic representations (i.e. children's cartoons, stuffed animals, and family or classroom pets) (Cole and Stewart, 2014). This kind of kinship (Haraway, 2008) attempts to simulate the relationships children have in their daily lives and the lives of the non-human animals where they love one another, play, make homes, raise families, and feel. This objectification often tries to justify its abandonment when a child moves into adulthood, and the non-human animal is then oppressed by speciesist ideologies of human superiority that are reinforced by media representations that oppress the individuality of the non-human animals through the anthropocentric gaze.

Companion Animals

In Critical Animal Media Studies, the anthropomorphic gaze exists as a tool utilised by humans in order to make sense of non-human animals and often at the expense of the animals themselves. These representations range from the extremes of the 'monstrous other' to the ambiguous 'companion other.' The use of companions or companionship can be associated with the idea of animal domesticities. While some view domestication as a deeply transformative process that has profound impacts on both humans and animals, domestication is an exaggerated example of the power imbalance between humans and non-human animals, where humans hold significant authority over the lives of animals. In Leslie Irvine's *If You Tame Me*, she explores the emotional, psychological, and ethical dimensions of these connections, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of how and why we bond with non-human animals. Irvine states:

> Although sometimes used synonymously, companion animal has a connotation that is quite different from "pet," which evokes images of Tricky Woo. "Companion animal" has a political context, connoting an increased effort on the part of humans to accept some animals as animals rather than as workers, decoration, or entertainment… "companion animals" remain "other" than human but in a sense worth honoring, rather than one of inferiority (2004, p.58).

This distinction between “pet” and “companion animal” reflects a broader analysis of how society conceptualise relationships with non-human animals. “Companion animals” challenge the traditional speciesist representations that reduce non-human animals to commodities or functional tools. Irvine highlights that mutuality, respect, and emotional connection, while still acknowledging the differences between species, are key in companionship with non-human animals. However, even when the non-human animal is framed, more are still positioned as “other,” which raises critical questions about the limits of inclusion and whether true interspecies equality can exist within dominant anthropocentric frameworks (Irvine, 2004). While the companion animal and the domesticated animal may differ in certain aspects, media representations often impose the anthropocentric gaze upon non-human animal presentation, rendering the non-human animal as the ‘companion other.’ These representations echo instances of respect and admiration but ultimately fall victim to the authority of the anthropocentric gaze. These representations shape the behaviour, identity, and perception towards non-human animals through the anthropocentric gaze and influence societal views and interactions with non-human animals. It speaks to the ways in which animals are not simply tamed or subjugated but actively shaped by their relationships with humans over time, influencing everything from cultural representations to ecological realities. This notion has continuously been reinforced by the media, specifically films and wildlife documentaries. Understanding domestication as a continuous process allows for a more nuanced exploration of the shifting identities of animals, especially in contexts where human influence is increasingly pervasive (Irvine, 2004).

Non-human animals, such as dogs, cats, and livestock, have been selectively bred for specific traits that benefit humans, such as docility, productivity, and particular physical characteristics (Irvine, 2004). This selective breeding often comes at the cost of the animals' natural behaviours and well-being. Irvine explains that many livestock animals are bred to grow quickly and produce more meat, milk, or eggs, which can lead to health problems and a reduced quality of life for the non-human animal as their worth is equivalent to the value to humans (2004). This reflects the anthropocentric gaze of companionship in human/non-human animal relationships, where the animal is commonly relegated to a ‘side character’ or a ‘second thought’ working to assist the human main character. Donna Haraway writes in her essay *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* that “the

‘companion animal’ has the pedigree of mating between technoscientific expertise and late industrial pet-keeping practices, with their democratic masses in love with their domestic partners, or at least with the non-human ones (2003).

The companionship between humans and non-human animals refers to a relationship between humans and animals that is characterised by mutual interaction, often with emotional bonding. Companion animals, also known as pets, are typically kept by humans primarily for company, affection, and social interaction rather than for work or utility (Arluke and Sanders, 1996). The relationship is often seen as one based on love and attachment, with animals offering comfort, companionship, and even therapeutic benefits to their owners (Irvine, 2004). “Companion animals can be horses, cats, or a range of other beings willing to make the leap to the biosociality of service dogs, family members, or team members in cross-species sports” (Haraway, 2003, p.14). When looking through the lens of the anthropomorphic gaze, any animal that a human may seem fit to anthropomorphise is fit to domesticate into companionship.

> Dogs are said to be the first domestic animals, displacing pigs for primal honors. Humanist technophilics depict domestication as the paradigmatic act of masculine, single-parent, self-birthing, whereby man makes himself repetitively as he invents (creates) his tools. The domestic animal is the epoch-changing tool, realizing human intention in the flesh, in a dogsbody version of onanism, Man took the (free) wolf and made the (servant) dog and so made civilization possible. (Haraway, 2003, pg.28)

Haraway highlights the complex interplay between human identity, technological advancement, and the domestication of animals, particularly the dog (2003). It suggests that the domestication of the dog symbolises not only a physical transformation but also a profound shift in human culture, encapsulating ideas of control, utility, and creation. By taming the wolf and turning it into a loyal servant, humans are portrayed as shaping both their environment and themselves, forging the foundation for civilisation through the anthropocentric gaze (Cudworth and Jensen, 2016). The domesticated dog, as an extension of human intention, becomes a reflection of human agency, a tool that realizes the desires and ambitions of its creators (Irvine, 2019). This raises questions about the ethics of manipulation, the nature of relationships between humans and non-human animals, and the broader implications of using domestication and companionship to define the human experience. In influencing the companion other through the anthropocentric gaze, humans were also shaping their own narrative of progress and power through the anthropocentric

gaze, which highlights the human need to master the world around them (Arluke and Sanders, 1996). Unlike companionship, domestication refers to the process through which wild animals are adapted over generations to live in close association with humans and to perform specific roles. The goal of domestication has historically been for practical purposes, such as for food production, labour, or protection, serving the needs of the dominant human (Irvine, 2019).

Domestication is the predecessor to companionship, with domestication leading to companionship; however, often, domestication is not seen as a tool needed for companionship. Domestication prompts us to think about the choices we make as pet owners, consumers, and members of a society that relies heavily on animals for various purposes (Irvine, 2004). By questioning the current situation and proposing alternative ways of relating to animals, a more thoughtful and compassionate approach to domestication and human-animal relationships should be encouraged (Merskin, 2016). CAMS scholars advocate for a more empathetic and introspective engagement with animals, underscoring the imperative of embracing ethical and humane practices (Irvine, 2004). However, these solutions remain problematic as they only address the issue of building better relations with animals that have been domesticated and removed from their natural world.
Irvine quotes Berger:

> Animals interceded between man and their origins because they were both like and unlike man. Animals came from over the horizon. They belonged *there* and *here.* Likewise they were mortal and immortal. An animal's blood flowed like human blood, but its species was undying and each lion was Lion, each ox was Ox. This – maybe the first existential dualism – was reflected in the treatment of animals. There were subjected and worshipped, bred and sacrificed. (Irvine, 2004, pp.35-36).

Non-human animals have a unique and paradoxical role in human history, straddling the line between the familiar and the alien, the mortal and the immortal. Their presence in human life was both symbolic and utilitarian, as animals embodied the tension between the human desire for connection and the need for separation (Haraway, 2008). This duality has allowed for the ways in which non-human animals have been treated: as beings worthy of reverence in some cultures and as tools to be exploited in others. In both their worship and subjugation, non-human animals were a reflection of human understanding of power, life, and death. Non-human animals were not merely creatures to be used or adored but were intermediaries between human existence and the mysteries of nature, offering humans a glimpse into the

cycle of life that reflects their own (Haraway, 2008). Humans have defined their place in the world by asserting power and dominance over non-human animals. The relationship with non-human animals is an intricate dance of reverence, exploitation, and existential reflection, demonstrating the impact non-human animals had on human philosophy and culture.

> [C]ompanion as an adjective…Although such usage does not directly label particular animals for abuse, it does reduce them to a role they fill for humans. Like my feline companion Willie, I am a companion. Nevertheless, no one calls me a 'companion animal' or 'companion human' – because 'companion' is not a trait. Willie is a nonhuman companion, and I am a human one. Insidiously, companion animal bolsters the view that it is morally acceptable to kill healthy cats, dogs, and other nonhumans commonly kept as 'pets' unless they are some human's companion (Dunayer, 2016, p.97).

While both companionship and domestication involve close relationships between humans and non-human animals, companionship is about emotional bonds and personal relationships the human places on the non-human animal, whereas domestication involves a more extensive process of breeding animals to suit human needs, often for control and functional purposes (Arluke and Sanders, 1996). These concepts overlap in anthropocentric representations of the 'companion other' but serve different roles in the human-animal dynamic. The complex relationship between humans and non-human animals also reflects a deeper distinction between *companionship* and *domestication*. While animals were once seen as intermediaries between the human and non-human realms, evolving into symbols of power or spiritual guides, their domestication marked a shift toward functional, utilitarian roles.

Domesticated animals, like dogs, horses, and cattle, became extensions of human enterprise, bred for specific traits that made them more useful for tasks like hunting, labour, or protection (Arluke and Sanders, 1996). In contrast, the companionship between humans and certain animals emerged as a more mutual, emotional bond. The domestication of an animal was often a process of manipulation and control, while companionship was about coexistence and shared affection (Merskin, 2016). As animals were selectively bred to fulfil particular human needs, they were no longer just symbols of duality; they became integral to the human experience, shaping the way societies organised themselves (Irvine, 2019). Yet, even in companionship, there remains an element of domestication – the companion other we view on screen is confined by the scope of the anthropocentric gaze, imposing a sense of power and dominance over the non-human animal, which by all accounts should be regarded as equal. By comparing and contrasting the differences and similarities between domesticated

and companion animals, the researcher is able to deconstruct media representation of the 'companion other' by emphasising speciesist representations that impose the anthropocentric gaze on the non-human animal. These representations are underscored by the conflict between the desire for control and the need for connection as opposed to the desire to approach non-human animals as equals: companions. This reflects the broader cultural evolution of how humans perceive their relationship with the animal (Merskin, 2016) and the belief that profound connection can be established with any companion animal.

Animal Actors and the Human Narrative

Inaccurate portrayals of apex predators (sharks, bears, and wolves) are not limited to the one-dimensional 'monsters' resented in the horror genre or to the demeaning anthropomorphic caricature representations in various genres. Movies such as Dances *with Wolves* (Costner, 1990), *Brother Bear* (Blaise and Walker, 2003), *The Jungle Book* (Favreau, 2016) and *Grizzly Man* (Herzog, 2005) try to refute these images by establishing human-animal bonds, but "such interaction may be considered as another way of harvesting something from an animal object" (Malamud, 2010, p.8). Malamud further suggests that:

> These movies all purport to offer (and in some way do offer) intricate portrayals of human sensitivity to animals. They all, at first impression, seem to highlight animals. And while these are indeed animals in them all, in each case what might have first seemed like an animal reference actually turns out to be a human being: Timothy Treadwell is the Grizzly Man in Werner Herzog's odd documentary; Kevin Costner's character is giver the name "Dances with Wolves" as he becomes enchanted with animals and Native American culture (Malamud, 2010, p.8).

Heterotopia is a term coined by French philosopher Michel Foucault in his book *The Order of Things* (1991) and is described as spaces where multiple meanings and identities are intertwined in order to create a place where representations expose others to the world beyond their normal reach. Merskin explains the concept of heterotopia:

> Heterotopia builds on, but exceeds the concept of utopia as an ideal space, and instead heterotopia is confrontation with the exteriorization of idealizations with the sameness of the familiar. On the one hand, this type of re-presentation illuminates the sameness of the animals and the human animals. On the other, as human creations, they keep the real animal in a tight knit tapestry of Otherness, as apart from or only valuable in those attributes that can be seen as being "like us." Otherwise incongruent, unrelated, or even contradictory items or beings might, in the space of a re-presentation, are shown together (2018, p.97).

Heterotopias are real places and can be anything from a zoo to a movie theatre, but the knowledge within them is "selected, framed, edited, and interpreted, according to an array of social forces and cultural contests over meaning […] absolutely different from all the sites they reflect on and speak about" (Chris, 2006, p.xi, quoted in Malamud, 2010, p.13). It is evident that the human protagonist proceeds with their animal counterpart designated as a secondary character, a supplement to form an illusory connection between the human and the natural world. The research suggests that it is problematic to domesticate and/or associate animals with humans' everyday lives: The viewer sits and observes humans with a fulfilled sense of biophilia (Wilson, 1984), however, very little information is given to help an audience understand the autonomy of these non-human animals who are living independently of humans. The information given to viewers typically plays on the apparent otherness of the non-human animal (whether it be monstrous, anthropomorphic or companion otherness). CAMS' portrayals of nonhuman animals are often framed in ways that emphasize passivity and compliance, reinforcing particular ways of seeing and understanding them. As such, representational practices are "ideologically invested in so far as they incorporate significations which contribute to sustaining or restructuring power relations" (Fairclough, 2002, p. 91).

> [If] one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as a starting-point for speech instead of as an obstacle to be avoided, so as to stay as close as possible to both, then one must erase those proper names and preserve the infinity of the task. It is perhaps through the medium of this grey, anonymous language, always over-meticulous and repetitive because too broad, that the painting may, little by little, release its illuminations (Foucault, 1991, p.10).

There is an abundance of zoological terms, references and idioms in the language, including the use of references to female genitalia and the use of terms such as studs or even bucks for sexually aggressive men (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979).

> Things and words were to be separated from one another. The eye was thenceforth destined to see and only to see, the ear to hear and only to hear. Discourse was still to have the task of speaking that which is, but it was no longer to be anything more than what it said (Foucault, 1991, pp.47-48).

Even though some humans assign other humans the status of 'animals', "it should be noted that being human is a subjective concept, either self-appointed or granted by others who are favourably prone to their objected designation, thereby isolating the other" (Mavhunga, 2011,

p.17). For example, an association between the phrase ‘a momma bear and her cubs’ and the behaviour of a protective human mother over her children has developed in common parlance, which originated from mother bears' aggressive actions towards strangers over their cubs. In this instance, an anthropomorphic analogy is used to identify the perceived similarity between the non-human animal and the human. The analogy is that a human mother is similar to a non-human mother bear with regard to protecting her young. This phrase is an example of anthropomorphism that does not “ignore the needs, interests, and intelligence” of the animal (McKenna, 2013, p.9), and offers an understanding of animal behaviour in relation to other species that are known to be protective of their young. This satirical anthropomorphic language implies that human mothers will defend their young in the same way as a protective maternal bear. The function of the bear, as the anthropomorphic other, is ultimately to provide a context for humans to understand themselves. This representation of the non-human animal, adjusted through a sentimental or comical lens of the anthropocentric gaze, allows for further deconstruction of the asymmetrical power dynamic between humans and non-human animals by highlighting the significance of the animal as a tool for human use.

> The man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extra-diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle. This is made possible through the process set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence (Mulvey, 1975, p.63).

In media the human typically determines how the animal is viewed based on how we perceive the non-human animal represented and this cultural practice is what the researcher terms the anthropocentric gaze. Non-human animals are represented through satirical anthropomorphism as well as narratives and narrations in wildlife documentaries to help convey a sense of their behaviour and existence to viewers.

> Caution against anthropomorphism is, in many instances, an entirely reasonable stance to adopt. After all, animals do many things that resemble certain human behaviors but that many serve it very different ends (for example, a primate who appears to be “smiling” and “happy” to the untrained observer might in some circumstances actually be displaying an aggressive stance). Some critics of anthropomorphism have also maintained that human cognition is fundamentally different in nature from animal cognition, thereby ruling out in advance any meaningful explanatory overlap. This attitude toward animal cognition is grounded in

> what is sometimes called the principal *cognitive parsimony*, which suggests that a given behavior should be explained if possible using the most basic cognitive capacities possible, and that appeals to higher-order cognitive capacities (which are common among human beings) must be accompanied by compelling evidence of never necessary for such appeal (Calarco, 2021, p.22).

Anthropomorphism, although occasionally a useful tool when conveying representations (particularly for children), should generally be avoided and more importance given to interpreting animal behaviour within its own context rather than through a strictly human framework (Calarco, 2021). While this caution is scientifically and ethically valid, especially when it helps prevent misinterpretation or projection, it can also risk reinforcing a rigid human-animal divide that denies animals' cognitive complexity. The principle of cognitive parsimony, though useful in avoiding overstatement, may inadvertently uphold assumptions of human exceptionalism if it dismisses evidence of advanced non-human animal cognition without serious engagement. A more balanced approach acknowledges the need for both scientific rigour and the possibility that non-human animals possess forms of intelligence, emotion, and communication that differ from, but are not necessarily inferior to humans. The researcher recognises that it may be impossible to eradicate the anthropocentric gaze entirely when presenting non-human animals in wildlife documentaries, as it is the human who produces and constructs this information for human consumption.

In an attempt to reduce the hyperreal characteristics of human-centered narratives that potentially erase the existence of animals, the researcher suggests that hyperreal influences should be altered and deconstructed in order to minimise the anthropocentric gaze. Wildlife documentaries, filmmakers and media outlets have the ability to reveal and conceal information with regard to non-human animals through the power of images and words. As a result of the choice and manipulation of images and language used across different media platforms, it is possible for non-human animals to be presented in a transparent manner where they are depicted in relation to their environment and behaviour, however, more commonly they are contained within the anthropocentric gaze, where the non-human animal is presented as an object of human fascination and desire.

Animals in Wildlife Documentaries

Animal horror and thriller filmmakers are not the only media outlets responsible for promoting the current myths and misrepresentations of animals in society (Litchfield, 2013).

In animal documentaries and television broadcasts, where each animal appears to be afforded an appropriate portrayal, the overall representations arguably do more to perpetuate the mythologies of otherness than present an accurate depiction. Videographers' media content and journalists' news stories often create narratives with undertones of fear, not unlike those invoked in animal horror films, or narratives with undertones that appeal to one's emotions, not unlike those invoked in wildlife documentaries (Litchfield, 2013, p.164). It has been observed by the researcher that any narrative that includes animals will always make headlines as a result of her work as a broadcast journalist. However, these stories tend to be endearing stories (the anthropomorphic other) or those that involve a human being injured by an animal (the monstrous other).

> News programs treat all spectacles as interchangeable, reducing everything to spectacle. As a result, the media mainly talks about itself. The real function of the media is to transmit the general outlook of reducing everything to signs. Media technologies subtly alter how viewers and readers think. Viewers have to unconsciously decode stories, and as a result, internalise the code. Behind the shifting images lies a conception of a world which can be seen, divided into segments, and read in signs (McLaverty-Robinson, 2012).

It is important to examine how animals have been represented in mainstream media in order to raise awareness about their environment and relationship with humans. Alternative representations may, in turn, affect public perceptions of their presence in their natural environment (McKenna, 2013). There is a belief that we can document and rediscover the real, from reality TV to historical artefacts, but what remains is always shaped by human involvement, never exactly as it would have been on its own. (McLaverty-Robinson, 2012). Throughout history, we recreate and relive a number of aspects of the past and present that have now been simulated. We have become engrossed in the fantasy of the real, as if it were a lost object that we are seeking. Culture is now engaged in the activity of simulating itself (Baudrillard, 1994). The accuracy of the portrayal of non-human animals has been replaced by a simulation of the actual, manifested in the form of wildlife documentaries which adhere to cultural ideologies that have been imposed upon them. This builds on the anthropocentric narrative structures that have already been popularized in cinema, such as the menacing shark and the cute and cuddly bear. These representations have set the stage for non-human animal representations in wildlife documentaries that centre around the anthropocentric gaze.

> We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning (Baudrillard, 1994, p.79).

In the face of overly bleak and gruesome imagery depicting non-human animals in horror and thriller films, and anthropomorphic caricatures in films across a variety of genres, audiences have taken to wildlife documentaries as ways of gaining insight into how animals think and behave. In order to satisfy 'popular 'narrative expectations, videographers and journalists sometimes struggle to present an appropriate portrayal of the animals involved; often sacrificing authenticity for entertainment. Evidence of this, in television news and documentaries, is highlighted in Chris Palmer's *Confessions of a Wildlife Filmmaker* (2015). Palmer explains the moral dilemma of being a wildlife videographer, and the difficulty in creating authentic content that entertains audiences.

> On the one hand, I wanted to produce films that were scientifically rigorous and responsible. On the other hand, I wanted to attract a large and general audience, and I knew that I would have to entertain them to achieve that goal (Palmer, 2015, p.35).

It is significant that natural history programmes are able to produce work that appears authentic and truthful, however, there has been very little analytical work. This is "unusual given that documentary as a form of broadcasting has been routinely examined by the academy, precisely because of the genre's relationship with the real world and its sociopolitical functions" (Mills, 2017, p.80): Indeed, with "discussions of the representations of animals in documentaries being startlingly absent" (Mills, 2017, p.80) there is a need to deconstruct such images and critique the narratives disseminated.

> Documentary's claims to have a relationship to the truth may be more powerful for the representation of the animals because many viewers will have little or no other resources to draw on to asses those truth-telling claims. Given that one of the genre's pleasures is its bringing to audiences things they have never seen before, such depictions inevitably function as the truth of that representation. This is not to overstate this; it is clearly possible for audiences to reject what they are told, either because of their access to other forms of knowledge or because of some perceived flaw in the representation. But a level of trust persist for such programming […] (Mills, 2017, p.81).

Wildlife documentaries persist in perpetuating the idea that "the camera was nothing more than an instrument of scientific observation" (Winston, 2008, p.152, quoted in Mills, 2017, p.84). Science uses technology as a tool to prove its objectivity and the camera persists as a tool because science uses it, and vice versa. However, it is not the camera that is the cause for concern but the techniques and methods employed by videographers to capture and present

non-human animals. Voiceovers in wildlife documentaries commonly place the non-human animal within the confines of the anthropocentric gaze by appearing to hold scientific authenticity. Other methods, such as the inclusion of ‘behind the scenes ’footage reveal the information and claim authenticity. Production teams typically emphasise the extent to which they aim to communicate the latest scientific thinking during the 'making of' processes (Palmer, 2015). Program makers often depict scientists as excited by their evidence, especially if they capture unrecorded animal behavior (Mills, 2017, p.84). Short 'behind the scenes' footage is now common in contemporary wildlife documentaries, and can validate a documentary's information and authenticity, allowing film and documentary productions to validate themselves with the respected educational aspects of science. This, however, also raises the question of why particular sequences were chosen over others to be highlighted in the feature presentation. The documentary disseminated to the viewer is a product of editorial and curatorial decisions that are invariably influenced by the anthropocentric gaze of the human filmmaker. Film has the power to either entrench the objectification of animals by portraying them as mere backdrops to human stories or to challenge these narratives by presenting animals as complex sentient beings with their own experiences and intrinsic value.

> Cultural representations of nonhuman animals and of advocacy issues are present in our everyday lives. Images of nonhuman animals or signifiers of them are omnipresent in all mediums, from print media to television and film. The question is what do these representations tell about our attitudes toward nonhuman animals and in what ways do they help maintain and promoted the hegemony of anthropocentrism? (Loy, 2016, p. 223).

Loy’s (2016) observation underscores the persistent influence of media representations in shaping society’s understanding of non-human animals. The media often reinforces anthropocentric ideologies by framing non-human animals primarily through the anthropocentric gaze as either sources of entertainment, symbols, or commodities (Freeman, 2016). As a result, such speciesist portrayals rarely reflect the animals' intrinsic value or agency but instead serve to uphold human dominance and entitlement over other oppressed groups. By normalising these perspectives across media, cultural representations play a powerful role in sustaining systems that marginalise nonhuman animals, ultimately discouraging ethical engagement and deeper understanding. Non-human animals become props or backdrops, emphasising their utility or symbolic function in anthropocentric narratives without acknowledging their intrinsic worth or individual experiences (Freeman, 2016).

> Cinema represents a potential tool for activism, not only because it's wide audience reach, and for its potential pedagogy force, but most importantly, for its capacity to create relevant discourse in the media and beyond however, it is a reactive tool in the sense of advocacy efforts are forced to use this tool in the context, created by the profit, driven movie industries (Loy, 2016, p.230).

Films can serve as powerful tools that can either advocate for or discriminate against non-human animals. When non-human animals are depicted with depth and empathy, showing their individual lives and intrinsic worth, the focus shifts from the anthropocentric gaze. Documentaries have historically manipulated the technology of television by exploiting the intimacy created by images and figures that are both present and absent (Malamud, 2012). It becomes apparent that wildlife documentaries provide viewing audiences with a wide range of hyperrealistic cinematic attractions that, while visually pleasing and entertaining to watch, are absent of scientific drive. Mills writes that "[a] key pleasure of such a documentary is that of the spectacle: seeing beings and locations far removed from the viewers' experiences," and this is made possible by technology that can have "drones and helicopters make sweeping shots of spectacular landscapes possible" (2017, p.84) or "where smaller cameras enable footage to be gathered from places such as inside termite mounds (Bousé, 2003, quoted in Mills, 2017, p.84). Post-production takes this element of the spectacle further into the hyperreal by altering footage to appear, for example, in slow motion to create dramatic cinematic scenes or set to the sound of orchestral music, enhancing the emotional experience for the viewer.

> While such vivid description highlights the potential danger as well as continues an implicit fascination with the "wild" encounter… there seems to be a striking absence of references to animals as dangerous to humans (with the exception of a few brief mentions of sharks and the hippopotamus as one who injures and kills more humans than any other animal in Africa) (Kalof and Amthor, 2010, p.169).

The documentary, from this perspective, is less about the animal and more about the spectacle, a grand production filled with overly stylised shots and a narration that fully enhances an already hyperreal representation: The animal disappears into the background of the hyperrealistic imagery (Baudrillard, 1994). Some animals have become the villain (shark; monstrous other) while others seem to present no dangers at all (bears; anthropomorphic other, wolves; companion other. Berger acknowledges the disappearance of non-human animals from human experience despite representations of non-human animals flourishing (2009). The non-human animals are marginalised as objects rather than close neighbours

partaking in the experience of being (Berger, 2009). Such depictions contribute to a cultural narrative that views animals as secondary to human concerns, further entrenching speciesist attitudes and justifying non-human animal exploitation (Loy, 2016). Despite an increase in animal images, the animal has disappeared within the anthropocentric gaze, and the images exist as a reminder of the absence of what really exists (Baudrillard, 1994).

> Very few of the references to animals as dangerous to humans appear prior to the 1940s, and this is consistent with the overall tone observed in many of the stories during the period, where the fascination with the natural world - and the implicit role of the magazine to draw audiences into this world - are apparent. While vivid descriptions of the explorers' experiences are present, and the potential for danger in that close encounter with the "wild" is alluded to as part of the thrill, truly bothersome images of danger are not at all prevalent and such references as" destructive wild animals" who may attack the crew's belongings seem purposefully vague (Kalof and Amthor, 2010, p.168).

At the start of the 1940s, audiences became more and more conditioned to representations of non-human animals in the media. Non-human animals in wildlife documentaries are shown in increasingly intimate and connected ways, which lures the viewer into what the research suggests is a false sense of intimacy, but violence is omitted (unless the non-human animal is perceived as monstrous) (Kalof and Amthor, 2010). Visual close-ups of non-human animals, specifically the animal gazing into the camera's lens, is a filmic device that attempts to achieve a sense of companionship between the non-human animal and the viewer. The researcher suggests that the anthropocentric gaze should be deconstructed and thus shifting the non-human animal from the role of companion other. The concept of 'becoming animal' developed by Deleuze and Guattari (2017) can be referenced here as not a literal method of 'becoming animal' but a shift of perspectives on seeing and being. Becoming animal is a concept that advocates a fluid understanding of being and as such may assist in the endeavour to transcend our anthropocentric biases when encountering non-human animals. Many theorists, like Deleuze and Guattari, and Donna Haraway, are eschewing the human/animal dichotomy as a starting point for thinking about animals. Rather, they examine what other possibilities might emerge when we abandon the unchallenged distinction between humans and animals as the basis for thinking and practice.

> [T]he fact that wildlife programming places such imagery as central to its spectacular and educational pleasures also limits the kinds of imagery that is deemed worthy of broadcast. It is therefore precisely those spectacular moments of animal activity – hunting, mating, fighting – which fulfil these goals, rendering the majority of animals' lives – sleeping, sitting, doing not much at all – absent from our screen. Thus wildlife

> documentaries require other beings to be spectacular to be visible at all; and if they're not spectacular at normal visual speed, camera trickery such as slow-motion filming will successfully spectacularise them (Mills, 2017, p.85).

The concept of the anthropocentric gaze, particularly when mediated through scientific instruments like the camera, is often framed within ideals of objectivity, detachment, and neutrality. However, this notion of the observer as emotionally distanced and non-interventionist is deeply entangled with male centered values. As feminist scholar Lynda Birke argues in *Feminism, Animals and Science: The Naming of the Shrew* (1994), the dominant modes of scientific inquiry have historically excluded both feminine ways of knowing and non-human perspectives, privileging a model of knowledge production rooted in control, classification, and abstraction.

This gaze, far from being neutral, reflects the patriarchal foundations of Western science, where care, empathy, and are often dismissed as subjective or unscientific (Birke, 1994). In this context, not only is human supremacy perpetuated through the objectification of non-human animals, but patriarchal values also shape how knowledge is framed, who is authorized to produce it, and what counts as legitimate evidence The act of looking through the camera lens can be seen as a political and epistemological act. It reflects not only anthropocentrism but also the gendered dynamics of knowledge production, where the "objective" observer is modelled on a masculinist ideal that distances the self from both emotional engagement and ethical responsibility (Berger, 2009). To deconstruct this gaze is to question the foundations of how we perceive and construct a 'reality' that is shaped by intersecting systems of domination including patriarchy, colonialism, and speciesism.

Both patriarchy and speciesism operate through systems of asymmetrical power, where one group dominates and determines the lives of others. Within the patriarchal structures, men (as a group) maintain political, economic, and social power over women and gender-diverse individuals. In the context of CAS, humans exert control over non-human animals, determining how they live, die, and are represented. Recognising these parallel structures is crucial for understanding how different forms of oppression overlap and strengthen one another, highlighting the need for less anthropocentric non-human animal portrayals and a move away from systems of hierarchy.

This research suggests that there should be a minimisation of the anthropocentric gaze in order to avoid overstylising and dramatising representations of animals through techniques

such as slow-motion, voice-overs, intimate close-ups, and overzealous narrations. The research contends that non-human animals should not be objectified through the anthropocentric gaze, but rather be viewed and represented without the tropes of entertainment or the spectacle as highlighted through Critical Animal and Media Studies. Just as women have been appreciated as being subjected to the objectifying sexualisation of the male gaze in feminist theory, CAMS considers the parallels of how animals are represented and the social factors and ideologies that influence them. The objectification and fantasy of non-human animals reflects the animal's role as the spectacle (the anthropomorphic other of the anthropocentric gaze) and as a presence to develop the story line (the companion other). The fear of difference has also characterised sexuality as abject (the monstrous other of the anthropocentric gaze), and the identity of the woman (non-human animal) has been infantilised by power and dominance (Mulvey, 1975). The recent ecofeminist movement, an activist movement that aligns environmentalism and feminism to address the subjugation of women and natural phenomena by patriarchal capitalism, attests to the importance of feminist theory in a discourse on animal othering (Malamud, 2010, p.6).

Documentaries function as experiences that communicate particular meanings about animals and reflect society's sociopolitical positioning. The portrayal of animals in media not only reflects but also reinforces societal attitudes towards nonhuman animals, often perpetuating a disconnect between humans and animals (Merskin, 2016). Randy Malamud expands on this concept by examining how visual media contributes to the objectification of animals, arguing that visual media often presents animals through a lens that commodifies their existence, reducing them to picturesque elements or spectacles for human enjoyment, thereby perpetuating their objectification and exploitation (2016). This understanding of visual representation aligns with the anthropocentric gaze, where animals are seen not as beings with intrinsic value but as objects to be observed, controlled, and utilised. Malamud further contends that such portrayals are deeply embedded in the aesthetics of media, where the beauty and exoticism of animals are highlighted at the expense of non-human animals' individuality and agency (2016). By framing animals as mere components of visual pleasure, media reinforces a disconnect between humans and nonhuman animals, legitimising practices that exploit animals for entertainment and profit. As Malamud writes:

> Non-human animals in visual culture are often somehow disguised- costumed, masked, distorted, or disfigured. Mockery of other animals is another common trope,

> as is decontextualization: displacing animals from their natural habitats, contexts, ands lives, and reconfiguring them as players in a purely anthropocentric narrative (Malamud, 2016, p.156).

While wildlife documentaries "often impose a human narrative, a human cultural aesthetic, upon animals," the documentaries "may be flat-out faked: there's a rich tradition of natural-film fakery" (Malamud, 2010, p.11). "But even when there's no explicit attempt to deceive, still, they may mislead or miseducate viewers by making animals seem too accessible, too easily present, which distorts the reality that most animals live away from us and hidden from us" (Malamud, 2010, p.11). Vivian Sobchack explains that "documentary is less a *thing* than an *experience*" that is established from "a specific mode of consciousness and identification with the cinematic image" (Sobchack, 1999, p.241). As programmes get more anthropocentric in nature, they start to lose sight of the non-human animal and become more about entertainment and how humans experience these animals from an anthropocentric point of view.

This literature review has integrated perspectives that address the misrepresentation of animals and the potential impact such representations may have on human opinion and perceived knowledge of animals and environments. Litchfield writes that, in order to flourish, animals should be left to live freely in their own environments, without the imposed threat of human society; however, a lack of understanding created by media outlets has reinforced myths that harm conservation efforts (Litchfield, 2013)).

> Our misperception of other species and their plight influences our behaviour to such an extent that we may inadvertently be pushing animals that we consider special towards extinction. It is time for us to demand truthful portrayals of animals and the environment – whether in visual and print media, or in labelling of consumer products (ingredients and source materials). Science communicators must find ways of 'telling the truth' and debunking myths that potentially harm conservation (Litchfield, 2013 p.155).

This thesis examines a variety of techniques used to film or portray non-human animals on screen, in both wildlife documentaries and cinema. This thesis also considers CAMS as an approach to critiquing the anthropocentric gaze. This research attempts to deconstruct the anthropocentric gaze of non-human animal representations portrayed in film and wildlife documentaries to present alternative narratives that provide a more accurate representations of non-human animals and their environment that can be incorporated into alternative

narratives. Dunayer (2016) suggests that alternative representations of specific wildlife, that remove the human from the centre of the narrative, can positivity influence public perception, and ultimately promote conservation of animals and environments; however, this idea is commonly undermined as film, broadcast news, and wildlife documentaries continue to reinforce or reference archetypal animal themes of the 'cute and the cuddly' or mysterious (other) and violent, because it is assumed that audiences are familiar with these ideas and that they have proven profitable.

> There are two planet earths. One of them is the complex, morally challenging world in which we live, threatened by ecological collapse. The other is the one we see on the wildlife programmes […] Except for a few shots of animals doing amusing things in people's gardens, and occasionally, an indigenous person, stripped of his t-shirt, wildlife programmes present the natural world as a pristine wilderness, unaffected by humanity (Monbiot, 2002).

Journalists and documentary filmmakers are required to follow certain story structures to accommodate a typical viewer's, relatively short, attention span, and this is apparent in the work produced where the nuanced existence of the animal is edited to produce a human spectacle. Thus, journalists frequently present information in a way that is intended to capture the public's attention (Marris, 2021). Wildlife documentary exists in an area of perceived authenticity where the viewing audience is oblivious to the hyperreal, it remains a "form of programming perceived to conform to, and uphold the values of, 'traditional' forms of factual programming-making" (Mills, 2017, p.83). Thus, it is not a form that is able to resist examinations about truthfulness or fakery, as it is not a form that is immune from such debates; rather, it is important to stress that the social position such programming occupies today is one that can be associated with the truth-telling priorities that television has placed on the factual output of its content (Burt, 2002). The lack of analysis of wildlife documentaries is mainly due to the fact that there still remains an assumption of objectivity regarding their reception and production, which makes a critical assessment impractical. Natural history programmes are therefore classified as scientific films or documentaries because of the assumption of truthfulness.

> The concept of the Anthropocene, is not merely intended to highlight those process; it is also a call to action, suggesting that thinking about how animals are represented is necessary if we are to tackle the problems that critical animal studies rightly sees as shaping animals' everyday experiences. This points towards the necessity for debate about possible alternative ways in which animals could be represented, unpicking the norms that currently persist. Wildlife documentary is a useful starting point for this

> because it is a genre that typically claims to suggest that its mediatisation processes are as minimal as possible (Mills, 2017, p.98).

A key aspect of wildlife documentaries should remain educational and informative in order to represent non-human animals effectively rather than emphasising the glamourisation of non-human animals through hyperreal representations of the anthropocentric gaze. The researcher suggests that this should be the primary focus during pre and pro-production of wildlife documentaries. The deconstruction of the anthropocentric gaze is vital to the representation of non-human animals as "it probably remains true that how we see the natural world influences how we treat it" (Bousé, 2000, p.192).

This literature review has synthesised concepts from Critical Animal Media Studies in order to establish the perceived hierarchy between humans and animals in an anthropocentric era. CAMS provides critical tools for analysing how media content influences public perceptions and ideologies. The media is a cultural tool that constructs and disseminates dominant ideologies, including those concerning non-human animals. Through representations we give meaning to things which are depicted through images on paper or on screen (Hall, 1997). The images and language that the media constructs around representations of non-human animals directly influences society's perception and treatment of non-human animals.

> Representation is the production of meaning through language. In representation, constructionists argue, we use signs, organized into languages of different kinds, to communicate meaning- fully with others. Languages can use signs to symbolize, stand for or reference objects, people and events in the so-called 'real' world. But they can also reference imaginary things and fantasy worlds or abstract ideas which are not in any obvious sense part of our material world. There is no simple relationship of reflection, imitation or one-to-one correspondence between language and the real world…Meaning is produced within language, in and through various representational systems which, for convenience, we call 'languages'. Meaning is produced by the practice, the 'work', of representation. It is constructed through signifying – i.e. meaning- producing – practices (Hall, 1997, p.14).

It becomes evident that media representations are not mere reflections of reality but are actively involved in shaping how meaning is constructed and understood (Hall, 1997). In the context of animal media, this means that the way animals are depicted (visually and narratively) does not merely reflect reality but rather constructs specific interpretations of their lives, behaviours, and value. These portrayals influence public perceptions and can either reinforce dominant anthropocentric ideologies or challenge them by presenting animals as sentient beings with agency. Research in this field has also explored the role of media in

fostering empathy towards animals through documentaries and news coverage, revealing both the potential and limitations of current media practices to shape the meaning we give to non-human animals. By integrating knowledge from CAS and Media Studies, CAMS highlights that media is a powerful force in shaping societal views and ideologies about nonhuman animals. The joining of these fields offers a framework for understanding and challenging the cultural, economic, and political underpinnings of animal exploitation, advocating for a shift towards more ethical and empathetic representations of animals in media. This integrated approach highlights the importance of addressing speciesism in media representations to foster a more just and compassionate society for all beings. The focus of this literature review has been the formulation of the anthropocentric gaze as a concept that reflects the manner in which animals are represented in film and wildlife documentaries. The researcher has established three possible iterations of the anthropocentric gaze for representations of non-human animals; the *monstrous other*, the *anthropocentric other* and the *companion other,* perspectives which will be elucidated and applied in three case studies.

> Can we think into the experiences of other animals without overly projecting our own interests, desires, and needs, sprinkling the relationship with the perfect amount of anthropomorphism to carry us closer to, without polluting the symbolic stew with too much saccharine us-ness (continuum) or the ideology that all other beings' interests are subordinated to ours (human animal dualism)? (Merskin, 2016, p.15)

This research has highlighted the need for a critical re-evaluation of the portrayal of apex predators in mainstream media, particularly in wildlife documentaries. Through the practice-based research and the creation of three short information films, the researcher has demonstrated how traditional filmmaking techniques often reinforce an anthropocentric gaze that limits a more in-depth understanding of non-human animals. By employing alternative filming methods that resist hyperreal visuals, avoid the imposition of a power dynamic over the non-human animal and minimises human-centered narratives, this research offers a fresh approach to capturing more authentic and less biased representations of sharks, bears, and wolves.

Practice-Based Research

Throughout this study, the researcher has a employed qualitative research paradigm in order to examine the impact different media, film techniques and post-production editing may have on the representation of apex predators, specifically sharks and bears and wolves, in mainstream media. The animals represented in films and wildlife documentaries are often depicted through an anthropocentric gaze that highlights their 'otherness' while creating a structured understanding of animals through either their connection or threat to humans. In the context of animal documentaries animals are commonly depicted in exotic and remote geographical locations, untouched by human society, and this is arguably what viewers expect to see when watching wildlife documentaries (Monbiot, 2002). Society has become more engaged with viewing 'exotic' animals from the comfort of own homes. The labelling of an animal as 'exotic' is itself a form of othering, marking them as different and distinct from our lived environment. Julian Hector, the head of the BBC's Natural History Unit, stated that "Over a billion people have watched *Planet Earth II* and *Blue Planet II* in the last 3 years" (quoted in Marris, 2021). Since the premiere of the BBC's 2006 series *Planet Earth*, audiences everywhere have engaged in viewing visually aesthetic programmes produced by the BBC, most recently BBC Natural History Unit's *Planet Earth III* (2022) and *Frozen Planet II* (2023). For the practice-based component of this study, the researcher has undertaken filming of the three apex predators that are the focus of the three case studies cited in this thesis (sharks, bears, and wolves). The filming of the three respective animals was undertaken whilst attempting to minimise the anthropocentric gaze commonly adopted in both film and wildlife documentaries. The researcher has a background in filmmaking and television broadcast journalism, and as such recognises that the visual aesthetic and narrative structure created around animal representation is typically edited in a manner that is designed to capture the attention of its audience through hyperreal visuals that Marris describes as "wildlife porn" (Marris, 2021). Commonly, visual and narrative appeal are given precedence while scientific accuracy is considered subsidiary. Journalists are often trained to locate the most important and interesting facts in a story. We are taught to follow particular narrative structures in order to accommodate the typical viewer's minimal attention span, and this is in part the reason for the cinematic approaches adopted in wildlife documentaries and disseminated to viewers. Whether journalists acknowledge their use of spectacle or not, they often present information in a way that is intended to entertain rather than inform. There is also a tendency, when relating information about wildlife in the media, to focus upon

incidents where animals' lives cross paths with those of humans, especially if this encounter results in the human being injured or killed (Bekoff, 2012), however, the animals we see in wildlife documentaries appear to live an isolated, non-human and uninterrupted existence (Malamud, 2010).

> Something about these programs is hyper-real. Partly, this stems from the fact that the films are enhanced. It is an open secret that the long zoom lenses used to capture animals up close can make recording real-time sound nearly impossible. And so the wet crunch of lions opening up a gazelle's rib cage, the hollow clack of birds' bills closing, the groan and woosh of a calving glacier—these noises are often recorded separately or even created by sound-effect artists and added to the shots later. (Marris, 2021).

This manipulation of sound and image reveals how wildlife documentaries often blur the line between reality and spectacle. The seamless integration of artificially enhanced sounds and visuals serves to heighten the drama of the animal world, yet it simultaneously distances the viewer from an authentic representation of nature. By exaggerating these elements, documentaries cater to desire and thrill, larger-than-life experiences, aligning with the notion of "wildlife porn" that Marris refers to. This hyper-reality not only distorts the truth of animal behaviour, but it also perpetuates a voyeuristic approach to viewing the natural world, further entrenching the anthropocentric gaze. The result is an image of animals that conforms more to human expectations and entertainment needs than to the complexities of the animals' actual lives in their environments.

Methodologies

The research adopts a qualitative research paradigm to analyse the effect different media and filming have had on the production of wildlife documentaries. The research critically evaluates films and documentaries as forms of constructed systems of knowledge and deconstructs cultural narratives of apex predators and how these mythologies have informed our understanding of sharks, bears and wolves. Throughout the study, the research highlights the objectification of animals in selected media using CAMS to deconstruct the power relations of the anthropocentric gaze. Speciesism, the assumption of human superiority leading to the objectification of non-human animals (Taylor, 2016) is highlighted through the anthropocentric gaze imposed upon the non-human animal (Malamud, 2010). The research identifies the perceived 'otherness' of animals through three case studies which examine how the animal is objectified through different articulations of otherness: *The Monstrous Other, The Anthropomorphic Other* and *The Companion Other*.

> The idea of '*otherness*' is central to sociological analyses of how majority and minority identities are constructed. This is because the representation of different groups within any given society is controlled by groups that have greater political power. In order to understand the notion of The Other, sociologists first seek to put a critical spotlight on the ways in which social identities are constructed. Identities are often thought as being natural or innate – something that we are born with – but sociologists highlight that this taken-for-granted view is not true. (Zevallos, 2011).

The concept of the 'other' is discussed extensively throughout the research demonstrating how the non-human character's value is only depicted in relation to their ability to serve humans. The research adopts a critical theory paradigm to consider human narratives imposed upon non-human animals. The research critically evaluates the concept of anthropocentrism and the belief that the human is central to all intrinsic values (Goralnik and Nelson, 2012), a perspective that reinforces the anthropocentric gaze. The research demonstrates an anthropocentric bias in film and wildlife documentaries and analyses media specific methods used to contain and control the 'otherness' of apex predators. The research suggests that the depiction of animals as the unknown or the 'other' has been used to present these species as monstrous, man-eating predators, a perspective that requires little or no explanation of the animals' motivation to attack, thus reinforcing preconceptions of the hierarchical duality between human and animal (George and Schatz, 2016). The concept of monstrosity is commonly applied to representation apex predators to reinforce the

preconception that the animal is a threat to the human. This perspective is examined in Chapter 2 where the researcher's analysis of the film *Jaws* serves as a method to articulate the influence of media representations on the public's subconscious articulation of sharks as a 'monstrous other.'

The research adopts the theory of deconstruction as a method to reconsider the cultural tropes surrounding apex predators. Deconstruction suggests that we should not naturalise that which is not natural. Within this thesis animal behaviours, such as the 'monstrous shark' the 'anthropomorphic bear' and the 'companion wolf' are not proposed as 'natural' behaviours, rather they are socially constructed identities that may be deconstructed.

The researcher deconstructs the supposed 'naturalness' of these behaviours which have been persistently repeated in media representations and thus attained the illusion of truth. The concept of deconstruction was proposed by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology* (1967) where he discusses the relationship between language and constructed meaning. While Derrida's definition of deconstruction has evolved over time the concept at its core is a philosophical approach that de-centralises the standard or traditional meanings of texts or history to reject an absolute or singular truth, which allows for marginalised meanings (1967). The idea of an illusion that we have come to accept as truth is applied within this research to our perception of non-human animals. The research analyses the themes and methods adopted by popular culture that have influenced the constructed knowledge that has formed our understanding of animals in wildlife documentaries. The research attempts to deconstruct hyperreal representations of apex predators and subsequently reorient the anthropocentric gaze to achieve a representation that resists the spectacle of illusion:

> Storytelling, however, has been around much longer than either video or ethnographic research. Using narrative devices to convey a message visually was a staple in the theater of early civilizations and remains an effective tool for engaging an audience today. Within the medium of video, storytelling techniques are an essential part of a documentary filmmaker's craft (Walker and Boyer, 2018).

Animals are arguably easy to villainise within a constructed narrative in the context of the media, because they do not require a backstory, they do not need to be understood, and they can be categorised as the 'other' because from an anthropocentric perspective only humans possess thought (Lerberg, 2016, p.33). This research will analyse techniques used in film-

making, highlighting their influence on wildlife documentaries and their relation to popular motion pictures. Hyperreal techniques used in the process and postproduction of film will be discussed in relation to the filming of three apex predators (sharks, bears and wolves) and new approaches that remove the constructed narratives of the human gaze will be proposed. The three apex predators (sharks, bears, and wolves) were selected because of their over saturated presence in film, news, and wildlife documentaries. The three animals each maintain a wide variation of representation ranging from monstrous villain to companion. The films were selected to represent each non-human animal for analysis; sharks – *Jaws* (1975); bears – *Bears* (Scholey and Fothergill, 2014); wolves – *Dances with Wolves* (Costner, 1990). Each film is a 'blockbuster' and may be considered to represent one of the three categories proposed by the researcher to identify the non-human animal 'other' of the anthropocentric gaze; *the monstrous other, the anthropomorphic other*, and *the companion other.* While other animals were considered, the researcher chose these three animals as a method to exemplify the categories used to identify the use of the anthropocentric gaze.

To analyse human perceptions of apex predators in wildlife documentaries, this research draws on a theoretical framework that includes Derrida's deconstruction, Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, and Butler's theory of performativity, alongside insights from feminist theory and CAS. By applying a deconstructive approach, the study interrogates the binary logic (e.g., human/animal, culture/nature) present in visual narratives, revealing how these reinforce anthropocentric ideologies in regards to non-human animals. The analysis critiques the hyperreal nature of wildlife documentaries, which present highly constructed and edited footage as accurate reflection of animal life. Drawing on Butler's notion of performativity, the research explores how repeated visual tropes (such as the ferocious shark or the noble wolf) contribute to non-human animal "identities" that align with human cultural narratives rather than ecological realities. Furthermore, feminist perspectives, particularly those from scholars like Carol J. Adams and Laura Mulvey, inform the study's critique of the anthropocentric gaze, a term used here to describe the human-centered and gendered ways animals are visually and ideologically framed. This theoretical lens supports a constructive methodology, recognising that knowledge about animals is mediated through culture and representation rather than direct experience. The practice-based research includes a series of recommendations for wildlife videographers aimed at resisting these reductive portrayals. These recommendations are grounded in the belief that, if knowledge and representation are

constructed, they can also be reconstructed to foster more ethical and accurate understandings of non-human animals.

> Practice-based research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice (Candy, 2006).

Marine biologist Ocean Ramsey provides a significant example of research through practice. Ramsey challenges the anthropocentric male gaze through an approach to filming sharks that deconstructs the physical and psychological distancing expected in humans 'interaction with sharks. Additionally, Debra Merskin offers a comprehensive guide to how non-human animal stories should be conveyed in the media. Wildlife documentaries echo themes that appear in films and media. In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of these suggestions, the researcher conducted field research. By applying the research methods to wildlife documentaries, the researcher was able to demonstrate the methods of practice through the field research carried out. placing This research created an original set of guidelines to highlight different filming and editing methods that can work to minimise the anthropocentric gaze. The field research was carried out over the course of a few years, with the researcher visiting the Celtic Sea, Alaska, and wolf sanctuaries in Southern California. These locations were chosen because of their close proximity to the researcher's home, as the field research was conducted on a personal budget. The researcher used autoethnographical methods to examine their experiences during the field research. Each mission presented itself with a different set of challenges, which helped contribute to the researcher's overall deconstruction of the anthropocentric gaze. Despite bad weather, canceled appointments, dead camera batteries, and one unexpected flat tire, the field research conducted proved to be beneficial in demonstrating filming and editing techniques that the researcher argues minimise the anthropocentric gaze.

Through the deconstruction of the anthropocentric gaze, the research provides a new theoretical lens through which a deconstructive analysis of existing film and documentary media may be undertaken, and a series of practical approaches that may positively impact future representational filming in relation to apex predators.

Methods

The practice-based research collects, collates and presents evidence of anthropocentric depictions of apex predators in the media and enacts a process of deconstruction through a process of filming and fieldwork. This has been achieved through the production of three short informational videos where the researcher has filmed animals in order to discover and articulate more authentic filming and editing techniques that attempt to resist the asymmetric gaze of the human filmmaker. These filmic articulations present future researchers and medias with visual data to inform approaches to filming and broadcasting that encourage more accurate representations of the three apex predators selected for this study. Therefore, the practice-based research has centred around visual representations through film production to provide a more effective understanding of the impact of current anthropocentric narratives and demonstrates the benefits of non-human centred narratives in the genre of film and wildlife documentaries.

The study examines hyperrealistic representations in wildlife documentaries and identifies themes that are present in many blockbuster films. (Litchfield, 2013), themes that may be observed in programmes such as *Shark Week* or BBC's *Planet*, and which are used to highlight the otherness of sharks, bears, and wolves (Lerberg, 2016) and focus on anthropocentric narrative structures (Dunayer, 2016). These structures in turn lead to the formulation of a biased public understanding of each non-human subject, resulting in a misunderstanding of these predator animals and their respective environments (Litchfield, 2013).

The practice-based research presents as series of methodological approaches for filmmakers that provide strategies to deconstruct anthropocentric modes of representing apex predators. In order to accurately analyse the cumulative and interrelated impact of these media representations, the researcher's three videos are presented in a way that mirrors context of the research. Through information highlighted and presented in the three case studies (*The Monstrous Other, The Anthropomorphic Other* and *The Companion Other*, and from the literature review, the researcher's short films firstly present the animals in a way that is typical in wildlife documentaries: The second representation of each animal articulated in the researcher's films attempts to construct a new perspective from which each predator animal may be viewer. This is achieved by resisting the hyperreal techniques commonly adopted in

wildlife documentaries and thus deconstructs the anthropocentric gaze evident in media representations of animals. This resistance to postproduction methods arguably communicates a more authentic representation of apex predators to the audience.

By rejecting the conventional postproduction techniques that typically enhance the spectacle of animal behaviour, the researcher's films seek to offer a more grounded and accurate portrayal of apex predators. The decision to avoid excessive manipulation through slow-motion or dramatic sound effects, for instance, allows the animals to exist on their own terms, as sentient beings, rather than being shaped by human expectations. This alternative approach not only challenges the anthropocentric lens, but also underscores the complexities of animal behaviour, presenting these creatures as entities with intrinsic value, independent of their relationship to human desires or fears. Through this method, the films open a space for viewers to engage with these animals beyond the confines of spectacle and narrative manipulation, fostering a more empathetic and accurate understanding of their lives in the wild.

The researcher has undertaken field research by filming in three locations in order to develop the practice-based component of this research. These short films are not intended to be finished documentary clips but rather they provide wildlife documentary filmmakers with a series of simple approaches that attempt to minimise the oppressive drive of the anthropocentric gaze.

The researcher's voice, used for narration in this series of short films, is a young, female, American voice, a voice that provides an antithesis to the patriarchal authority of narrators such as Sir David Attenborough. This is emphasised in the film centred on bears. The voice and dialogue used in the three films offers a deconstruction of anthropocentric perspectives and the conversational tone adopted attempts to lessen the authority of the human voice, a voice which is commonly used to impose meaning upon our animal others. Each of the three films present a different filming and editing technique that offer potential for accurate representations of animals to be captured while filming.

This research has critically explored the impact of anthropocentric narratives in the representation of apex predators such as sharks, bears, and wolves in mainstream media. Through the practice-based research approach, the researcher has developed and tested

alternative filmmaking techniques aimed at resisting the hyperreal and often distorted portrayals found in conventional wildlife documentaries. By deconstructing the anthropocentric gaze, the researcher has highlighted the biases inherent in traditional media portrayals and offered practical solutions for more authentic and nuanced representations of non-human animals. The three short films produced as part of this study serve as a visual demonstration of how filmmakers can create more accurate and empathetic depictions of wildlife by shifting the focus from human-centered narratives to animal-driven stories. The research also interrogates the power dynamics embedded in the use of human voices and authoritative narrations, offering a refreshing counterpoint through a conversational, less authoritative tone. By presenting these methodological approaches, this study contributes to the ongoing conversation about how media, particularly wildlife documentaries, can evolve towards more ethical and respectful portrayals of apex predators, ultimately fostering a deeper and more informed relationship between humans and the natural world.

The Monstrous Other

For most people, their first and only interaction with an apex predator is through film or wildlife documentaries. Humans have become accustomed to hyperreal representations of animals, presented through the view of wide angle and long zoom lenses set to high or slow moving speeds, accompanied by distinct sound effects and orchestral music (Marris, 2021): This, combined with memorable representations of a predator baring its teeth or claws before it attacks its prey, has become the 'norm', it is what humans expect to see when viewing apex predators on screen. In fact, we often associate specific cinematic devices with a specific apex predator; this is demonstrated in Steven Spielberg's 1975 film *Jaws* where the two-note musical motif, composed by John Williams, combined with the film's title and iconic movie poster have become familiar cultural connotations for sharks. It may be suggested that the hyperreal has superseded the real. In this case study, the researcher will consider the use of the *Jaws* musical 'theme', the title of the film and the promotional imagery depicting a titular shark baring its teeth, all of which have become part of the iconography of what is termed the post-*Jaws* era. The shark depicted in *Jaws* is a predator that has no other purpose than to cause harm to humans. The shark holds no morals and is without ethics, it is an outsider that only exists to cause chaos and while the shark does not appear on screen until 1 hour and 21 minutes into the film (and holds approximately 4 minutes of overall screen time), the constant presence of the animal is felt throughout the film's duration. The shark is ultimately the 'object' for man to overcome. The objectified shark in *Jaws* may be fully comprehended when viewed through the theory of the anthropocentric gaze, as elucidated in the literature review (Chapter 1). The anthropocentric gaze is an asymmetric system where the human assumes authority over the animal and animals are exploited or altered on screen. The concept of the human gaze may be considered in parallel with the idea of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975). The concept of 'the gaze' is associated with notions of power thus the animal as the object of the anthropocentric gaze is part of an asymmetric power relation where the human holds power over the animal subject, rendering it a spectacle for human consumption as described throughout CAMS research. "The animal is rendered vulnerable, free for the taking, in whatever way the human viewer chooses: the process metaphorically reiterates what is enacted literally in the culture of carnivorous agribusiness" (Malamud, 2010, p.7).

The shark in *Jaws* is positioned as abject, and reflects the human's desire to overcome, control, kill or conquer that which threatens. The concept of the abject has historically been applied in feminist theory; when woman is more than an object to view, then she can be a threat or *castrator* (Creed 1993). Barbara Creed, author of *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993), examines the male's gaze and the objectifying roles woman have been given in horror films.

> The presence of the monstrous-feminine in popular horror films speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity. However, this presence does challenge the view that the male spectator is almost always situated in an active, sadistic position and the female spectator in a passive, masochistic one (Creed, 1993, p.7).

This quotation, first introduced in the literature review, is reiterated to give emphasis to the perspective that the objectification of women in horror films speaks of man's desire to overpower and control that which is viewed as a threat to their social order. The 'other' Creed cites, or as Julia Kristeva explains in *Powers of Horror* (1982) the abject as a source of chaos, is something that does not obey boundaries or rules, and thus is a threat to the subject's identity or life (1982). If the subject is male, then the 'abject' female threatens patriarchal order. When reading feminist theory, specifically a discourse on the male gaze, objectification and the abject, it is relatively easy to substitute 'man' for 'human' and 'woman' for 'animal' as a reflection of hierarchical cultural behaviour. Kristeva's writing may be coherently applied to the human/animal relation, with the animal, specifically the shark in the context of this case study, viewed as a source of chaos, transgressing human boundaries, and thus threatening civilisation (1982).

This research suggests that hyperrealistic and postmodern animals in horror films leave a lasting impression on human conceptions of non-humans, by playing on the fears and desires of the viewing subject. The animal, similar to woman, is exploited on screen as an object and the 'abject', that which is literally cast off or exists in a low state or condition. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), ecofeminist Carol Adams compares the consumption of meat to man's assertion of power and male dominance. Hunting and consuming meat has always been linked to people's association with power. Aristocrats of Europe, hunters and first-class citizens consumed meat while women, gatherers and second-class citizens, more often consumed second-class foods such as fruits and vegetables (Adams, 1990). Woman and animal are both assumed to exist in a lower state than man, a hierarchical order that highlights the dynamics of difference at the centre of CAMS (Nibert, 2016). Both exist

‘outside’, to serve man and promote their position of power. “In many ways, gender inequality is built into the species inequality that meat eating proclaims, because for most cultures obtaining meat was performed by men. Meat was a valuable economic commodity; those who controlled this commodity achieved power.” (Adams, 1990, p.58). Man’s need for power and dominance manifests in the need to remove anything that challenges the balance of human’s position in the food chain: In *Jaws*, the shark threatens the overall balance of power.

The shark in *Jaws* abruptly asserts itself in the social dynamic of the town Amity Beach and acts as an agent of chaos until it is ultimately destroyed by two men. The shark is not an animal to be reasoned with, it is abject, an outsider who brings unwanted change and threatens the town’s people and more fundamentally the perceived authority of human identity. As the film progresses, the presence of the shark becomes even greater as he goes from killing a woman and young boy to killing adult men (with the exception of Ben Gardner, who was killed off screen and later discovered by Sherriff Brody and Matt Hopper). The shark acts as the perfect killer. It is neither seen nor heard until it is too late.

> Sharks have been vilified in human culture for centuries, and negative attitudes toward sharks continue to pervade mass media, perpetuating stereotypes, often conveying inaccurate information. One way the public’s fear of sharks, which resonates deeply and viscerally, manifests itself is a pervasive overestimation of the likelihood of being ‘attacked’ (Nosal, et. al, 2016, p.2).

In the film *Jaws*, the use of sound, language and images used for the film’s promotion, have become inextricably linked to cultural representations and understandings of sharks (Spielberg, 1975). Through the anthropocentric gaze animals have been depicted using different techniques that emphasise the characteristics in animals that play on society’s fears. The concept of a silent killer that threatens the day-to-day lives and enjoyment of society, disrupts social order and the anthropocentric position of the human subject.

> When Peter Benchley wrote the novel Jaws in 1974, about shark that terrorised a small seaside island community, he admitted that very little was known about sharks. The following year Spielberg's film of the same name was released and gene unprecedented audience response of excitement and terror. As a result, the idea of marauding sharks became entrenched in the psyche of bathers around the world creating a fear that the media exploited (Francis, 2012, p.44).

The idea that at any moment, a person may be attacked by a 'man-eating beast' is a trope that has since been repeatedly played-out on screen, from horror films to wildlife documentaries, reinforcing the perception of the shark as a vicious killer. "Sharks and shark hunters had suddenly become a bank for the media that was guaranteed to attract the public interest" (Francis, 2012, p.48). From the low angle camera shots to the use of menacing music to fill the silence of underwater filming, and the valorisation of 'catching a shark', *Jaws* popularised the objectification of sharks throughout the media.

Before Jaws

Before the world was introduced to the man-eating fish that terrorised Amity Island in 1975, little was known about these sea dwelling creatures, with 'shark lore' being limited to tropical islanders and sea-faring men. Ancient Hawaiians have had a long and significant relationship with sharks. One Hawaiian legend tells of a woman who was bitten by a shark only to free herself by telling the shark that he was her aumakua or Hawaiian ancestorial spirit and "[t]he shark let her go and said he would recognise her in the future by the tooth marks he left on her ankle" (State of Hawaii, 2022). Some Hawaiian people are known tattoo their ankles to indicate that their aumakua is a shark, however, in the post-colonial era, with the rise of Western civilisation, sharks were identified as the mysterious bringers of chaos and destruction. Fishermen and sailors, who spent their lives on the ocean shared stories and experiences of encounters with sea monsters and creatures of the deep.

> Ancient sea-farers fervently believed in sea monsters and serpents that were lurking in the gloomy depths of the world's oceans; they filled their charts and maps with hideous creatures that had features both real and imagined. Sailors told terrifying tales, and the stories and superstitions were passed down through the ages. As swimming gradually became an acceptable form of recreation, the average bather knew or cared little about sharks and the tales became accepted as simply sailors' lore and legends (Francis, 2012, p.45).

When reality is replaced with signs and symbols, the human experience becomes a simulation of reality and when reality is created without reason all meaning becomes meaningless (Baudrillard, 1994). It may be suggested that the signs and symbols we associate with sharks are a simulation of the real and as such a human perception of sharks is, from a Baudrillardian perspective, meaningless, or perhaps more accurately described as myth. The inspiration of folklore, infused with post-colonial themes, has inspired works such as *Moby*

Dick, written by Herman Melville (1851), which draws inspiration from sailors' accounts of two whaling events: The 1820 sinking of the Nantucket ship *Essex* by a sperm whale off the coast of South America and the 1830s supposed killing of an albino sperm whale, as characterised in Moby Dick, off the coast of the Chilean island of Mocha (Carlton, 2020). Similarly, Peter Benchley's novel *Jaws* (1974) was, in part, inspired by the events of the 1916 Jersey Shore shark attacks that resulted in 4 fatalities (McCall, 2019). Occurring at a time when people knew very little about sharks, the 1916 New Jersey Shark Attacks created the pervasive narrative of a man-eating predator, lurking in deep waters, capable of bringing chaos to a beach town.

Figure 1.1 Philadelphia Inquirer, *Huge Shark, of the Man-Eating Species, Caught at Belfort, N.J.*, July 15, 1916. Capture of the shark responsible for the attacks in New Jersey. Photography from the Library of Congress.

Fifty-eight years later, Benchley's curiosity and interest in sharks would inspire him to write a novel which would in turn inspire a film that would become the dominant representation of sharks for years to come. After *Jaws* opened in theatres on June 20, 1975, the idea of a man-eating monster infesting the waters became a form of reality, audiences were struck with fear through the images and music shown on the silver screen (Francis, 2012).

The Sound

Relatively few people will have come into contact with a shark, therefore most people's first encounter with this animal is likely to be through Steven Spielberg's 1975 film. Set in the beach town of Amity Island, the summer season is thrown into chaos as a mysterious man-eating shark wreaks havoc on innocent beach goers. The only hope for the people of Amity Island was local police chief Martin Brody, oceanographer Matt Hooper and local shark fisherman Quint, who set out on their quest to rid the town of the carnivorous shark. Throughout the film *Jaws*, the shark is largely unseen and the only indication the audience is given of impending shark attacks is when the two-note motif from John Williams' score is sounded.

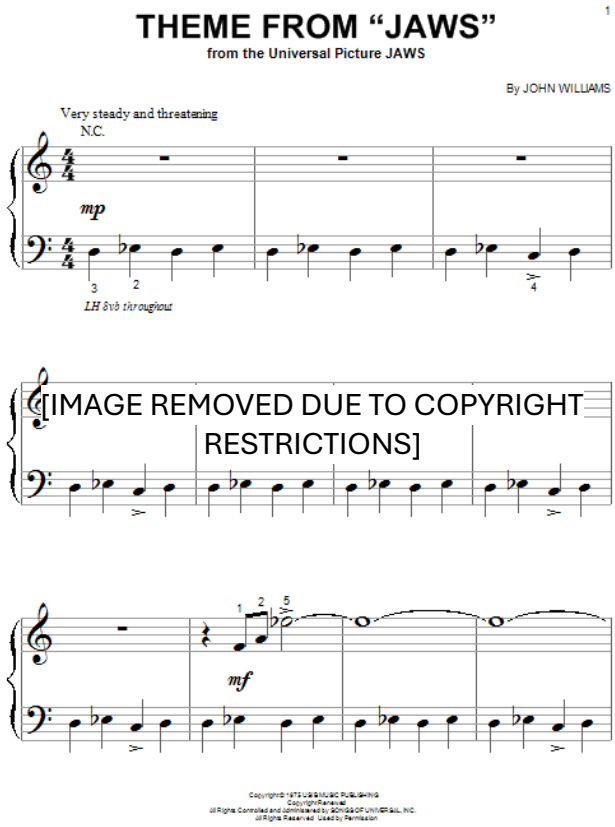

Figure 1.2 John Williams, *Theme from 'Jaws'*, March 1975. Music sheet for the movie.

The ominous tone of the film is inferred as Williams' score is played over the opening credits showing footage that suggests a 'shark's view'. The next time the audience hears the music is when the 'shark's view' moves closer to the surface towards a young woman alone in the

water at night. The woman's impending death becomes clear as the camera moves closer to the woman and the music shifts from its two-note motif to a more dramatic sound effect. From this point forward the audience will inevitably associate this haunting music with an inevitable shark attack. Throughout the film the use of the *Jaws* theme indicates impending carnage and the use of these sound effects sets the emotional tone for the action happening on-screen (Marris, 2021). Rather than leaving the shark silent, Williams' musical score creates fear by signaling the presence of the shark to the audience.

> Music is ubiquitous and integral in film; it induces mood, communicates meaning, heightens the sense of reality, and enables symbolization. Thus, the music accompanying shark footage is nontrivial. In fact, many people trace their fear of sharks to the 1975 blockbuster *Jaws*, whose redolent soundtrack has become deeply rooted in popular culture. *Jaws* epitomized the use of *leitmotif*, a short, recurring musical phrase that is continuously paired with a character such that eventually, the theme alone conjures up that character (Nosal, et. al, 2016, p.2).

The use of repetition in the film has created an enduring image of the shark which has produced a binarised understanding of the human/animal relationship. The theory of performativity, or the creation of one's identity or social reality reproduced through language, gesture, and symbolic social signs (Butler, 1990), may be used to analyse the identity of sharks that humans come to understand through the use of music. The two-note musical motif from *Jaws,* which is often considered one of the best musical cues in film history, is one of the top social signs that humans associate with sharks, despite sharks being silent animals. Sharks themselves do not make sounds and across 400-500 species of sharks, no one has ever found an organ capable of making sound (Geib, 2020). This suggests the power and influence of human narratives and the significance of the anthropocentric gaze as a theoretical lens to deconstruct representations of apex predators.

> They, the animals, do not speak. In a universe of increasing speech, of the constraint to confess and to speak, only they remain mute, and for this reason they seem to retreat far from us, behind the horizon of truth. But it is what makes us intimate with them. It is not the ecological problem of their survival that is important, but still and always that of their silence. In a world bent on doing nothing but making one speak, in a world assembled under the hegemony of signs and discourse, their silence weighs more and more heavily on our organization of meaning (Baudrillard, 1994, p.137).

Sharks are entirely silent, their silence is possibly part of what makes them menacing and this may be a rationale or why humans have provided a 'voice' for that which is silent. Following the release of *Jaws*, the infamous score has transcended into a pop-culture soundtrack for all

sharks. The score has connected humans with the shark while situating the animal as abject, an outsider intruding on human society. In the decades that have followed, the use of sound has become a vital tool for how media depicts sharks on screen; from the anthropomorphic cartoon sharks in *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003) and *Shark Tale* (Bergeron, et al., 2011) to the numerous narrators used in the Discovery Channel's annual *Shark Week,* which under the anthropocentric gaze are objectified; where humans appraise them in terms of their usefulness or threat (Malamud, 2010). In *Shark Tale* (Bergeron et al., 2011), the film references the infamous theme tune from *Jaws* with the shark, Frankie, as noted earlier, referring to it as his theme song, and in the Pixar film *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003), although based on animated representations of sharks which arguably attempt to articulate a different identity for the predator, the audience is also reminded of themes from *Jaws*: Sharks are portrayed as friendly vegetarians which is contrasted by their large, wide, and jagged-toothed smiles and going by the name, Bruce, a homage to the nickname given to the shark in *Jaws* by the film crew. It becomes clear that the impact of Williams' score continues to resonate throughout media linking shark representation to an underlining sense of fear and the eerie.

> [T]he weird is constituted by a presence – the presence of that which does not belong. […] The eerie […] is the constitution by a *failure of absence* or by a *failure of presence*. The sensation of the eerie occurs either when there is something present where there should be nothing, or is there is nothing present when there should be something (Fisher, 2016, p.61).

The visual absence of the shark throughout the majority of the *Jaws* film is attended by an eerie presence, intensified by Wiliams' ominous musical motif.

> Behind all of the manifestations of the eerie, the central enigma at its core is the problem with agency. In the case of failure of absence, the question concerns the existence of agency as such. Is there a deliberative agent here at all? Are we being watched by an entity that has not yet revealed itself? In the case of the failure of presence, the question concerns the particular *nature* of the agent at work (Fisher, 2016, p.63).

In Spielberg's film the shark is articulated as an absent agent at work, the inference is that humanity is "being watched by an entity that has not yet revealed itself" (Fisher, 2016, p.63). This phenomenon of being watched positions the human subject as an object of prey, a position that threatened the anthropocentric power of the human

> When actual unprovoked shark bites happen there are only four reasons: confusion over whether a human is a potential prey item (mistaken identity), perception that the human is competition or a threat (territorial), a compromised condition (starvation), and rarely, out of frustration which is actually a specific part of territorial or competitive reasoning usually only seen in diving (Ramsey, 2019, p.122).

Ramsey's reference to the territorial behaviours of animal (this is applicable to both human and non-human animals), provides a useful connect to the writings of post-structural philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari who, in their concept of becoming animal, suggests that in order to deconstruct the dominant (anthropocentric) position we must enact a process of deterritorialisation (the first step in a change of function) and look for ways to "radically de-hierarchize the relationships between the realms of the living" (Beaulieu, 2011, p.85).

The Shark's View (CAMERA ANGLES):

The concept of a 'shark's view', is introduced during an analysis of *Jaws*, suggesting the possibility of becoming-animal within media representations. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal is not a literal becoming animal but an attempt to change perspectives of looking and being from a human-centred position (2017). In the context of this research becoming-animal may offer the potential to shift the anthropocentric gaze whilst documenting sharks towards a 'shark's view'. This idea may be aligned with the work of contemporary artist Miranda Whall whose performance film *Crossed Paths* (2017-2021) introduces the idea of becoming-sheep. Whall uses go-pro cameras attached to her body to document her movements as she moves through the landscape using a quadrupedal motion. This shift from the typical bipedal movement of the human ensures that the footage captured by the camera adopts a similar position to that of the sheep, thus deconstructing the human view of the landscape.

The Title and Poster

Jaws (Spielberg, 1975), the film and the title, have had a long-term effect on influencing society's understanding of sharks (Pepin-Neff, 2015). *Jaws* created a lasting narrative that sharks are mindless killers (the abject), which seek to destroy man and his way of life and can only be defeated in a battle in which man will reign victorious. This basic structural narrative

is common and has subsequently been copied and referenced in postmodern animal imagery throughout popular culture. The title itself "literally (through eating) and figuratively (through representations of them) reproduces future sharks and the fear humans have of sharks" (Lerberg, 2016, p.33), thus making the overall message or story more believable to the viewing audience. The poster provides evidence of this idea through featuring an image of a large shark baring its jagged teeth as it moves to attack an innocent woman swimming in the water.

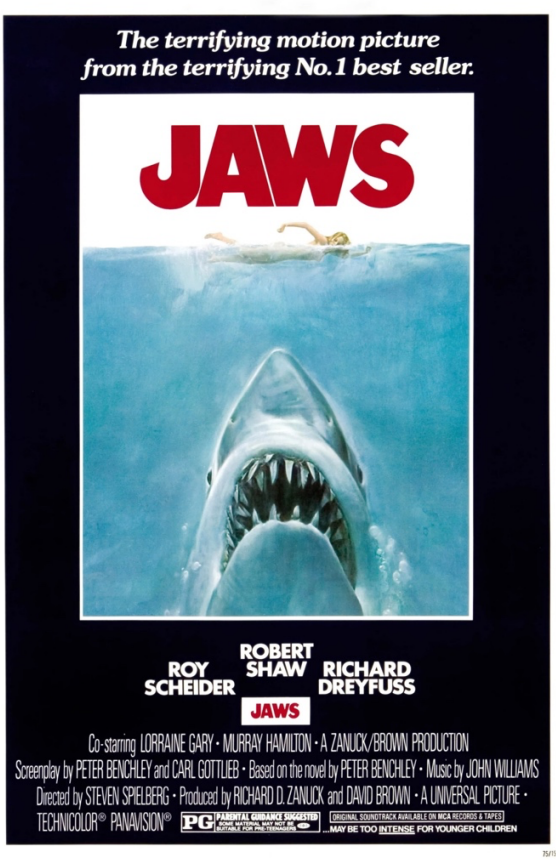

Figure 1.3 Steven Spielberg, *Jaws*, 1975. Promotional poster for the film. "Richard Dreyfuss" by Jean Beaufort is licensed under CC0 Public Domain.

Sharks in a post-*Jaws* era have been defined by the characteristics of their 'jaws', a species defining feature that has come to differentiate sharks and designate them as 'other', an association that arguably demonstrates a lack of understanding from society (Lerberg, 2016, p.33) and draws on 'the weird and the eerie' (Fisher, 2016) tone that surrounds the shark in the film *Jaws*.

> What the weird and the eerie have in common is a preoccupation with the strange. The strange – not the horrific. The allure that the weird and the eerie possess is not captured by the idea that we "enjoy what scares us." It has, rather to do with a fascination for the outside, for the that which lies beyond standard perception, cognition and experience. This fascination usually involves a certain apprehension, perhaps even dread – but it would be wrong to say that the weird and the eerie are necessarily terrifying (Fisher, 2016, p.8).

Jaws does evoke simply that which terrifies, but also the fascination with otherness which Fisher articulates, an integral link to our observation of 'other' animals. This may be likened to those who enjoy watching true crime and murder mystery documentaries, our fascination with the shark comes from our natural curiosity and fascination of otherness.

Visual representations of sharks primarily focus on images of their 'jaws' (and the word itself) and their predatory function rather than on other aspects of the shark's behaviours and other identifying features. The emphasis on the shark's teeth in *Jaws* relocates the viewer from 'the weird and eerie' tropes associated with the shark to certain terror (Fisher, 2016). Through the anthropocentric gaze sharks are perceived as abject, other, or monstrous (Creed, 1993). As previously discussed, the 'human gaze 'or anthropocentric gaze is perhaps best understood when considered in parallel with the 'male gaze 'or the shared histories with oppressed groups highlighted in CAMS (Merskin, 2016). In the context of animals on screen, the phrase 'the male gaze 'may be substituted for the 'human gaze 'or anthropocentric gaze, and woman replaced with 'animal', thus the animal is objectified through the human's gaze. (Malamud, 2010). The objectness or abjectness of the shark as 'other' in *Jaws*, is demonstrated through a sense of danger and a perceived threat to human nature. The shark is shown baring its teeth, this is thus a representation of 'otherness 'and an articulation that the animal is an obstacle for the human to overcome, a threat to human existence, thus the shark is the abject and their jaws the monstrous image. As outlined in the literature review, Creed suggests that in horror films the abject appears in three ways:

> [1:] The horror film abounds in images of abjection, foremost of which is the corpse, whole and mutilated, followed by an array of bodily wastes such as blood, vomit, saliva, sweat, tears, and putrefying flesh. [2:] The concept of a border is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film; that which crosses or threatens to cross the 'border' is abject. [3:] The way the horror film illustrates the work of abjection is in the construction of the maternal as abject (1993, pp.10- 12).

The shark in *Jaws* both physically and metaphorically crosses the borders of 'human' or 'male' control (Creed, 1993). By moving into shallow swimming waters to hunt, the abject

shark invades the area of societal control creating disruption and chaos to those who view its behaviour. The images of teeth which have the capacity to cut through human flesh have become permanently etched in the minds of humans, even those who have not seen the film; it is a collective and entrenched cultural representation of the shark. The jaws or teeth are images of abjection and these images have come to define and represent sharks in a post-*Jaws* era and references in media programmes reflect this cultural, hyperreal knowledge system.

> The system constantly presents its own crisis as spectacle. It juxtaposes its ideal (the advert) to its crisis (news, disaster movies, crime dramas, action films). But it is distributed in 'homeopathic doses' – in tiny amounts absorbed in other things. Hence, it doesn't explode. It is constantly drip-fed to us instead. The world becomes non-representational through lack of signs. After meaning, we are left with manipulation, touch, circulation, ventilation. It becomes a world of panic. (McLaverty-Robinson 2012).

A close up image of the shark (Image: Euan Rannachan / Mediadrumworld)

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Brave diver captures great white shark in a Jaws look-a-like pose on camera

Photographer Euan Rannachan takes groups of willing adventurers out to Guadalupe Island off the coast of Mexico. There he captured these amazing underwater shots

By Kelly-Ann Mills, News Reporter

11:31, 17 Sep 2021

Figure 1.4 Kelly-Ann Mills, *Brave diver captures great white shark in a Jaws look-a-like pose on camera,* September 17, 2021. Article published by The Mirror. Screenshot.

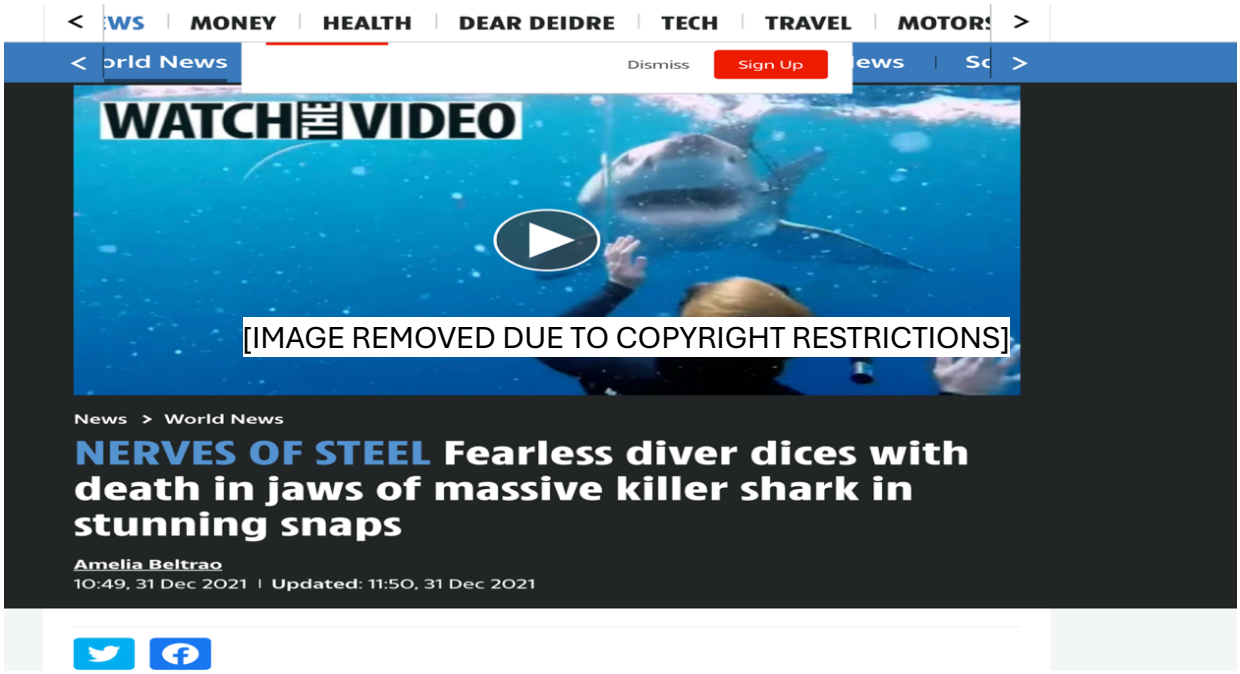

Figure 1.5 Amelia Beltrao, *Nerves of Steel: Fearless diver dices with death in jaws of massive killer shark in stunning snaps,* December 31, 2021. Article published in The Sun. Screenshot.

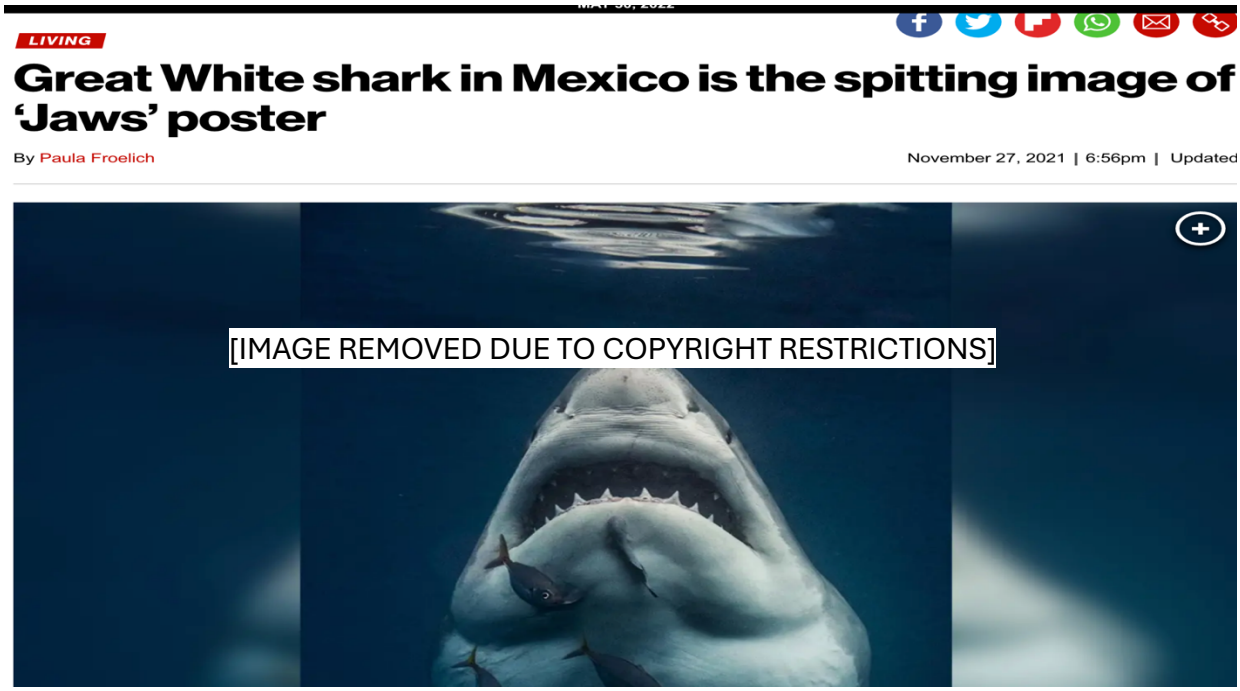

Figure 1.6 Paula Froelich, *Great White shark in Mexico is the spitting image of 'Jaws' poster,* November 27, 2021. Article in the New York Post. Screenshot.

In animal documentaries and television broadcasts where each animal appears to be afforded an appropriate portrayal, the overall representations arguably do more to perpetuate the mythologies of otherness than present an accurate depiction. Videographer's media content

and journalist's news stories often create narratives with undertones of fear, not unlike those invoked in animal horror films, or narratives of with undertones that appeal to one's softer nature, not unlike those invokes by playful wildlife documentaries (Litchfield, 2013, p.164).

Fighting the Stereotype

In order to raise awareness of animals in their natural environment and the relationship with human society, it is important to explore how these creatures have been represented in mainstream media and, in turn, how alternative representations may affect public perception of their existence in their natural habitat (Merskin, 2015). It is also worth acknowledging that there is an "ideology of exhuming, documenting, and rediscovering the real – from reality TV to the preservation of historical artefacts and indigenous groups", which the researcher suggests, often "reinforces the process of destroying and then simulating. What is preserved is never what it would have been without intervention" (McLaverty-Robinson, 2012). The researcher is particularly aware of the interventions that are produced through post-productive film techniques and how these hyperreal narratives may be perceived as 'more real than real'.

In Carrie P. Freeman and Debra Merskin's *Guidelines for Entertainment Media*, they suggest that we should "be selective in portrayals of wildlife (free-living animals) so as not to over-represent predatory-prey conflicts for dramatic purpose. Over reliance on tooth-and-claw representation imply nature and wildlife are primarily harsh and dangerous (in contrast to "civilized" human culture). Balance this with portrayals of more filial, cooperative, or symbolic relations between wild species in and among their families and community groups" (2016, p.217). We are constantly recreating and reliving aspects of our past, including representations of non-human animals, to the extent that they have been simulated and recreated in the present. There is a sense that the real has become our utopia, which we dream about as if it was something we had lost. It seems as if an entire culture is now devoted to the counterfeiting of itself (Baudrillard, 1994). An accurate depiction of animals has been substituted for a simulation of the real, manifesting as wildlife documentaries which adhere to cultural ideologies of our understanding of that animal. Programmes like the Discovery Channel's annual *Shark Week* or BBC's *Blue Planet II* (2017), are, the researcher suggests, guilty of objectifying and presenting sharks through the anthropocentric gaze by highlighting

shark behaviour in relation to humans, valuing them only in terms of their usefulness or threat. Researchers such as shark enthusiast Ocean Ramsey have already demonstrated how to better represent sharks in the media. Ramsey, author of *What You Should Know About Sharks* (2019), carries out research and videography of sharks while also deconstructing myths surrounding the apex predators.

Figure 1.7 American diver Ocean Ramsey swimming with shark in trailer for "She is the Ocean" film. Photo by Juan Oliphant. Photo licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license.

While wearing an ocean camouflage wet suit (a significant juxtaposition to the image of 'woman as victim' in the iconic *Jaws* film poster), Ramsey does little to enhance the footage she captures and the impression of the sharks she is recording, rather she allows the documentation to speak for itself while also providing viewers with information on how to safely encounter these apex predators and how to keep oneself from harm while swimming. This transparency between Ramsey and the viewer helps to eliminate the anthropocentric gaze and the representation of the shark as a monstrous other. This method of transparency facilitates a better understanding of sharks by informing viewers of necessary precautions while also highlighting the threat that improper interactions with apex predators can bring, without resorting to the archetypal objectification of the sharks as the monstrous other. Ramsey explains that while unprovoked shark attacks are extremely rare, they can occur if

the shark is either starved or frustrated (Ramsey, 2019, pp.120 –130). Ramsey advises swimmers and divers to be cautious and alert when entering the home of an apex predator, however, this does not mean that sharks are constantly hunting human prey, a contrary message to that of television and film representations of sharks since the release of *Jaws* in 1975.

In order to disentangle the image of the stereotypical monstrous shark, filmmakers and wildlife videographers must shift focus from presenting a man-eating predator and alternatively elucidate an accurate representation of the shark's language and behaviour, so that society can better understand these predators and their environment, rather than conforming to the villainous caricature of Spielberg's *Jaws*.

This case study has highlighted the anthropocentric gaze through which sharks are invariably viewed, and where they are portrayed as monstrous others. The research suggests that this phenomenon was affirmed by the iconic film *Jaws*, a film that has set the tone for how sharks have been, and continue to be, represented in films and wildlife documentaries. By drawing parallels with the feminist theory of the male gaze and CAMS knowledge of woman/gender studies (Merskin, 2016) and the representation of women as the monstrous feminine (Creed, 1993), this case study has considered the representation of animals as agents of chaos in relation to human society and the male's fear of loss; loss of control but also, in the context of the shark, the loss of limbs (fear of castration) or life when the non-human predator is encountered. This study elucidates the potential links between woman and shark, where both are objectified as monstrous others (the monstrous feminine as a manifestation of the patriarch's fear of female sexuality), and both subject to a controlling, dominant gaze; woman the object of the male gaze and shark an object of the anthropocentric gaze. Freud connects man's fear of woman to his fear of castration (Creed, 1993, p.1), and the shark as a monstrous other may also be aligned to man's fear of castration in that both woman and the non-human animal predator are an abject threat to man's safety.

This case study has articulated the significance of the shark's defining features (their teeth and jaws) which are typically enhanced in media representations by dramatic camera angles; such images are used to reinforce the monstrosity, animality and otherness of the shark. This chapter has also considered the influence of John William's musical score in *Jaws* and the typical use of ominous music in film and wildlife documentaries that work to connect the

image of the shark to the fear invoked in *Jaws*. In order to deconstruct the anthropocentric gaze and the depiction of the shark as a monstrous other, the researcher suggests that filmmakers and wildlife videographers must shift their gaze from presenting the non-human predator as an animal of chaos capable of human destruction. Wildlife videographers should focus on the reality of how these animals behave and interact with humans in addition to creating transparency around the unlikely circumstance of encountering a shark in the environment.

Through film practice, the researcher will incorporate methods such as the use of a timecode (a deconstruction of cinematic time), the use of natural sound, and filming the shark in its entirety rather than focusing on its jaws and teeth as a gesture toward deconstructing some of the myths created and perpetuated in *Jaws*. Ocean Ramsey has adopted the approach of focusing on the animal as a 'whole being' rather than on the culturally pervasive image of the shark's jaws; this is apparent in *What You Should Know About Sharks* (Ramsey, 2019) where only one of twenty images shows a shark baring its teeth. The research considers whether the use of such methods can deconstruct the anthropocentric image of the shark as a monstrous other and alternatively create more transparent representations of these apex predators.

Practice-Based Research

To challenge the dominant portrayal of apex predators in popular media, the researcher took a deliberate and experimental approach to the production of each film, employing strategies that actively resist anthropocentric narratives. By experimenting with different filming techniques and post-production choices, the researcher aimed to create a more authentic and animal-driven perspective. The focus shifted from crafting a dramatic human-centered storyline to letting the animals' natural behaviours and environments speak for themselves. This methodology allows the animals, in this case, sharks, to occupy the foreground, with the human presence intentionally minimised, a key component in deconstructing the traditional, often distorted, ways in which apex predators are depicted. By reducing human influence in both narrative and visual style, the research opens a space for a more ethical and transparent representation of wildlife, encouraging the audience to rethink their perceptions and engage more critically with media portrayals of animals.

In order to draw attention away from the anthropocentric gaze and produce a more honest, non-human animal-driven video, the researcher tested various production methods through practice-based research. The first short film in this series focuses on the documentation of sharks. The researcher spent two weekends filming blue sharks in the Celtic Sea off the southwest coast of Wales in Pembrokeshire. The eleven-hour excursion was aided by the eco-touring companion Celtic Deep and was carried out in October and September 2023. In order to reach the desired location, the researcher had to take a two-hour boat ride to the middle of the ocean with no guarantees that a shark would appear. The researcher was required to wear a full-body 7mm wetsuit in order to endure the freezing water temperature. On the first occasion, while the water was quite calm, we did not see our first shark until approximately 3 hours into the excursion. This experience deconstructs the popular theme of a man-eating predator that infests the waters. In fact, the boat captain couldn't guarantee the appearance of sharks and warned us ahead of time that even with chumming, it was very likely that we would see nothing. In a world where the researcher has heard the phrase "I won't go into the ocean because I don't want to be eaten by a shark" too many times to count, it was validating to be able to use this experience to deconstruct the 'monstrous other' representations of sharks. Over the course of the weekend excursions, two blue sharks were documented during the first dive and three on the second. On the second excursion, the sharks appeared almost instantly, but high currents and choppy waters made it difficult for the researcher to film in the water. As a gesture to deconstruct the socio-cultural perception of the shark as a man-eating predator lying in wait for human prey, a narrative commonly portrayed within both films and wildlife documentaries, the researcher incorporated the use of a time code to record the length of time that was needed before the sharks were documented. The use of post-productive methods has allowed the researcher to demonstrate the effect that real-time footage and slow-motion footage have on the representation of sharks. Significantly, the films are produced without the use of a soundtrack or the accompaniment of music. "Using ambient sound, even if it has to be recorded separately or manipulated to be audible, can give viewers a truer and more complete understanding of the nonhuman world" (Marris, 2021). The absence of a musical score and the comparative differences between real-time and slow-motion footage deconstruct the identity and ominous presence of the shark as discussed in case study 1, *The Monstrous Other*.

In examining the relationship between media representations and the perception of apex predators in the field, this research deliberately avoids reinforcing traditional anthropocentric

portrayals. By adopting a more observational, simplified approach, the filmmaker invites viewers to experience these creatures without the emotional manipulation typically employed in wildlife documentaries. In contrast to conventional media techniques that emphasise the danger or grandeur of predators, this research seeks to question and challenge these constructed identities by focusing on the inherent qualities of the animals, free from the lens of fear or awe. The use of unembellished visual strategies - such as real-time footage, slow motion, and the absence of a soundtrack - shifts the focus from spectacle to the animal's lived experience, offering a deeper, more authentic connection to the creatures depicted. This method ultimately aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the sharks, inviting the audience to engage with them as complex beings rather than as mere symbols of terror or myth.

Practice-based film: Sharks

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2"> 
</td><td>Video Link: https://vimeo.com/1081831043</td></tr>
<tr><td>Password: MonstrousOther</td></tr>
</table>

The informational film ‘Sharks ’provides a deconstruction of the familiar tropes used in shark documentation which the researcher suggests construct the hyperreal identity of the monstrous other. The removal of the stereotypical dramatic musical score, synonymous with sharks in a post-*Jaws* era, creates a new space for the shark to be considered. The simple addition of a time code to this film is used to dispel the myth that the shark is a latent threat to humanity. The time code reveals that several hours have passed before a shark is finally captured on film. The word 'captured' may provide further insight in this short film through acknowledging the presence of the film crew/diving crew in the deconstructive ‘part two ’of the film; this gesture removes the hyperreal depiction of sharks associated with Spielberg's *Jaws*. It may be suggested that in this context the filmmaker becomes the predator, searching for an image of the shark; luring the non-human animal away from its normal pattern of behaviour in order to ‘capture ’it on camera.

The researcher acknowledges that the removal of the anthropocentric gaze in its entirety is impossible as the footage is essentially recorded by humans through a process of perspectival looking; however, the elimination of hyperreal post-productive techniques and a commitment to producing of more transparent representations of non-human animals may help to minimise the anthropocentric gaze, resulting in depictions that free animals from socially imposed stereotypes.

In conclusion, this research emphasises the potential of film as a tool to challenge and reshape the narrative surrounding apex predators, particularly sharks. By consciously deconstructing the traditional, anthropocentric lens, the filmmaker aims to offer a more nuanced and authentic portrayal that resists sensationalism and myth. Through the careful use of observational techniques, such as real-time footage and the removal of dramatic musical scores, the film fosters a deeper, more respectful understanding of the sharks' behaviours. While the complete removal of the anthropocentric gaze remains a challenge, this work demonstrates that by removing the exaggerated representations of non-human animals, we can move towards a more truthful, less reductive depiction. The research offers a vital contribution to how we perceive not only sharks but all apex predators, encouraging a shift away from fear-driven representations toward a more balanced and empathetic understanding of their roles in the natural world.

The Anthropomorphic Other

From children's books to wildlife documentaries, the anthropomorphising of animals is a widespread practice that has saturated the mass media for decades. Anthropomorphism is defined as the "misattribution of human qualities to nonhumans, or at least the overestimation of the similarities between humans and nonhumans" (De Waal, 1999, p.256). While the term anthropomorphism might be relatively unfamiliar, the practice itself is part of the human way of thinking (Kennedy, 1992, quoted in De Waal, 1999). Anthropomorphism within societal popular culture commonly appears in the form of animated 'talking 'animals as main characters in films and television programmes. Images of human-like bears appear frequently in fiction genres; however, the anthropomorphic bear has also been incorporated into wildlife documentaries. This spectacle is less common and perhaps less obvious than that of animated films that emphasise the overt use of anthropomorphic animal characters in media (Winnie the Pooh, Paddington Bear, *et al*.). Anthropomorphised animals in wildlife documentaries take a different form, one which the researcher suggests is constructed and presented through the lens of the anthropocentric gaze, as outlined in the literature review (Chapter 1). Through the anthropocentric gaze the animal is objectified through anthropomorphic explanations, transforming the animal into the anthropomorphic 'other.'

Wildlife documentaries incorporate a variety of methods that work to construct a narrative around non-human animals highlighting their arguably human-like behaviour. The implementation of music is often used to create a dramatic setting where the emotion surrounding the non-human animal is determined by the musical inflections. The role of the narrator acts as an all knowing 'voice of God 'creating hyperreal representations of animals and their environments creating images that project human experiences onto the animals, rather than trying to understand animals 'behaviour within the natural world (De Waal, 1999).

> Derived from the Greek words *anthrōpos* (meaning "human") and *morphē* (meaning "shape" or "form"), anthropomorphism involves more than simply attributing life to the nonliving (i.e., animism). Anthropomorphism involves going beyond behavioral descriptions of imagined or observable actions (e.g., *the dog is affectionate*) to represent an agent's mental or physical characteristics using humanlike descriptors (e.g., *the dog loves me*). At its core, anthropomorphism entails attributing humanlike properties, characteristics, or mental states to real or imagined nonhuman agents and objects (Epley et al, 2007, p.865).

Anthropomorphism is a common practice in the media, including satirical anthropomorphism, 'bambification' and anthropomorphism of non-humans, "based on human feelings and thought without insufficient information or wishful thinking" (De Waal, 1999, p.260). Satirical anthropomorphism or *anthropomorphic analogy* is indicated when a comparison is being made between the non-human and the human. This form of anthropomorphism is often used to illustrate the behaviour of the non-human (De Waal, 1999) so that they can be more clearly understood. For the purpose of this case study, the research will focus on the latter two and their prominence throughout wildlife documentaries particularly within the Disney documentary *Bears* (Fothergill and Scholey, 2014). In addition to the three *forms* of anthropomorphism, there are also three factors in which a human is compelled to anthropomorphise.

> Epley *et al*. suggest that the need for to humans to anthropomorphise can be motivated by three factors: *sociality* – the need to fulfill a yearning for social connections by establishing humanlike connections with nonhuman agents resulting from a lack of connect with other humans, *effectiveness* – the need to make sense of complex agent's behavior in moments of uncertainty by linking human characteristics to nonhuman in order to increase one's ability to predict, understand and control an agent's behavior in the future, and *knowledge* – the process of using knowledge about humans as the basis for induction to nonhumans because one's knowledge about human is more developed than one's knowledge of nonhumans (Epley et al., 2007, p.866).

Anthropomorphism transforms animals into caricatures, shaping their behaviour to correspond to narratives structured by humans. The animal's story is cut and edited to accommodate a human perspective, commonly focusing on behavioural acts that fit a predetermined narrative while omitting the animal's perspective and investing them with human-like characteristics (Malamud, 2010). Anthropomorphism in wildlife documentaries has been criticised by many scientists as being having an unscientific disposition towards non-human nature (Gallup, 1997). While some scientists argue that anthropomorphism is a useful tool that can help humans to better understand an animal's nature by elucidating potential similarities between human and non-human animals, anthropomorphism can equally lead to a loss of understanding towards the animal by blurring the lines between human and non-human narratives (Epley, et al., 2007).

> Our misperception of other species and their plight influences our behaviour to such an extent that we may inadvertently be pushing animals that we consider special towards extinction. It is time for us to demand truthful portrayals of animals and the environment – whether in visual and print media, or in labelling of consumer products

> (ingredients and source materials). Science communicators must find ways of 'telling the truth' and debunking myths that potentially harm conservation (Litchfield, 2013, p.155).

Indeed, since our insight into animals 'thoughts and behaviours is from a purely observational standpoint, the research emphasises that it may be impossible to fully eliminate the anthropocentric gaze from representations of non-human animals. However, the researcher suggests that this should not result in mass media genres consistent humanisation of animals into a social 'other. 'The issue arguably stems from questionable filming techniques, extensive post-production editing (Corner, 1999), orchestrated music layered over natural sounds, and anthropomorphic language used by narrators (Elliot, 2001). This humanisation of animals within the entertainment industry is demonstrated in the documentary *Bears* (Fothergill and Scholey, 2014).

> You can't avoid some anthropomorphism… [but projecting emotional narratives that] aren't reasonable, or so far beyond reality, is something to prevent. … otherwise you get into the Disney approach that I just really abhor (Landis, 2014, quoted in Bradley, 2015).

The documentary *Bears* follows a year in the life of an Alaskan brown bear, Sky, and her two cubs, Scout and Amber. The film follows the family from the end of their hibernation over the next year of their lives. Over the course of the film, the viewer follows the bear family as they navigate the challenges of survival and the constant danger they face as they move through the Alaskan outback.

Bears is narrated by John C. Reilly, and through his voice the audience follows the family of bears across the vast Alaskan outback on their journey to find food. The *Bears* filmmakers document moments ranging from 'childlike play time 'to suspenseful struggles for survival. As spring changes to summer "the brown bears must work hard to find food-ultimately feasting on a plentiful salmon run - while staying safe from rival male bears and predators, including an ever-present wolf" (Walt Disney Studios, 2014). While the documentary is an interesting look into the lives of three bears, the film's narration is constructed entirely from a human perspective, incorporating music and close-up film footage that arguably communicates a fabricated perception of the bears.

> Disney realized that he could tap into a profitable market by producing nature films that not only entertain but also champion moral behavior and traditional values (Palmer, 2010, p.37).

Audiences have acknowledged the value of learning about the natural world and observed that the behaviour of wild animals may reflect how human society is organised, or how it should be; we learn from ‘good ’animals what constitutes ‘good ’behaviour and a well-organised society (Palmer, 2015).

Figure 2.1 Keith Scholey and Alastair Fothergill, *Bears,* 2014. Distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures. Promotional poster for the film. Photo courtesy of IMDb.

The *Bears* documentary capitalises on this phenomenon by following the mother bear, Sky, and her two cubs. Thus, the theme of a mother protecting her children is consistently espoused throughout the film. The documentary’s poster features an image of the mother and one of her cubs, presumably relating to adult viewers the values of parenting, while the small cub may remind children of their teddy bears or similar Disney bear characters. Additionally, the images used on the poster closely resemble that of another Disney film, *Brother Bear* (Blaise and Walker, 2003). This parallel communicates to an audience (before they have seen the film) the values the movie will invoke while emphasising the ‘good nature ’of bears. The

bears have been constructed and edited to communicate family values, a preconceived human narrative of the anthropomorphised gaze.

Figure 2.2 Aaron Blaise and Robert Walker, *Brother Bear,* 2003. "Brother Bear" by Citron--Vert. License Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivatives Works 3.0 License.

Visually striking wildlife footage is often transformed into a carefully constructed narrative by assigning human-like identities and relationships to the animals, shaping their lives into familiar and emotionally driven storylines, and guiding the audience through it with an expressive human voice. Humans are frequently exposed to representations of animals speaking and acting in a manner similar to that of humans. While their physical appearances are entirely 'animal', their actions and mannerisms are often entirely human: This anthropomorphic animal is left without meaning or secrecy and "co-opted into the *family* and into the *spectacle*" (Berger, 2009, p.25). *Bears* has named the mother Sky and her cubs, Scout and Amber, this simple act of giving the bears names is itself an exclusively human practice. In this context a human language system is used to bring the non-human animal into the domain of the human through the anthropomorphism. In a similar manner to the CAMS field that recognises the imbalance of power among oppressed groups where those objectified as the object for exploitation and confined to roles allocated and deemed acceptable for them,

bears in the *Bears* documentary are confined to human behaviours and their 'wildness' is contained to conform to humanity's social purpose. This containment and confinement co-opts the animal into the spectacle, visible yet only existing for the viewing and pleasure of the human, appearing like "fish seen through the plate glass of an aquarium" (Berger, 2009, p.26). In contemporary media practices Berger's plate glass aquarium is replaced by plate glass of a television screen. While the bears move through the vast landscape of the Alaskan outback, their existence is compressed and confined into a 1 hour and 18-minute spectacle on screen. The viewer is led to believe that a deep understanding has been created between themselves and the documentary's subjects, an illusion that ends when the film concludes. This example echoes the animals in a zoo, on display as a spectacle for human consumption.

> [A]nimals are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance. They are the objects of our ever-extending knowledge. What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of what separates us from them (Berger, 2009, p.27).

The anthropomorphic drive of the human is arguably an attempt to suppress the characteristics of otherness, otherness understood as that which may threaten human control. If the animal is rendered human (anthropomorphised) then it becomes part of the anthropocentric system rather than existing in binary opposition. Photographer Richard Billingham focuses on the psychological space of a zoo in his work *Zoo* (2005-6). The enclosures highlight the relationships between the animals and their public audience using the enclosure as a tool to create distance from the animals without creating sentimentality (Aloi, 2009). The frame of the enclosures in Billingham's *Zoo* echoes the frame of the television screen, where animals are frequently enclosed and held captive by their anthropocentric representations. The researcher suggests that the capturing and confining of an animal physically and psychologically enacts a process of othering where the animal is designated as different and separate from the human. Perhaps it is important to revisit the concept of the other as a method to understand how an andromorphic gesture may derive from a fear of otherness. The ideology that "the Other is closely linked to those of identity and difference in that identity is understood to be defined in part by its difference from the Other" (Barker, 2004, p.139).

> Othering is not about liking or disliking someone. It is based on the conscious or unconscious assumption that a certain identified group poses a threat to the favoured group. It is largely driven by politicians and the media, as opposed to personal

> contact. Overwhelmingly, people don't "know" those that they are Othering (Powell, 2017).

If animals are positioned as other to the human, then the human may choose to villainise the other (the monstrous other), or alternatively project human-centred behaviours onto the animal in an act of colonisation. "The notion of the other is widely used in a variety of disciplines [...], it refers, at its most general level, to one pole of the relationship between a SUBJECT and a person or thing defined or constituted as a non-self that is different or other" (Macey, 2000, p.285).

In the *Bears* documentary, animals are placed in similar conflicts as one might expect to see in a fictional drama featuring human characters. Although the documentary lacks human characters, the anthropomorphised bears are portrayed in situations that express drama, conflict, and humour, and the producers and editors have sometimes crossed the line between fact and fantasy (Palmer, 2015), creating an image of bears that is hyperreal.

> Beyond the edge of the so-called human, beyond it but by no means on a single opposing side, rather than ''The Animal'' or ''Animal Life'' there is already a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living, or more precisely (since to say ''the living'' is already to say too much or not enough), a multiplicity of organizations of relations between living and dead, relations of organization or lack of organization among realms that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and/or death. These relations are at once intertwined and abyssal, and they can never be totally objectified (Derrida, 2008, p.31).

Representation of non-human animals invariably adopt a mono-directional gaze which is always from the perspective of the human. The non-human animal as the 'other 'in the context of the *Bears* documentary is made explicit through the human narrator's dominant voice which assumes authority over the animals' actions. The human presupposes their superiority over the non-human animal and therefore speaks for them and subsequently controls the cultural discourse associated with this species.

> Indeed, most wildlife films are essentially narrative adventures, and have adopted the codes and conventions of mainstream film and television, with which they are, after all, in direct nightly competition for viewers and ratings. It should be no surprise that wildlife films exhibit familiar devices for narrative and character construction, which have become so dominant that any film not employing them can appear technically amateurish (Bousé, 2003, p.123 -124).

The raw unedited animal sits in its own category free from extensive human comparison. However, when subjected to the anthropocentric gaze, the animal becomes the object of human desire and the 'anthropomorphic other 'is an attempt to create a connection between the animal and the viewing audience. The anthropomorphising gaze in the documentary constructs the notion that bears can think and act like humans, thus they remain within human society, homogenised to conform to human narratives.

> [W]ildlife films are typically regarded as a sub-genre of documentary – nature documentaries – with all that this implies about the authenticity and spontaneity of the events depicted, the absence of staging and editing tricks, and ultimately about the Truth of what is shown and the very relationship of images to reality (Bousé, 2003, p.124).

In order to fulfill 'popular' narrative expectations, videographers and journalists sometimes struggle to present an accurate portrayal of the animals involved; often sacrificing authenticity for entertainment. The wildlife films and documentaries are constructed and edited like Hollywood films to attract the view to the hyperreal representations that present the non-human animal as the spectacle. Evidence of this, in television news and documentaries, is highlighted in Chris Palmer's *Confessions of a Wildlife Filmmaker* (2015). Palmer explains the moral dilemma of being a wildlife videographer and the complexity involved in creating authentic content that entertains its audiences.

> Not all filmmakers are scrupulous. The industry has its share of producers, directors, and camera operators who value getting a great shot over the welfare of the animals they are filming. Some filmmakers bother animals by getting too close; others stage phony scenes to make animals seen more dangerous than they really are…The proliferation of wildlife shows in recent years has created a species of wildlife paparazzi – filmmakers who harass and even endanger animals in their zeal to get the "money shot." The aggressive tactics they use to draw animals to the film site and capture unnatural scenes such as man-made feeding frenzies, can produce "wildlife pornography" in which animals are exploited for viewers' pleasure – and funders' return on investment (Palmer, 2010, p.7).

The pre and post-production techniques used in wildlife documentaries are where the influence of the anthropocentric gaze is made explicit. Filmmakers often have a pre-determined non-human animal story that they are hired to capture. However, if a film crew is unfortunate in their filming efforts, wildlife crews will often take matters into their own hands. Palmer explains that; "If you see a bear feeding on a deer carcass in a film, it is almost

certainly a tame bear searching for hidden jellybeans in the entrails of the deer's stomach" (2011). Animals shown on screen are often taken out of their natural environments and repositioned within human-made frameworks, meaning these portrayals tend to reflect the filmmakers' choices and cultural perspectives more than the realities of animal life or ecology (Adcroft, 2010). The animals are the spectacle (Berger, 2009) shown through the hyperreal lens of the anthropocentric gaze.

> Anthropomorphism, including personification, characterisation and narrative structure, are nevertheless inseparable from the wildlife filmmaking process. Inherently subjective, nature on screen is depicted as per the production and post-production choices of the wildlife filmmaker (Adcroft, 2010, p.ii).

Film crews set out to tell a specific story often working under tight deadlines. However, rather than adapting the narrative to tell the story that is being filmed, filmmakers instead adapt the footage or situation to fit the story structure (Palmer, 2015). This practice creates a false narrative misleading the viewing audience to believe that the images on screen are an accurate representation of the scene. In many cases, wildlife films function as story-driven adventures, drawing heavily on the stylistic norms of mainstream film and television that they often compete (Bousé, 2003). As a result, they tend to rely on recognisable techniques for shaping narrative and character, to the point that productions seem unpolished or lacking professionalism (Bousé, 2003). Footage is edited to look as if the non-human animals are engaging in a situation that is being played out in front of the videographer. Speaking to a member of the film production crew, it was revealed to the researcher that one of the cubs died during filming *Bears* thus elucidating that we were not viewing the same three bears throughout the film.

The purpose of wildlife documentaries should be to accurately depict and educate the audience on the non-human animals we are unable to encounter in our daily lives. However, by constructing hyperreal stories in which the anthropocentric gaze is used to alter the reality of the non-human animal, reality loses its meaning (Baudrillard, 1994). It may be suggested that the use of hyperreal techniques reflects the human's attempt to exert control over the animal's identity and environment (anthropocentrism) establishing the human's hierarchical position over the non-human animal.

The Role of the Narrator

Narration is one of the most important tools used in wildlife documentaries due to the obvious reason that humans and animals do not speak the same language, thus the narrator is there to provide information for the audience.

> With the omniscient point of view (sometimes also referred to as panoramic, shifting or multiple point of view), an "all-knowing" narrator firmly imposes himself between the reader and the story, and retains full and complete control over the narrative. The omniscient narrator is not a character in the story and is not at all involved in the plot. The narrator is free to tell us much or little, to dramatize or summarize, to interpret, speculate, philosophize, moralize or judge (Diasamidze, 2014, p.161).

A narrator can exist beyond the world of the text, offering an all-knowing perspective, or operate from within it, presenting events through a limited or first-person viewpoint. In some cases, the story unfolds without any visible narrator at all, creating the impression that no guiding voice is present (Diasamidze, 2014).The choice of narrator viewpoint determines the place in which the narrator is situated within the story and to what extent the narrator wants the reader/viewer involved in the interpretation of the story and the distance the author holds between the viewer and the story (Diasamidze, 2014).

> In terms of narrative form, the two documentaries follow a rather simple pattern and are of five core elements: (a) snippets of interviews with survivors and eyewitnesses of bear attacks, (b) audiovisual reconstructions of the attacks, (c) photographs of the wounds the bears inflicted, (d) voice-over narration, (e) additional interviews with animal behaviorists, park rangers, and other people knowledgeable about bears. The expert interviews are primarily explanatory, trying to explain the bears actions (Fuchs, 2018, p.5).

A narrator's voice used in wildlife documentaries is a method to connect the audience to the animals they are viewing by using voice-over narration to offer both information to the viewers and a human voice for animal behaviours. The voice of the narrator conveys what we know about the animal inserting our position of power. The human holds authority over the animals and maintains control over them by constructing a narrative, seeking a specific story to be told rather than telling the story that is happening (Diasamidze, 2014). The narrator speaks 'for 'the animals and thus maintains power over the animals and how the audiences view them. The voice of the narrator may add power to the spoken narrative through the tone of their voice. The gender, accent and pitch of the narrator's voice can either create a playful tone or act as a powerful 'voice of God'. The patriarchal, authoritarian voice may be heard in

the BBC's *Planet Earth* (2006) and *Planet Earth II* (2016) narrated by David Attenborough. Attenborough is highly regarded in the United Kingdom and his voice holds a sense of power. Attenborough's voice and presence in a wildlife documentary communicates a sense of both authority and trust which the viewer transposes onto the documentary footage, thus accepting what they are viewing as an accurate representation.

The language used in wildlife documentaries is the only way that the audience is able to understand the setting in which the animal is placed and the actions the animal is carrying out. The narrator typically uses language that is less scientific and more attuned to the narrative tropes of fiction media, in order to connect with viewers that presumably will not understand or pay attention to the information being presented. Language becomes a tool to anthropomorphise animals in order to make them understandable to a human audience. However, when information is consistently 'popularised', accurate animal narratives are lost (Baudrillard, 1994). The voice of the narrator determines the tone of the documentary. In *Bears*, the narrator, John C. Reilly, delivers a gentle, playful narrative that not only anthropomorphises the apex predators but also arguably infantilises them.

Figure 2.3 Stills from the film, *Bears,* 2014. Screenshots.

> "Hi, little guys. They say the first year of parenting is the hardest. Sky will soon learn that, for bears, it's nearly impossible. Almost half of all bear cubs don't survive their first year. But for now, deep inside the den, they're safe. It's warm and comfy. And after an entire winter together, it probably smells pretty bad. Sky worked hard last summer, eating over 90 pounds of fish a day, to store up enough fat to last through these early months. But now she's hungry, and if she doesn't eat soon, the milk her cubs need will dry up. There's a long, dangerous journey ahead of them. Sky needs to get her cubs down to the coast, and she hopes that the salmon will be plentiful this summer. But there's no guarantee. Little Scout and Amber's survival depends on it. Okay, cuddle time is over. These bears need to get on the move. This is the story of their incredible first year."
>
> (Narrated by John C. Reilly in *Bears*. Fothergill and Scholey, 2014).

The use of language such as "little guys" and "cuddle time is over" anthropomorphises the animals in a way that links them to human actions. Likened to language like "cutie" or "whore" used to objectify the female through the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975), the narrator's language creates an anthropomorphic analogy around the animal highlighting the comparative qualities and action to that of the human. While the language is intended to illustrate the behaviour of non-human animals more clearly, the narration arguable creates misleading information. Wildlife documentary narratives that incorporate anthropomorphic analogies place the non-human animal within the confines of the anthropocentric gaze rendering it a spectacle for human pleasure (Berger, 2009, p.26).

Changing the Narrative

In order to minimise the anthropocentric gaze of non-human animals depicted as the anthropomorphic others in wildlife documentaries, it is important to look at the influence of popular cultural representations of anthropomorphised non-human animals and why wildlife documentaries make implied references to these representations and how they may affect the public's perception of their existence in their natural habitat (Merskin, 2015). When dealing with a scenario in wildlife documentaries, it is often easier to incorporate established perceptions of a recognisable non-human animal rather than attempting to disseminate a new perspective.

> So some amount of anthropomorphism has been necessary for these inter-species relations to exist at all. It is also necessary for such relationships to thrive. What is needed, then, is a view between the rejection of, and the over indulgence in, anthropomorphism. Human beings need to learn new and different ways of relating with other animal beings as well (Mckenna, 2013, p.10).

We have come to accept these representations as real and the representations themselves have become void of meaning. The more we impose the anthropocentric gaze upon non-human animals and create hyperreal situations, the more meaning is lost (Baudrillard, 1994). The more we place ourselves at the centre of animal representations the focus becomes less on the non-human. An accurate representation of animals has been substituted for a simulation of the real, and the narration that is being constructed in wildlife documentaries commonly creates representations that parallel anthropomorphic cartoon characters. The researcher recognises the need for a 'narrative change 'in how non-human animals are represented on screen. However, this change must be done carefully to avoid creating further misinformation surrounding the animals. Timothy Treadwell, whose life and death is depicted in the documentary *Grizzly Man* (Herzog, 2005), is an example of how changing the narrative can result in more harm than progress.

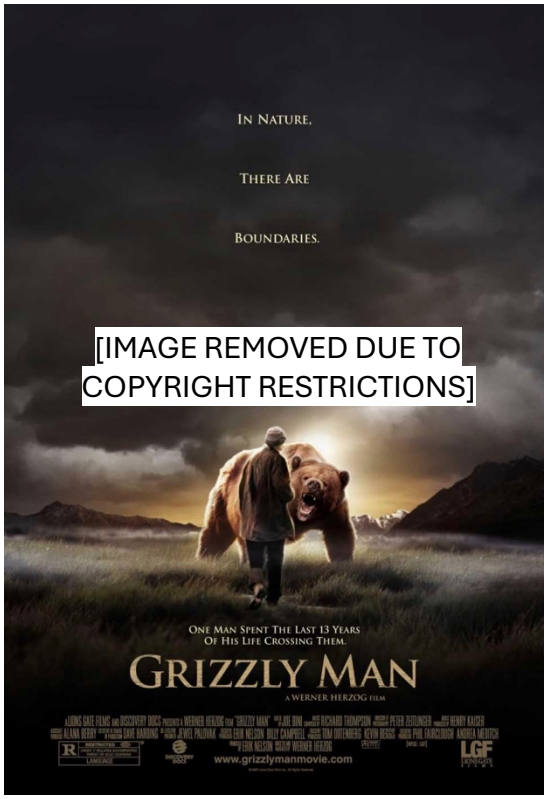

Figure 2.4 Werner Herzog, *Grizzly Man*, 2005. Distributed by Lionsgate and Lionsgate Films. Promotional poster for the film. Photo courtesy of IMDb.

Over the course of thirteen summers, Timothy Treadwell, lived among brown bears on the Alaskan coast, acting as a supposed advocate for the animals' wellbeing. Treadwell spent

hours filming himself with the bears trying to show the public that humans and bears can coexist. On the surface, Treadwell's actions seem justified as he claimed to be a voice for the bears, speaking for animals that could not do so themselves. Placing himself at the centre of his videos, Treadwell would attempt to communicate the bears' behaviour to his camera, recording his interactions with the animals and giving names to each one he encountered. Through the course of the *Grizzly Man* documentary, it became clear that Treadwell was intruding on the bears' space. The documentary shows footage taken by Treadwell interacting with several bears, often getting too close, close enough to pet them and play with bear cubs. In his attempts to blur the lines between human and bear, he presents and talks about the bears as if they are human, thus his representations are formed through an anthropocentric gaze.

Figure 2.5 Werner Herzog, *Grizzly Man*, 2005. Photos of Timothy Treadwell in front of a bear on the Alaska Peninsula. Screenshot.

In order to separate the image of bears from that of the anthropomorphic other, filmmakers and wildlife videographers must move away from the anthropocentric gaze and construct narratives that focus on scientific information rather than presenting the animal through literal anthropomorphism as a human parody.

> While anthropomorphism of NHAs (especially in children's programming) can be useful and bringing audiences closer to other animals and recognizes NHAs as persons who have emotions similar to human animals, it can risk misrepresenting other animal species and creating unrealistic expectations for how real animals should

> behave (especially to be attractive to humans). Therefore, content creators should be careful not to rely too heavily on formulaic, romanticized, cutesy approximations of other animals and attempt to more accurately capture the essence of their actual personalities behaviors. This will help us to accept and appreciate them on their own terms, whether they are similar to us or not (Freeman and Merskin, 2016, p.216).

The research suggests that the media should try to minimise the use of anthropomorphism in film, wildlife documentaries, and even in news reports and instead seek to convey representations that are more accurate in their storytelling. This case study has highlighted the anthropocentric gaze through which bears are continuously viewed and how they are portrayed as the anthropomorphic other. The research highlights bears' behaviour and social language that at times may seem to emulate human characteristics and how these features are emphasised through hyperreal images and narration in wildlife documentaries. By looking at the CAMS disciplines of power and domination between human and non-human animals (Merskin, 2016) and the use of language to objectify women (Mulvey, 1975), the case study reflects the anthropocentric gaze of the anthropomorphic other as objects of human pleasure mirroring human-like qualities. The objectified woman and the anthropomorphic other may be aligned as objects of man's desire to establish himself as the hierarchy above the other and control non-human agents (Epley, et al., 2007).

This case study has addressed the role of the narrator in wildlife documentaries and how the characteristics of bears are exaggerated to fit within the scope of the anthropocentric gaze by drawing comparisons of bear nature to human nature. This chapter has also considered the influence of pre and post-production editing methods in order to satisfy narratives that have been predetermined before filming. In order to deconstruct the anthropocentric gaze and the representation of bears as an anthropomorphic other, the researcher suggests that filmmakers and wildlife videographers must resist the depiction of bears and similar non-human animals as anthropomorphic human actors. In order to minimise the presence of the anthropocentric gaze, wildlife videographers should focus less on anthropomorphic tropes and more upon scientific information relating to bears and their social behaviour. Through practice-based research (see Chapter 5), the researcher will incorporate a dialogue that is based on information gathered during the filming process and through research into brown bears. The researcher recommends that the incorporation of such methods will allow the animal subject to be viewed outside of the scope of the anthropocentric gaze and alternatively more authentic representations of these apex predators may be created.

Practice-Based Research

Building on the methodological shifts explored in the previous case study, this installment of the research continues to challenge conventional representations of apex predators in wildlife media, specifically addressing the grizzly bear. While many wildlife documentaries depict the awe and terror, or anthropomorphic characteristics associated with these powerful animals, often through a lens of sensationalism, this film takes a more nuanced and observational approach. By immersing the viewer in the natural habitat of the grizzly bear, the research moves away from the common tropes of ‘dangerous predator ’and ‘majestic beast, ’or anthropomorphised ‘cuddly ’bear, and alternatively focuses on the raw, unfiltered realities of the animals ’behaviours during a critical period of survival. This approach aligns with the overarching aim of the research: to offer a more accurate, unmediated portrayal of apex predators that resists the tendency to project human narratives onto their lives. Through careful attention to detail and intentional filmmaking choices, the researcher creates space for a deeper understanding of the grizzly bear, highlighting its complexities beyond the confines of anthropocentric storytelling.

The film centres on grizzly bears from the Alaskan backcountry. Filming took place over the period of one week in the Katmai National Park and Preserve on the Southern Alaskan peninsula. Through an excursion with Gondwana Eco Tours, the researcher filmed brown bears during the annual salmon run at two separate locations, Brookes Falls Camp in the Katmai Nation Park and Preserve and a grassy costal area commonly known to the public as the area where environmentalist and bear enthusiast Timothy Treadwell spent the last thirteen summers of his life filming and living among the grizzly bears. Several different bears were filmed catching salmon during the trip to Brookes Falls Camp and the filming was carried out between July and August 2023. It is noted that while a filming permit is often required by someone seeking to film in an American national park, the researcher did not need to obtain a permit as filming was not for commercial or promotional reasons. During the filming process, the researcher used a separate recording device to capture real-time audio of the bears and their surroundings. This audio has been incorporated into the film in post-production as an attempt to move away from using ‘clean audio ’that excludes the noise created by film crews. This is an acknowledgement of the human’s presence in the animal’s environment. Additionally, the role of the human voice recorded in post-production is greatly minimised

and worded in such a manner as to prevent the use of language or narrative that may impose an anthropocentric discourse or anthropomorphise the bears documented, as examined in case study 2, *The Anthropomorphic Other*. The elimination of separate audio files that remove the constructed nature of documentary filmmaking and the reduction of the role of the human narrator in the film serves to deconstruct the notion that bears share common behavioural traits with humans and thus operates as a critique of typical anthropomorphic representations of the apex predators.

To achieve a more authentic and less biased representation of apex predators, the films intentionally challenge the conventions of wildlife documentaries, particularly those that rely on manipulative storytelling techniques. During the field research, the researcher became acquainted with a park ranger (who would like to remain anonymous) who had previously worked as a guide and consultant on the wildlife film, *Bears*. During our hike through Katmai National Park, we discussed the anthropocentric gaze and the false narratives imposed on non-human animals, the ranger revealed that the narrative played out in *Bears* is entirely false. In fact, during the filming process, one of the cubs died, which resulted in the production being paused. As a result, the cubs that you see throughout the film are not the same set. The ranger revealed that despite the death of one of the cubs, the production team was still determined to tell the story that they set out to tell, omitting any notion of violence or heartbreak (Kalof and Amthor, 2010) in favour of a hyperreal, literal ‘Disney’ version. The revelation that the bears represented on screen are not the same throughout highlights the commodification of non-human animals as tools of oppression in wildlife documentaries. The research not only critiques the portrayal of predators as monstrous or overly human-like but also reflects a deeper philosophical inquiry into the role of the filmmaker and their inherent influence on the subject. By employing observational techniques that minimise human interference, such as capturing raw ambient sound and removing human-centered narration, the filmmaker seeks to offer a representation that is closer to the animals' lived experiences. This approach fosters a more ethical and transparent engagement with the natural world, urging the audience to reconsider their preconceived notions about animals, especially apex predators. Moreover, the careful attention to the absence of anthropocentric elements challenges the dominant, exploitative modes of documentary filmmaking that often diminish the animals' agency and complexity. Through these methodological shifts, the films create space for a more respectful and holistic exploration of the animals' roles in the ecosystem.

Practice-based film: Bears

	Video Link: https://vimeo.com/897119245
	Password: AnthropomorphicOther

The informational film Bears focuses on brown bears and the role of the narrator in wildlife documentaries. The first clip is accompanied by what may be termed an anthropocentric narration where the vocabulary used relates to human experience. The narrator relates the bears to 'hard working fishermen 'and to their love for the fast-moving water to a jacuzzi. By minimising the anthropocentric gaze in the narration, the researcher is able to coherently convey information surrounding the bears and their behavioural patterns. The tone established in part two of this film is distinctly different from part one and reveals that the film footage captured reflects a crucial period of time for the bears in terms of their survival during the winter months. The absence of a musical score creates a space where the bears are able to exist in their natural setting instead of characters in a dramatic film production. These methods remove the anthropocentric representations of the bears that are notable in Scholey and Fothergill's *Bears* and commonly reiterated in the media.

The practice presented in this chapter articulates representations of bears and the narratives that influence them. The research suggests that media representations have had a significant influence on public perceptions of the apex predators that form the focus of this thesis, however, the methods of deconstruction and alternative approaches to filming outlined in this research suggest documentation can be approached more accurately to portray animals respectfully in the media (Litchfield, 2013). Society's fear of the unknown, the other, and the perceived disruption such unknown forces may have of human civility has contributed to the viewing of animals through an anthropomorphic gaze (Epley, et al., 2007, p.866), a phenomenon that is reinforced in wildlife documentaries (see case study 2), which commonly contain aspects from popular film, thus demonstrating a sense of Fordism where predictable

products are marketed to generate capital. Conforming to ‘what works ’and what is popular with viewers (Palmer, 2015) has undoubtedly influenced narratives in wildlife documentaries. This research has adopted a transparent process of documenting animals to substantiate the proposition that filmmakers should reject human centred representations and alternatively adopt more rigorous strategies and modes of thought that resist the hierarchical dynamics of the anthropocentric gaze and consequently improve viewers’ perception of non-human animals.

In conclusion, the research presented in this chapter offers a critical analysis of the portrayal of apex predators in wildlife documentaries, particularly focusing on the deconstruction of anthropocentric representations of bears. Through the adoption of more observational filmmaking techniques, the film challenges the conventional narratives that anthropomorphise animals or reduce them to symbols of fear and dominance. By eliminating the use of exaggerated post-production techniques, such as dramatic music and human-centered narration, the research fosters a more respectful and authentic engagement with the animals, allowing them to be seen as complex, independent beings within their natural environments. The shift away from anthropocentric discourse aims to subvert the reductive narratives imposed on these predators and instead offers a more accurate, holistic portrayal that respects their agency and role in the ecosystem. Ultimately, this work advocates for a more ethical approach to wildlife filmmaking, one that prioritises the lived experiences of animals over sensationalised storytelling, contributing to a broader cultural shift towards a more respectful and nuanced understanding of the non-human world.

The Companion Other

This case study considers cultural representations of the wolf in relation to the concept of 'the companion other'. The research acknowledges an integral link between wolves and dogs, dogs being direct descendants of wolves and thus essentially domesticated wolves. We commonly refer to dogs as being 'man's best friend': Perhaps this example of idiomatic language reveals something about the position of the animal. The domesticated dog has become synonymous with loyalty and companionship, a companion who is there to assist humans, a supplement to human existence. It may be suggested that the domesticated wolf (dog) has in part led to media narratives that may reflect the human's desire to connect with the wild non-human animal. This phenomenon elucidates the anthropocentric drive to understand and control other animals. Malamud suggests that the animal's journey and self is often overshadowed by the human's emotion and desire, rendering the animal simply an object for the human's personal growth (Malamud, 2010). The non-human animal's sense of freedom is presented as a "vicarious experience of our own sense of freedom, which we celebrate by bestowing (on our own terms) a modicum of freedom upon them" (Malamud, 2010). Audiences may attempt to connect with animals through films such as *Dances with Wolves* (Costner, 1990), and *Grizzly Man* (Herzog, 2005), though arguably remain more interested in the human story than in that of the animal; "such interaction is arguably just another way of harvesting something from the animal object" (Malamud, 2010, p.8). In *Dances with Wolves* (Costner, 1990) we see the wolf, Two Socks, used as a plot device to further the journey of the protagonist, John Dunbar, as he lets go of his Western ideals and begins to embrace the culture of the Native Americans. In the case study *The Monstrous Other* the shark was discussed in terms of monstrosity and the pervasive cultural representations that reinforce this perspective and in the case study *The Anthropomorphic Other* the bear is attributed human characteristics in order that it may be represented within the frame of human experience; however, cultural depictions of the wolf have the capacity to shift between wildness and the domestic animal. The wolf is commonly represented as either a wild animal or a common dog and thus exists within these different states of otherness. In Angela Carter's collection of fairy tales, *The Bloody Chamber*, the author combines postmodern self-awareness with the intensity of classic horror and fantasy fiction (2008). In Carter's *The Werewolf*, and *The Company of Wolves*, the wolf or wolves are representations of evil in a world playing into the cultural cliche of 'the big bad wolf.' However, in Carter's

story, *Wolf-Alice*, the wolves appear to take on a loving nature, similar to those in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1994). The wolf is both individual and part of a species of similar individuals taxonomically recognised in relation to their biotic and abiotic environment. Robisch suggests that the animal cannot be rendered but only represented to better or worse effect (2009). Cultural representations of the wolf are typically those of 'otherness 'presented in relation to the human; its identity is determined by how it is perceived by the human (Barker, 2004).

> The stories we tell, and live, are not about facts but our values, fears and hopes – all of which, to a certain degree, are malleable. Our narratives don't just reflect them, they also shape them. While anxiety about change is natural, Othering is not. Othering is socially and culturally constructed. So how do we respond to our collective anxiety today? Either we "bridge", reaching across to other groups and towards our inherent, shared humanity and connection, while recognising that we have differences; or we "break", pulling away from other groups and making it easier to tell and believe false stories of "us vs them", then supporting practices that dehumanise the "them" (Powell, 2017).

Western culture has been known to prioritise rationality, knowledge and power and in the pursuit of these ideals we separate ourselves from 'other animals' in the belief that we have dominance over them. Other animals (however heterogeneous that categorisation might be) are simply 'other', and deemed less important than humans (Birke, 2007). If the wolf is considered wild, then it is monstrous, if it becomes domesticated, then it is anthropomorphised; however, the researcher suggests that the wolf's otherness transcends the monstrous and the anthropomorphic to occupy a space where human and animal may meet.

This proposition will be considered in relation to the mainstream film *Dances with Wolves.* (Costner, 1990). While the film presents the wolf as vulnerable to domestication by the film's protagonist, it may also be suggested that the film places the wolf within the anthropocentric position of the 'companion other.' Of particular interest to the researcher is the suggestion that the film may demonstrate a balance in the representation of distance between human and non-human animals, a representational distance between species that is not crossed, but rather used as a 'meeting place 'where species temporarily coexist, observing each other's social behaviour and language.

Figure 3.1 Kevin Costner, *Dances with Wolves,* 1990. Distributed by Orion Pictures. Promotional poster for the film. Photo courtesy of IMDb.

The 1990 film *Dances with Wolves* is based on a historical-romance novel by Michael Blake (1988) and tells the story of a Civil War soldier posted to the frontier. During the course of the soldier's posting, he comes into contact with a tribe of buffalo-hunting Comanche Native Americans. The film's protagonist Lieutenant John Dunbar learns Comanche practices, becomes immersed in their culture, and consequently fights alongside them against the threats they face on the American plains. As a result of an injury he sustained during a Civil War battle in 1863, Dunbar is assigned to Fort Sedgewick as his new posting. After a series of unfortunate events, Dunbar's whereabouts become unknown to the Army, causing him to become completely isolated. In the course of several weeks, Dunbar becomes friends with a lone wolf whom he names Two Socks. While Two Socks 'presence in the film is sporadic and brief (appearing only once before the movie's intermission), the wolf's filmic representation shifts from wilderness to pseudo-domestication, becoming a companion to Dunbar.

The Companion

The wolf's first appearances in the film are depicted as threatening and therefore conform to cultural perceptions of the animal as a monstrous other and a threat to human supremacy, a threat to Dunbar in his isolation from Western civilisation. The researcher suggests that this threat is signified by the absence of the wolf's eyes. The animal is seen but does not see and therefore a human audience objectifies to the animal and renders it a presence lacking sentience.

> There cannot be just one companion species; there have to be at least two to make one. It is in the syntax; it is in the flesh. Dogs are about the inescapable, contradictory story of relationships – co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all. Historical specificity and contingent mutability rule all the way down, into nature and culture, into nature cultures. There is no foundation; there are only elephant's supporting elephants all the way down (Haraway, 2003, p.12).

Haraway's quotation articulates the complexity of the concept of companion species where historical and cultural knowledge of others influences the relation between species, whereas the ideal formation of companionship necessitates the absence of a pre-existing relationship. The researcher's interpretation of Haraway's companion species discourse suggests that prior knowledge of other species affects the formation of companion relationships and in the context of humans and their companion animals this is likely to result in an asymmetric relation of power; the companion and other (the other as a minority identity).

In its first appearance, the wolf is unchallenged and "resides at the still point of the turning world, master of its prospects, sovereign surveyor of the scene. In this initial exhilaration of self-possession, nothing threatens the occupancy of the self as focus of its visual kingdom" (Bryson, 1988, p.88). However, once the wolf falls within the gaze of Dunbar, the wolf becomes watched, an object of the anthropocentric gaze, the spectacle of another's sight (Bryson, 1988). However, the asymmetric gaze of the human is complicated by the film's cinematographic approach when we encounter a sustained image of the wolf's eyes.

Figure 3.2 Kevin Costner, *Dances with Wolves,* 1990. Kevin Costner's John Dunbar and the wolf Two Socks. Still screenshot from the film.

We are left to contemplate the potential of the animal's gaze and its potential affect upon Dunbar's anthropocentric position. "The self-possession of the viewing subject has built into it […] the principle of its own abolition: annihilation of the subject as center is a condition of the very moment of the look" (Bryson, 1988). It is at this moment in the film's narrative where the human and non-human may be said to exist in the same space. However, this implied space of equality is partially removed in Dunbar's act of naming the wolf Two Socks. In bestowing the wolf with a name Dunbar reevaluates the wolf as a wild agent and establishes a sense of control over it, in order to minimise potential future chaos (Epley, et al., 2007).

> It's natural that we associate language with such verbal intercourse. Unfortunately, this association has led many to assume that language is an exclusive attribute of our species—we, after all, are the only creatures that use words—and to conclude that all other organisms are entirely bereft of meaningful speech. It is an exceedingly self-serving assumption…Other animals, commonly possessed of senses far more acute than ours, may have much less need for a purely conventional set of signs to communicate with others of their species, or even to glean precise information from members of other species. (Abram, 2010, pp.166-167).

The name, Two Socks, is a reference to the animal's paws which are white, different in colour from the rest of the wolf's fur. This process of naming undertaken by the human anthropomorphises the wolf by linking its features to human clothing. Unlike cultural representations of bears which typically anthropomorphise the animal, the wolf in the context

of *Dances with Wolves* is not entirely anthropomorphised. The wolf is simultaneously a monstrous other and an anthropomorphic other, wild but also an ally to the human, a companion other.

> Companion animals can be horses, dogs, cats or a range of other beings willing to make the leap to the bio-sociality of service dogs, family members, or team members in cross species sports. Generally speaking, one does not eat one's companion animals (nor get eaten by them); and one has a hard time shaking colonialist, ethnocentric, ahistorical attitudes towards those who do (eat or get eaten) (Haraway, 2003, p.14).

The narrative of the wolf and its participation in human drama has been separated from ecological fact, and the wolf's position in the material world has been manipulated to satisfy human curiosity and need (Robisch, 2009). Two Socks is a wild animal, a predator animal capable of harming Dunbar. However, its wildness is reworked and minimised in *Dances with Wolves* in order to formulate a narrative of companionship between the human and non-human animal. The first iteration of the wolf in Costner's film is 'other', a potential agent of chaos similar to representations of sharks which commonly represent monstrousity and disorder in film and media genres. The first images of the wolf are of the animal alone wandering along the Great American Plains, seemingly stalking the film's protagonist, John Dunbar. In Jacques Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009), the wolf is often depicted as a ruthless and predatory figure, defined by unchecked aggression and brutality. It repeatedly serves as a symbol of fear, reflecting the violence that humans project onto each other (Derrida, 2009). The notion of the villainous lone predator is a human-derived concept, the big bad wolf. The oscillation between the wolf's animal and human forms in the fairytale *Little Red Riding Hood* appears to be echoed, be it subtly, in *Dances with Wolves*. When the wolf is first introduced, the wolf is the animal other, a threat to the human, however after a relationship between Dunbar and the wolf is formed (the naming of Two Socks), the anthropocentric gaze moves from a formation of the wolf as a monstrous other to that of an anthropomorphic other.

> Wild animals inhabit their own world, and when we pretend to be friends, we risk losing sight of the inalienable otherness of those animals. The otherness of wildlife goes along with their wildness and uncontrol- lability—it belongs to the essence of wild animals that they do not bother about our rules and considerations, but rather inhabit their own world. By pretending that we can befriend them, we are either fooling ourselves and we're overlooking the fact that wild animals cannot be controlled, or we smuggle away that in our relationship with them we are mostly interested in ourselves and that we are actually using them for our own desires and impose our will onto their wildness (Drenthen, 2016, p.197).

In *Dances with Wolves* viewers witness the shift from wild animal to companion other where the wolf's transition in the film more closely resembles a domesticated dog than a predator animal. The audience is narratively coerced into believing that a relationship between a human and an adult wolf is possible. This alliance between human and animal is reinforced by a fictive mirroring of the human/animal experience. Both Dunbar and Two Socks occupy a solitary position in the landscape: the lone human and the lone wolf. we are culturally familiar with the phrase 'wolf pack', however, the *Dances with Wolves* storyline necessitates the image of the lone wolf.

> Dogs are said to be the first domestic animals, displacing pigs for primal honors. Humanist technophiliacs depict domestication as the paradigmatic act of masculine, single-parent, self-birthing, whereby man makes himself repetitively as he invents (creates) his tools. The domestic animal is the epoch-changing tool, realizing human intention in the flesh, in a dogsbody version of onanism, Man took the (free) wolf and made the (servant) dog and so made civilization possible (Haraway, 2003, pp.27-28).

A pack of wolves cannot be domesticated, whereas the lone wolf under the gaze of anthropocentrism conforms to the ideology of the domesticated companion other. Haraway explains that in recent years accounts of domestication have been reworked to give "dogs (and other species) the first moves in domestication and then choreograph an unending dance of distributed and heterogeneous agencies" (2003, p.28). Haraway writes that:

> Histories of human migrations and exchanges, the nature of technology, the meanings of wildness, and the relations of colonizers and colonized suffuse these stories. Matters like judging whether my dog loves me, sorting out scales of intelligence among animals and between animals and humans, and deciding whether humans are the masters or the duped can hang on the outcome of a sober scientific report (2003, p.27).

Several interpretations suggest that dogs first emerged from opportunist wolves that took advantage of the presence of human to the point humans and dogs shaped and co-evolved alongside each other (Haraway, 2003, p.29). Drenthen writes that "Wild animals live in their own world, and any attempt to bridge the gap between their world and ours through friendship is not just based on an illusion, but all too easily turns into a disrespectful denial of individuality and wildness of the animal" (Drenthen, 2016, p.201). While dogs and humans may have evolved alongside each other to form a bond known as 'man's best friend', wolves continue to sit outside the scope of companionship. Indeed, one cannot simply

domesticate a wild wolf, as this pattern of behaviour is not consistent with wolves 'natural behaviour. The wolf within *Dances with Wolves* is arguably a characteriseded representation of the animal's identity that captures the wolf within the restrictive gaze of the human implying the animal wants and has chosen this courtship of companionship, likened to that of a modern-day domesticated dog. The wolf's rank as an apex predator is systematically lost within an anthropocentric gaze that relegates its position to that of a companion rather than a wild animal whose existence should be noted with caution and respect.

> Film tends to suggest that the look ought to say something particular. Film tends to suggest that the look is a different kind of contact, one determined by the particular nature and constraints of human-animal relations. The look need not necessarily communicate anything as such but sets in play a chain of effects that reflects at the very least some form of shared understanding of context between human and animal (Burt, 2002, p.40).

The anthropocentric gaze marginalises Two Socks in the wolf's designation as a subsidiary companion to Dunbar, never fully at the centre of the story but rather depicted as a dog-like companion moving alongside him in 'his' world. The title of the film, *Dances with Wolves*, is a reference to Dunbar and his companionship with the wolf; the wolf being the object of the anthropocentric gaze. The film is not about a particular 'dance' that wolves engage in, but rather the metaphorical 'dance' that Dunbar enacts when he comes face-to-face with the perceived 'other' (Malamud, 2010). The wolf is therefore almost a prosaic feature of the human hero's journey of self-discovery and growth. A parallel may be observed in the limitations of Dunbar's attempt to 'become' an American Indian and the companionship between journey Dunbar and Two Socks' journey. Just as Dunbar's whiteness differentiates him from the American Indian tribe, 'Two Socks' wildness differentiates the wolf from Dunbar's humanness.

> Until about four hundred years ago the wolf was second only to man as the most successful and widespread mammal in North America. There is extensive evidence to show that far from being at enmity, the wolf and hunting man enjoyed globally something approaching symbiosis, whereby the existence of each benefited the existence of the other (Mowat, 1963, p.vi-vii).

Mowat's designation of the wolf as secondary to man affirms the perspective that, in the context of *Dances with Wolves*, the companion wolf is a supplement to the human story. There are many narratives relating humans and wolves that attest to the complexity of a potential companionship between these species. Mazis writes that the close proximity of

wolves to humans and their homesteads was viewed as a system of warning for humans with respect to approaching adversaries. These warnings were attributes to the wolves 'sensory hearing and communication by howling. In this context the wolf's animal characteristics were valued. (2011). "The wolf became an object of veneration for many Native Americans in North America due to its loyalty and affection for its family (pack), its skill as a hunter, and its role in culling weak, sick, and decrepit prey" (Busch, 2007, quoted in Mazis, 2011, p.8). However, the wolf in *Dances with Wolves* is not depicted as a hunter and it is represented as being estranged from its pack. The film eliminates all outside influences in order that the wolf may occupy its position as other to Dunbar. The wolf never fully crosses the intangible boundary into Dunbar's world. The wolf displays a hesitancy to its potential domestication by the human subject. Media images reveal that many animals enter human territories, either out of curiosity or the need for survival (for example bears have been documented entering homes in urban areas to acquire food). However, documentation suggests that non-human animals do not desire companionship but typically enter human spaces out of necessity.

Meeting in a Common Place

While aspects of the film *Dances with Wolves* are problematic when dealing with the concept of the 'companion other', there is potential to expand upon the potential for a meeting place for different species. In the film the 'being 'of the wolf is unarticulated whereas Dunbar's narrative and Two Socks' relation to the human protagonist is central. This anthropocentric perspective may reflect most mainstream media representations of animals, specifically the apex predator. It is perhaps important to acknowledge that while humans may attempt to understand the wolf, Dunbar can never fully comprehend the wolf's perspective, being arguably character and removed from his animal origins. Despite Dunbar's anthropomorphisation of the wolf, both humans and wolves maintain a distance from one another throughout the film. Dunbar does not become a wolf and Two Socks does not become a human.

In CAMS, the anthropomorphic gaze is used by humans to interpret and make sense of non-human animals, often characterise human understanding over the animals themselves. This gaze creates representations of animals, which can range from the 'monstrous other 'to the more ambiguous 'companion other.' The concept of companionship is integral to this dynamic, suggesting a relationship characterised by mutual interaction and emotional

bonding. While the phrase ‘companion animal’ is typically associated with domesticated species, such as dogs or cats, it can extend beyond domesticated animals to encompass a broader, more inclusive understanding of human-animal relationships. Companion animals offer emotional support, comfort, and even therapeutic benefits, and the bond between humans and animals is often marked by affection and mutual care. Leslie Irvine (2004) examines the idea of “connection” between human and non-human animals based on certain preferred characteristics desired by human individuals seeking a pet at a shelter. Irvine writes:

> [T]he most important aspect of our relationship with companion animals is neither behavior nor appearance. All adopters talked about feelings of “connection” with the animal. [Clients] listed it among other qualities; they would not fall head over heels in love with an animal who was not “right” for them, but once they found a dog or cat who met their criteria, they, too, spoke of a “connection” with the animal. The smitten, in contrast, felt the “connection: from the start (Irvine, 2004, p.106).

Irvine demonstrates that human desire to see connection is inherent on non-human qualities we find desirable. While many might not see companionship with a shark, wolves display physical and social characteristics that appeal to the humans. People gravitate towards non-human animal companionship as a way to satisfy explores the emotional, psychological, and ethical aspects of these bonds, offering a rich understanding of the motivations behind human-animal companionship (Irvine, 2004). These relationships attempt to speak to the positive aspects of companionship, where animals offer comfort, emotional support, and a sense of partnership in regards to domesticated animals

Companionship is not just about domesticated animals but can refer to the interactions and emotional bonds humans form with animals outside of traditional domestic settings. In fact, some animals in the wild or in semi-wild environments can forge meaningful relationships with humans. These animals, whether through mutual respect or curiosity, can provide a sense of connection and companionship that goes beyond ownership or control (Irvine, 2004). For example, some animals in the wild have been known to approach humans out of a sense of trust or social bonding, showing that companionship does not have to be confined to domestication. These bonds offer opportunities for cross-species connections that transcend human ownership, highlighting a more egalitarian aspect of companionship (Cudworth and Jensen, 2016). However, the positive aspects of companionship can be complicated by the

human desire to enforce power and dominance on the non-human animal imposing the anthropocentric gaze.

> A natural and useful consequence of our socially constructed understanding of the dog's mind is that we regularly find ourselves in situations that make it necessary, convenient, or intrinsically rewarding for us to give voice to what we "know" to be the dog's subjective experience (Arluke and Sanders, 1996, p.78).

While non-human animals provide comfort and support to humans, the relationships can sometimes reflect imbalances of power, with humans in control of the animal's environment and needs. Regardless of whether our "construction of the dog's mind" is "true", the problem lies with fact that we are usually creating a dialogue with ourselves often oblivious to what the animal is experiencing (Arluke and Sanders, 1996). Arnold Arluke and Clinton R. Sanders write that "the accuracy of our understanding of the other – human or nonhuman – is grounded primarily on our sense of his or her body and behaviour. The validity of this understanding is confirmed or denied by its practical outcome" (1996, p.79). While the use of dialogue can benefit the human in understanding its non-human animal companion, hierarchy of language often creates a power imbalance with the human asserting dominance over the non-human animal (reflected films and wildlife documentaries) resulting in misrepresentation and misunderstanding by the human viewer. This does not mean that we should not attempt to understand our non-human animal companions, rather if a non-human animal is considered a companion, then society should attempt to resist the assumed position of cognitive superiority.

Figure 3.3 Kevin Costner, *Dances with Wolves*, 1990. Dunbar and Two Socks within each other's respected space. Photo courtesy of IMDb.

> Social scientists tend to take a linguacentric stance in their attempt to understand social interactions and the presumes "inner dialogue" that constitutes "mind." This privileging of language frequently is used to deny that nonhuman animals engage in minded behaviour. We would maintain, as do the cognitive ethologists and many other analysts of animal behaviour, that language is overrated as the primary vehicle of cognition and coordinated social interaction… so the view of dogs and other animal companions as mindless and uncommunicative is a social construction. The presumption that language is essential for an actor to experience empathy with others, construct viable lines of collective action, and engage in cognitive activities is, at best, debatable (Arluke and Sanders, 1996, p.79).

Indeed, the human ability of language does not justify our superiority and the non-human animals lack of language does not signify their lack of social cognition (Arluke and Sanders, 1996). The relationship between humans and companion others is often complicated by the humans need to impose power or domestication on non-human animals. In film and wildlife documentaries, this is seen through the treatment of the animal as a lesser other. The non-human animal becomes a tool or commodity used to fulfil human needs, whether it be for food, labour, or protection. Haraway critiques this view, suggesting that domestication, particularly of dogs, symbolises human control and the desire to shape both the world and oneself. She argues that the domestication of the dog, in particular, represents an important cultural shift, one that both reflects and reinforces the idea of human agency, progress, and civilisation (2003). While the domesticated dog offers companionship, it also highlights the tension between control and affection, as the animal's role in human life is shaped by human desires and needs. Despite these complications, companionship remains a profound and valuable aspect of human-animal relationships. The bond between humans and animals—whether domesticated or not – reflects the potential for deep emotional connections that can be nurturing and transformative (Arluke and Sanders, 1996). These relationships can offer both psychological and emotional benefits, with animals providing comfort, companionship, and even healing. The positive aspects of companionship underscore the importance of mutual care and respect, where the animal is not just a tool for human use but a partner in a shared, emotional experience.

While companionship offers a powerful and positive framework for understanding human-animal relationships, it is not without its challenges. The bond between humans and animals can be deeply fulfilling and enriching, offering emotional support and connection, but it is also influenced by the historical and social contexts in which it is situated. Whether domesticated or wild, the companionship between humans and animals represents a complex,

evolving relationship that is shaped by both affection and the inherent power dynamics between species. To truly understand and embrace the positive potential of companionship, we must acknowledge and address the ethical concerns that accompany it, ensuring that our relationships with animals are rooted in respect, empathy, and mutual care (Arluke and Sanders, 1996). The term *wolf* is not used reductively but a as term sufficient to recognise the boundaries of a species, like the term human (Robisch, 2009). This boundary is not necessarily drawn or spoken but its rather one of understanding. In John Berger's *Here is Where We Meet* (2005), the past invades the present as the writer describes his encounters with the dead in a common place of meeting. Here the dead mingle with the living and the living talk to the dead. However, at no point do the dead cross the threshold of the living nor do the living enter the realm of the dead, they come together in a common place, a place they both inhabit but with boundaries that are respected by both. (Berger, 2005).

> The degree to which humans and animals are alienated from each other is sometimes gauged by the extent to which some form of mutual communication is or is not possible. This is an echo of the commonplace that it is the capacity for language that marks the difference between human and animal. Communication by the look, however, has a different set of implications because it can be seen to be more primal and perhaps also telepathic (Burt, 2002, p.41).

There is a possibility that we may not be able to interpret the expression on the non-human animal's face, so it would not be possible for a communicator to establish communication through looking into their eyes, but rather by occupying a common space together in mutual respect and understanding (Burt, 2002, p.41). This idea of meeting in a common place of respected boundaries is suggested in the distanced meeting of wolf and human in *Dances with Wolves*. The wolf as companion in *Dances with Wolves* is positioned as secondary and arguably lesser than the human subject. However, Donna Haraway in her paper *Companion Species* suggests that the concept of companion species is about: "Living with animals, inhabiting their/our stories, trying to tell the truth about relationship, co-habiting an active history" (Haraway, 2003, p.20). If companionable relationship with wild animals is possible, then the otherness and unruliness of such animals will have to be given an articulable place in our anthropocentrically driven representational system (Drenthen, 2016). The analysis of *Dances with Wolves* suggests that we need to find authentic systems of representation that, as Haraway suggests, establish elegant and graceful ways to deal with our relationships with animals that include a space for the significant otherness of animals (Haraway, 2008). The

researcher suggests that cultural representations of and subsequent interactions with wild animals may necessitate a companionable distance.

> In this age of the Anthropocene, in which the wild and the human are no longer neatly separated, we will have to be prepared to enter into a negotiation process in which we both recognize the wolf's agency and accept that its interest can conflict with ours. From the perspective of wolf management, the resurgence of the wolf confronts us with our desire for control, not only control over nature, but also control over nature within us. We cannot but play an active role in organizing our relation with the wolf; we need to find an appropriate habitus that allows us to live together, and that will require some degree of management and control (Drenthen, 2016, p.201).

When entering an animal's habitat, the animal becomes subjected to the gaze of the human. It is at this place that humans and animals typically meet, usually via film. However, the human does not occupy the central position in an animal's existence, therefore it may be suggested that in order to establish 'a meeting place 'for species the animal should not be subjected to an anthropocentric gaze, whether in a lived experience or when represented in film or in wildlife documentaries. In the world of *Dances with Wolves*, Dunbar is placed clearly at the centre of the movie's narrative. While the film's title alludes to the presence of wolves or a wolf in the film, the wolf is an object inhabiting the gaze of Dunbar and the viewer. Norman Bryson writes that "the viewing subject does not stand at the center of a perceptual horizon, and cannot command the chains and series of signifiers passing across the visual domain. Vision unfolds to the side of, and in tangent to, the field of the other" (1988, p.94). Indeed, while Dunbar, the film's central character and Costner's hero protagonist, may be perceived as being at the centre of his environment (an anthropocentric position), he is in fact a guest in the land of the Native American and of the wolf.

> To hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem: all of that is tied to polite greeting, to constituting the polis, where and when species meet. To knot companion and species together in encounter, in regard and respect, is to enter the world of becoming with, where *who and what are* is precisely what is at stake (Haraway, 2008, p.19).

Haraway highlights the importance of further and deeper critical examination of how our social practices and institutions construct certain groups as valuable while positioning others as subordinate. The way that we interact with non-human animals creates the meaning, understanding and experiences we have with non-human animals (Haraway, 2008). Haraway emphasises the creating of kinship though touch in order to further understand the non-human animal and gain more worldly understanding (2008). The idea of creating kinship to create

understand is seen in the anthropocentric presentation of non-human animals as the 'companion other.' In *Dances with Wolves*, the viewer is led to believe that while the wolf and the human are inherently connected by an unspoken companionship that itself is a reflection of the relationship between man and a domesticated dog; this theme is made apparent through the structure of the storytelling and the image of the wolf presented. This theme is carried over in the production of wildlife documentaries. However, it is not kinship that should be sought out in media representations of non-human animals but more so a level of understanding for one another while being aware of the non-human animals presence and the place we hold in that space.

Figure 3. 4 Kevin Costner, *Dances with Wolves*, 1990. Two Sock close up on the eyes. Photo courtesy of IMDb.

While a human/wolf companionship may not be specifically reflected in wildlife documentaries, it is implied through the incorporation of several close-up shots of the non-human animal, suggesting intimacy between the wolf and the human viewer. In relation to the representation of wolves in wildlife documentaries, an anthropomorphic gesture is often attained through the filming of a wolf's eyes. The gaze of the wolf into the lens of videographers is disseminated to the viewing community to create the illusion of an effective bond between the human viewer and the animal.

> [To] gaze implies more than to look at - it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze (Schroeder 1998, p.208).

The non-human animal no longer appears to be enacting natural patterns of behaviour but is believed to be acting and performing as a result of human presence, thus reducing the non-human animal to a spectacle for the anthropocentric gaze. This connection of gaze between viewer and animal object produces a false sense of connection between the human and non-

human animal and creates the illusion that the distance between the human and non-human animal has been lessened. The intimacy created through the gaze of the animal in film and documentary representations is usually attained by a zoom lens with technological capacity to reduce the physical space between the human and animal, creating a hyperreal depiction of the relation between species. The illusory sense of companionship created through this gaze produces “the problem that follows from the differences between humans and animals, and does not try to take away these differences” (Drenthen, 2016, p.200). Drenthen extends his observation to suggest that we must give animals “a place, even if that means that he has to keep distance from the animal for which he feels affection and admiration” (2016, p.200). The place that Drenthen articulates is the ‘common place ’where human and animal can meet. Akin to Dunbar’s distance from the wolf in *Dances with Wolves*, it is a meeting place where neither subject occupies the others’ space. Relationships of mutual understanding between humans and animals can and do exist. This is evident in relation to companion animals and domestic animals, where each enjoys the others company within the same environment. However, this is not a bond we should strive for with wild animals. Humans may appreciate the “warm feelings of benevolence towards wildlife, even admire wild animals for what they are and how they are different from us, but a wild animal is not really interested in us but only in how we might matter to it” (Drenthen, 2016, p.201). The researcher suggests that wildlife filmmakers should not seek to create a connection with wild animals while filming or construct narratives where a bond between viewer and subject appears to have formed and alternatively, use forms that force the human to adjust their composure when entering the space of an animal and challenge the human to become aware of the space they hold among non-human animals. The theory of 'becoming an animal' provides structure for the concept of this method.

> To become animal […and] participate in movement, to stake out a path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs (Bruns, 2007, p.704).

The concept of becoming-animal, developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, describes a process in which a subject moves away from fixed identity and stable categories, entering instead a state of fluidity and indeterminacy. In this transformation, identity becomes less defined and more collective or shifting, operating in a nomadic way that follows a ‘rhizomatic structure’ rather than a rigid, hierarchical one. This

suggests that in order to deconstruct the anthropocentric gaze, videographers, filmmakers and viewers, should attempt to move beyond the stability of human centrality toward an ambiguous position, becoming-animal as a method to understand the animal and resist the objectifying gaze of the human. Haraway's idea of *becoming with* focuses on building a kindship or understanding with the non-human animals we encounter (2008) while Deleuze and Guattari's connecpt of becoming animal centres on the experience of adopting non-human animal traits can help us to understand what it means to be human and non-human animal (2017). While both notions of 'becoming' see to build an understanding of the human/non-human relationship, we ultimately should not seek companionship when filming animals, but rather enter their environments with caution and capture footage that reflects the distance and respect between the human and the non-human animal. Wildlife filmmakers are often compelled to create a connection between the viewer and the animal being filmed. However, by removing the anthropocentric gaze and presenting the wolf as different from the human a more authentic representation may be established.

This case study has considered an anthropocentric gaze that positions the wolf in companionship with the human, a position reflective of the relational bond between humans and domesticated dogs. The film *Dances with Wolves* perpetuates the notion that, similar to a companion dog, wolves seek the companionship of humans. The representation of the wolf in the film shifts from the monstrous other to the anthropomorphic other as a species that seeks the companionship from the human (Haraway, 2003). The link between hyperreal representations of animals in fiction films and the techniques used in contemporary wildlife documentaries is seen through filmmaker's and videographer's tendency to sensationalise animal identities and capture them within the restrictive scope of the anthropocentric gaze. While *Dances with Wolves* sensationalises the wolf by suggesting its desire for companionship with the film's protagonist, John Dunbar, wildlife documentaries also rely on hyperrealist representations of non-human animals that invite the viewer into a paradigm of companionship through illusory intimacy, close encounters, and close-up documentation. In order to shift the anthropocentric representation of the wolf from the companion other (aligned with the domestic dog), the researcher suggests that filmmakers and wildlife videographers could focus on filming the animal in a space where human and non-human animals may meet, observing each other without being subject to the false intimacy of the anthropocentric gaze which presumes a connection between the human/wolf and human/dog

relationship (Malamud, 2010). Through deconstructing the anthropocentric gaze it may be possible to represent non-human animals more accurately.

> Remind viewers that humans too are animals and naturally share many traits. It is helpful any time programming can deconstruct the dichotomies that falsely separate humans from animals and nature from culture, reuniting us instead. To embrace multiculturalism, entertainment programming can serve as ethnography, teaching us about other animal cultures. This call for increased respect and understanding for other animals species is akin to all social justice movements asking for respectful relations among different human groups (Freeman and Merskin, 2016, p.216).

Rather than force power and dominance over the non-human animal, media should strive to respect and make note of non-human animals' individuality not only in how we tell their stories but also in how we capture them. It is perhaps in John Berger's *Here is Where We Meet* (2005), where a common place of meeting is established, that we find a significant approach to the process of documenting and representing the three apex predators discussed in this thesis. Berger's 'mingling 'of the dead and the living where they never enter each other's realm offers the research a method with which to enact the process of documentation, a meeting place for the human and the non-human animal. It is an acknowledgement that both videographer and animal are occupying a space between species.

> [E]thnographers are encouraged to recognize the central role they play as participants in the setting and to attend more closely to the emotional and self-shaping aspects of the research experience (Arluke and Sanders, 1996, p.26)

Bruns suggests that if filmmakers respect the invisible barrier between human and non-human animals, they allow themselves a better understanding of the animals' behavioural patterns and environment (Bruns, 2007) by shifting their filming position to the physical level of the animal. The researcher suggests that understanding is not produced through the fabrication of false intimacy (close-up shots, anthropomorphic narratives, etc.) (Bousé, 2003), but rather through simple methods of filming that gesture towards a non-hierarchical representation (becoming an animal). For example, changing the camera's position (the viewer's position) to the physical level of the animal may infer an equality of viewing. In the practice-based research, the researcher will use methods of lowering the camera's angle to the eye-level of the wolf and will resist the use of long lens zoom technology. It is proposed that the use a of standard length zoom lens will demonstrate the distance maintained between the human and the non-human animal, a distance that reflects Berger's meeting place.

Practice-Based Research

The research extends beyond the examination of apex predators in wild environments to consider the role of human intervention in shaping the behaviours and identities of these animals. In this instance, the focus shifts to wolves, a species often associated with both wildness and domestication. By exploring the dynamic between wolves and their human caretakers at a sanctuary, the researcher seeks to explore the complex continuum between wildness and domestication, considering the varying degrees of human influence on these animals. The sanctuary environment, where wolves are rescued from different backgrounds and forced to live in captivity, offers a unique lens through which to view the animals ' adaptation to human proximity. This context provides an opportunity to assess the physical and behavioural transformation that occurs when wolves are brought into close contact with humans, raising important questions about the ethical implications of domestication and the distinction between companion animals and their wild counterparts. Through this exploration, the research investigates the broader implications of captivity and human interaction on the identities of apex predators through practice-based research.

The film focuses on the wolves at Wolf Mountain Sanctuary in the Lucerne Valley in California and the California Wolf Center in Julian, California. While excursions to film wolves proved difficult for the researcher due to limited access, the documentation process was undertaken during two visits to the sanctuary. The sanctuary rescues wolves from the movie industry, private owners and from breeders. They currently care for eight wolves. The Wolf Mountain Sanctuary is one of the few sanctuaries where visitors can closely observe wolves via viewing areas, while also being able to interact with wolves that have essentially been domesticated. Native American sanctuary owner, Tonya Littlewolf, believes that the wolves will be in captivity for the remainder of their lives, thus they will have ongoing human contact from their caretakers. During the filming process, the researcher was granted access to two different wolves; one that has been conditioned to interact with humans and lives essentially as a domesticated pet and another that is kept in a separate enclosure, due to its wilder temperament and thus was approached with caution. The filming of the two wolves demonstrated the difference between a wolf that has been colonised by humans and one that maintains the space between animal and human as outlined in case study 3, *The Companion Other*. However, the researcher was unable to capture many videos due to Tonya Littlewolf's personal mistrust of the media. As Littlewolf informed me, she was in an ongoing legal battle

with the producers of the film series, *Twilight*, after they used the likeness of her wolves for the films without her knowledge. Regardless, the field research was still able to test the methods on approaching non-human animals while filming in their habitat.

The researcher's approach to the filming process mirrors the thematic exploration of the animal-human relationship, particularly in the context of domestication and wildness. The decision to focus on wolves at the sanctuary provides a unique opportunity to examine the complexities of animal behavior in both controlled and more natural environments. By filming two wolves with contrasting levels of human interaction, the research underscores the diverse ways in which animals are shaped by their proximity to human influence. While one wolf exhibited domesticated behaviour, reflecting the process of human colonisation, the other retained a more distant and untamed essence, revealing the tension between captivity and wildness. This juxtaposition emphasises the importance of understanding animals on their own terms, rather than as mere extensions of human needs or desires. By documenting these wolves, the researcher seeks to complicate the notion of domestication and to challenge the simplistic binaries often imposed on animals in media representations, thus continuing the critique of anthropocentric portrayals.

Several close-up shots were captured as a result of the researcher being permitted to interact with the domesticated wolf, however, significantly the footage captured when granted access to the other wolf's enclosure includes no close-up documentation. In order enter the enclosure of the second wolf, the researcher was required to lower their stance to a crouching position and remain quiet and relatively still for the entire process. This lowering of oneself to the level of the animal is reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming animal; a form of deterritorialisation, or un-humaning of the human (2017).

The researcher also visited the California Wolf Center in Julian. This property differed from Littlewolf's in that it is used for breeding North American and Mexican gray wolves to one day be released into the wild and grow the overall population. The decision to visit this location was made later because of the limitation placed on the researcher by Littlewolf. However, unlike the Wolf Mountain Sanctuary, the researcher was not able to cross the fencing into the wolves' habitat. The wolves at the California Wolf Center are bred specifically with the hopes of one day being released into the wild and to help increase the population of gray wolves. The researcher respected the restriction of not entering the fencing

to film the wolves and was able to carry out the field research behind the fencing. Even from behind the fencing, the researcher still kept a low stance and avoided eye contact or communication with the wolves while filming. This is reflected in the video, where it is apparent that the view of the lens is at a low and distant position.

The representation of the domesticated wolf and the wild wolves in this film attempts to deconstruct the anthropocentric gaze that typically presents wolves as potential companions to humans through the dichotomies of apex predator and domesticated wolf. The gesture of lowering the researcher's body to a more animal-like stance is adopted as a method to literally alter the gaze of the human from a dominant, 'gods-eye 'view to a level where the gaze of human and animal may meet.

Practice-based film: Wolves

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2"> 
</td><td>Video Link: https://vimeo.com/1083267681</td></tr>
<tr><td>Password: CompanionOther</td></tr>
</table>

In the researcher's documentation of wolves, we may observe the 'colonising' of the animal world by the human. We see a wolf wearing a collar attached to a leash, an image we typically associate with domestic animals, we also observe several cages within the film suggesting the human's desire the enclose and control the wildness of the wolf species. The wolves in the video are caged as a result of their previous rescue by the sanctuary owner. Many of the wolves were previously film 'actors' living in inadequacy conditions. The current living conditions are a result of their previous treatment as many of them have been or are unable to survive on their own, ruling out any possibility for future release. However, the wolves previous use in the film industry affirms a pervasive anthropocentric attitude that subsumes all species into human society. One of the aspects explored in this film is the iconic image of the wolf's eyes in the film *Dances With Wolves.* The researcher suggests that the zoom lens technology used to capture the wolf's gaze is a hyperreal gesture that constructs an

illusory alliance between apex predator and human, conversely, when we ‘zoom out ’we see the non-human animal as a different species. Although this difference may be perceived as other it is also a representation that suggests resistance to the anthropomorphic domestication of the wolf, under the control of the human.

In conclusion, this exploration of wolves at Wolf Mountain Sanctuary provides critical insights into the complexities of domestication, captivity, and the animal-human relationship. By documenting the contrasting behaviours of wolves conditioned to human interaction and those maintaining a more wild essence, the researcher challenges the dominant anthropocentric portrayal of wolves in popular media. The intentional deconstruction of these binaries -wild versus domesticated, predator versus companion - offers a more nuanced understanding of the animals ’true nature, free from human-imposed narratives. The film's focus on visual techniques, such as the physical act of lowering the researcher’s body to the animal's level, further emphasises the need to reshape the human-animal gaze, allowing for a more respectful, balanced exchange. Ultimately, this research invites viewers to reconsider the way we define and perceive apex predators, urging a move beyond simplistic, anthropocentric representations to recognise the complexity and autonomy of the animals themselves. Through this practice-based research, the researcher advocates for a shift in how animals are portrayed, challenging the traditional power dynamics that often overshadow their lived experiences.

Conclusion

Within this thesis the researcher has identified and analysed three different anthropocentric gazes through which non-human animals have been represented, specifically apex predators. The researcher has extended the concept of the human gaze, outlined by Malamud, to consider three iterations of anthropocentric representation: The Monstrous Other, The Anthropomorphic Other and The Companion Other. Malamud suggests that through the human gaze animals, like women and other oppressed groups highlighted in CAMS (Merskin, 2016), are objectified (2010). The researcher has responded to Malumud's observation by drawing comparisons between the Critical Animal Media Studies argument that historically oppressed groups (Merskin, 2016) and objectified non-human animals in film and wildlife documentaries hold similarities. The animals we see on screen are 'products' that have been shaped and formed through the anthropocentric gaze. The research focuses on the use of CAMS as a method to deconstruct representations of non-human animals. By analysing the influence of popular culture, the research suggests that hyperrealistic, non-human animal representations in mainstream films have permeated the genre of the wildlife documentary and imposed human power and dominance over the non-human animal. As a consequence, viewers are led to believe that representations of animals in wildlife documentaries are accurate depictions of the animal being depicted thus effecting the way humans think about and interact with non-human animals.

The allusion to truth in the documentary genre results in over-dramatised representations of non-human animals being accepted as factual. I am not only a researcher but also a practitioner who has used this research to deconstruct and shape methods of film practice. I acknowledge that there was a time when I was seduced by the high-definition glow of hyperreal representations and anthropocentric frameworks that glamorized non-human animals as exotic others. However, this research has facilitated a practice of critique and self-reflection by allowing me to examine my practice through a deconstructive lens and question how certain representations can have a negative impact on non-human animals and societal understanding. Those who are part of a dominant group rarely observe the structure of oppression because they are not affected by it, and because they probably benefit from the oppression in some way. It is evident that through providing tools for deconstruction and criticality, we can shift our perceptions to improve future research and practice methods. By

highlighting instances of human-driven representation, this research has focused on developing an awareness of the anthropocentric gaze and deconstructing its illusory language within wildlife documentaries. Through research and analysis of anthropocentric modes of looking and representing, the research has highlighted three possible manifestations of the anthropocentric gaze through the examination of three apex predators (sharks, bears, and wolves), considering how each are depicted differently as the animal 'other'; as either monstrous, anthropomorphic or companion. This research contributes to the field of Critical Animal Media Studies by offering a focused critique of how apex predators, specifically sharks, bears, and wolves, are represented in film and wildlife documentaries. CAMS is concerned with how media constructs animal subjectivity, reinforces species hierarchies, and contributes to the cultural normalisation of speciesism. By combining a constructivist methodology with theoretical frameworks from deconstruction (Derrida), hyperreality (Baudrillard), performativity (Butler), feminist theory and CAS, this research has interrogated the anthropocentric gaze, a phenomenon that undoubtedly dominates wildlife representations in media. Unlike the majority of CAMS research that typically focuses on domestic or agricultural animal representations, this research centres on apex predators, where extreme depictions in popular media shifts between wonder and fear. Ultimately, this research expands the scope of CAMS by addressing how wildlife documentaries, often assumed to be a neutral or educational medium, are in fact sites of ideological construction that actively shape public perception, attitudes, and human-animal relations.

Injustice is often embedded in the assumptions, practices, and ubiquity of representation in daily life. Challenging oppression requires more than changing practice or law, it requires rethinking and reconstructing the reality we take for granted. Feminist and critical animal theorists aim to reveal and disrupt these constructions of reality to create more equitable systems. Through the three iterations of Monstrous, Anthropomorphic and Companion Others, in combination with aspects of CAS and CAMS discussion on the power imbalance between humans and non-human animals, the research has contemplated the parallel between representations of women and non-human animal representations with a focus of the monstrous other, the mockery, domestication and control of non-human animals as anthropomorphic representational gestures and acts of power, and the companion other as a complex relation between species. The three iterations of the non-human animal other proffered in this research contribute to the broader framework of CAMS by providing representations and terminology that can be applied to the deconstruction of non-human

animal representations. In order to perform and demonstrate the deconstruction of the anthropocentric gaze, these representations (Monstrous, Anthropomorphic and Companion) were applied to filmmaking carried out in the research and practice process, the culmination of which resulted in three documentary/information films. While the films are not high production (each film was funded and filmed by the researcher), they serve to elucidate the tropes of otherness that are routinely applied in the representation of non-human animals.

The research includes a practice-based component, culminating in a set of recommendations for wildlife videographers that challenge the conventional anthropocentric gaze and its influence on production techniques. This contribution provides a tangible link between theory and practice, offering actionable pathways for resisting reductive portrayals and promoting more ethical and accurate representations of non-human animals. The study not only critiques media representations but also contributes to the transformative aims of CAMS by imagining new modes of representation that respect animal agency and complexity. As a method to deconstruct the anthropocentric construction of the monstrous other (see Chapter 2, *The Monstrous Other*), the researcher has employed the use of real time footage over the hyperreal use of slow-motion footage, and the incorporation of natural sound over the stereotypical orchestral music used to create tension in the audience, a post-*Jaws* characteristic of shark representation. The researcher has also incorporated a digital time code into the film in order to eliminate the general social conception of the shark as a latent man-eating predator. The documentation for this film was undertaken in the Celtic Sea off the coast of South Wales. The use of slow-motion footage and orchestral music are key film methods used to create dramatic tension in wildlife documentaries, a strategy learned from iconic films such as *Jaws*. While music has the capacity to establish ambiance in wildlife documentaries, it also, through the cultural repetition of the *Jaws* two-note motif, has the potential to communicate the language of monstrosity associated with Spielberg's film. Additionally, the researcher does not incorporate film footage that focuses on the shark's 'monstrous' features (such as their jaws and teeth) and alternatively uses film sequences of the animal from above or at eye level in order to minimise associations to the monstrous other visualised in the iconic *Jaws* promotional poster. The research recognises the threat that apex predators have on those who encounter them but contests this narrative as a dominant representation and suggests that this monstrous othering of sharks is a consequence of the anthropocentric position where humans fear other species. Parallels may be found in filmic representations of women where the camera slowing pans across the female body, a male

gaze stultifying the agency of woman (Mulvey, 1975). The non-human animal is objectified using similar methods of representation - the objectifying anthropocentric gaze, a derivative of the male gaze. Wildlife activist Ocean Ramsey highlights this phenomenon and aims to educate viewers to better understand predator's behaviour (2019), while Debra Merskin offers a guide to how to tell non-human animal stories and suggests that we should not rely too heavily on "tooth and claw" representation (2016), a process of vilification that so commonly occurs in wildlife documentaries depicting sharks. The researcher's addition of a digital timecode allows the audience to see the passage of time that is required when videographers attempt to film non-human animals in the environment. This method works in a similar manner to the inclusion of 'behind-the-scenes' features that are sometimes included at the end of documentaries. While behind-the-scenes features are a useful way for production teams to show viewers their film processes, they also act as a form of self-validation to ensure audiences that ethical measures were carried out during filming. The use of a timecode informs viewers of the passage of time without having the create further spectacle around the production process (Kolker, 2012). By demonstrating simple methods for the representation of sharks in wildlife documentaries, the researcher suggests that future wildlife production teams may be able to see the effects of anthropocentric modes of representation on our animal others.

The role of the narrator in film and wildlife documentaries and the anthropomorphic perspectives typically employed in wildlife narration and how this contributes to the concept of an anthropocentric gaze in the representation of apex predators is articulated in Chapter 3, *The Anthropomorphic Other*. Language plays a crucial role in reinforcing 'reality', suggesting that terms, norms, and expectations around gender, race, and power serve to normalize and obscure injustice (Frye, 1983). The narrator in wildlife documentaries typically highlights an animal's perceived human-like qualities. This is demonstrated through the practice-based research film which focuses on brown bears in Alaska. In this film, the research compares the effects of anthropocentric narrations to a voice-over that focuses less on the bears' human-like qualities and alternatively delivers a more authentic narration (Merskin, 2016). Similar to terms like 'slut' or 'angel' that are used to objectify oppressed groups (Malamud, 2010), the anthropomorphised bear is objectified through narration in wildlife documentaries with language that establishes parallels with popular cultural representations of bears, such as the humanised Winnie the Pooh or Paddington Bear. As a result, the bear is confined within the scope of the anthropocentric gaze where a focus is

placed on the animal's apparent humanness (Merskin, 2016). The human's fear of otherness may be understood through the gestures of the coloniser who imposes their cultural values on the colonised subject: Anthropomorphised representations of bears are depictions that suggest the human has imposed human values on this 'other' species. It is perhaps worth emphasising that the researcher's voice, the voice used for narration in the practice-based films, is American, female and thus resonates at a higher pitch than the archetypal wildlife narrator, which is usually the voice of an English patriarch (for example, Sir David Attenborough). The role of the patriarch has historically held a hierarchal position over minority groups, whether woman or animal, and the researcher suggests that this sense of hierarchy is culturally reiterated through the use of male voice-overs in information films and documentaries. The patriarchal voice acts as a 'voice of God' dictating the animals' narrative and disseminating information to the audience (De Waal, 1999). The practice-based research establishes the anthropocentric narrative within the first half of the bears research film and further deconstructs this narrative by presenting the same footage with a new narrative. Both narrations present the viewer with the same information about the brown bears routine during the summer months; however, the latter representation does not over sensationalise or anthropomorphise the bears' behaviour with language that draws parallels to human behaviour. Through eliminating the anthropocentric narrative and electing a descriptive narrative, the researcher is able to present representations of these non-human animals that resist culturally pervasive anthropomorphic representations of bears.

In the research film which centres on wolves, the researcher deconstructs the formation of the wolf as a companion other through a number of approaches to filming. The methods tested in this film suggest approaches to documenting wolves, specifically when the videographer is occupying the same physical space as the non-human animal. The film comments upon the language of close-up film footage where an illusory intimacy is established between the human viewer and the non-human animal, as outlined in Chapter 4, *The Companion Other*. The researcher suggests that close-up footage of an animal's eyes may allude to a form of communication between species, a form a companionship. Through the view of the wolf's eyes, film and wildlife documentaries establish an unspoken understanding between the viewer and non-human animal, however this bond is a fabrication of emotion. In order to deconstruct this image, the researcher has outlined the need to shift the focus of documentaries away from visual close-ups and illusory 'eye contact' with the non-human animal subject in favour of visuals that capture the entire body of the animal. This approach

articulates the animal's difference from the human. This method can apply to both the representations of the monstrous and anthropomorphic other but are exemplified in the representation of the companion other. The researcher suggests that this method also articulates the distance that should be maintained between the human and the apex predator, a distance that is artificially reduced through zoom lens technology. Whilst filming the researcher attempted to adopt the eye-level of the wolf to test the possibility of a becoming-animal approach to documentation. The fundamental concept unpinning Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal is the 'unthinking' of the human condition (2017). If this 'unthinking' is applied to the anthropocentric gaze, a gaze that in practical terms adopts a human bi-pedal view, looking down upon the animal (both literally and philosophically), then filming from a lower eye-level position, similar to that of the animal's, may reduce the asymmetric narratives typically employed in animal representations.

It is perhaps in John Berger's *Here is Where We Meet* (2005), where he writes that the dead mingle with the living and the living talk with the dead, yet the dead do not cross the threshold of the living and the living do not enter the realm of the dead, that the researcher finds an approach to filming non-human animals where species may meet (Berger, 2005). The idea of a 'meeting' between species removes the hierarchical position of the human. This process of sharing space with animals means becoming part of intertwined narratives and working to represent those connections honestly (Haraway, 2003).

In summary, the documentary filmmaking methods and conceptual framework outlined in this research aim to expose and deconstruct three key articulations of the anthropocentric gaze developed by the researcher: The Monstrous Other, The Anthropomorphic Other and the Companion Other. By introducing and applying these categories to various media representations, the study provides a new lens for understanding how non-human animals are represented in visual media. The methods proposed and demonstrated by the researcher are not only relevant to filmmakers and media practitioners working in digital production or academics in the field of CAMS, but can also be applied to everyday representations of non-human animals. While the researcher acknowledges the possible limitations of working within a dominant visual culture shaped by hyperreality and spectacle, particularly in wildlife entertainment, this study nonetheless offers practical and theoretical tools for resisting reductive portrayals. Ultimately, it proposes an alternative approach to visual storytelling, one that challenges the objectification of non-human animals and creates space for more

ethical, respectful, and potentially reciprocal forms of representation where species may meet without the detrimental influence of an asymmetrical power dynamic.

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