

RECORDING NEAR  
ENVIRONMENTAL COMPASSION THROUGH  
PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM

by

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*Certificate of Approval*

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Faith Estroff Bernstein has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Environmental Humanities.

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## CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	<i>iv</i>
1-Hooked.....	1
2-Recording Stories.....	11
3- Casted Out.....	25
4-Active-Passivity: Philosophy Behind the Lens.....	38
5-Recording the Green Fire in <i>Spoil</i> .....	52
6-Seeing the Sacred.....	69
<i>Works Consulted</i> .....	77

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## 1 | Hooked

“I think it is important to learn about the beauty of life of the salmon and how it has this instinct to return home to spawn. I think the story of the salmon tells us that we all have a purpose in life and that we are all made for some reason. It is up to us to go find out what our purpose is and go do it.” -Mary Jane Miles (Nez Perce) from *Salmon and His People*

Seated in a stuffy Suburban, I stare out the smudged car window and watch the curvaceous Imnaha River wind through the spectacular and dusty canyon in northeast Oregon. I am a backseat rider for a field semester program exploring Wallowa Valley, which borders this landscape. Our professor calls the cliffs that we are winding around “triple screamers”—so high up that you would have enough time to scream three times before falling to your doom. The rushing water below us has been carving this steep landscape long before my grandfather was born, long before any human records, and its layered canyon walls run deep, engraved memories of water rippling the orange rocks. We are on our way to see an important figure for the Imnaha and Wallowa county: Joe

McCormack, a fish tech with the Nez Perce Fisheries. He works to tag and track salmon, a most sacred fish to his ancestry.

Wallowa Valley and the Imnaha Canyon used to be a home for the Nez Perce Native Americans (who call themselves Nimíipuu, “we, the people”) for thousands of years before white settlers arrived. The canyon is only a small portion of their original homelands, which once stretched through the Columbia River Basin, sprawling into the majority of what we now identify as Washington State, northeast Oregon and central Idaho.

My eyes cannot scan everything fast enough. The striations on the surrounding mountains reveal columnar rock formations, illuminating the historical basalt lava flows, now acting to hold up the natural walls of this river’s cathedral. Dry grasses grow golden, sun-baked and warm around every bend. The cold, silvery blue river rushes below, feeding the lush green vegetation that riots along its banks. I press my face closer against the cold glass to watch the river run free through the landscape its been whittling into for thousands of years.

Joe warmly welcomes us when we arrive at canyon’s base, where his tech lab is located. He is tall and friendly, his tan skin weathered soft and black hair silvered with the passing of time. His hands are gestural, and his smile wide. His voice is light but strong, and he laughs easily. Immediately, our group relaxes in his presence. He beckons us to follow him as he takes a few long strides up the riverbank to a “pit home,” a slight indentation in the ground, a mere footprint of what once was a summer home to a Nez Perce family tribe. Now it is overgrown with non-native cheat grass.

Joe explains to us that for generations the Nez Perce dug circular pits in the ground for shelter and resided within the landscape, covered by teepees, modestly sheltering their families in these pit homes. He reconstructs activities embedded in the landscape as he points to places where children once ran and where ceremonial gatherings might have taken place, telling us stories that were told and retold to the Nez Perce children, hundreds of years ago. These tales illuminated the reasons why the animals, valley, and river acted the ways they did and were reminders of how they fit together for Nez Perce children and adults alike. He shares with us one story of ancient salmon tracking, which was once signaled by swallows. It went something like this:

*Once there were five mischievous swallow sisters who build a dam on the river, preventing the Chinook salmon's upriver migration. Coyote heard of their meddling and was determined to stop it. So he camouflaged himself as a human baby, strapping himself to a cradleboard and setting himself off in the river, eventually becoming lodged against the dam. The swallows discovered him and decided to take care of him, leaving him alone the next day to dig up camas roots to feed him. As soon as the swallows were out of sight, Coyote revealed himself and started digging at the dam, breaking it down bit by bit with sticks. When the swallows finally found out what Coyote was up to, it was too late and the water rushed through the dam, and the salmon joyously swam upstream to join the people once more. Thereafter, the swallows are to make nests in the mud along the riverbanks, flying out in song to signal the return of the Chinook salmon to the people every spring.*

As Joe tells the story, I find myself becoming aware of the chatting swallows, filling the air above me with their melodies and I picture the hum of an older civilization

flourishing beneath my feet. Glancing down from the pit home, I spot the mud nests down by the river, and think about how the Nez Perce's story drenches them in meaning and significance. Embroidered into the stories of the landscape and other wildlife, I realize the swallows have a place here. They belong.

So did Joe's ancestors, many years ago. I remember what we learned earlier in the day, about the tragic last words of Nez Perce's Chief Joseph: "*My son, never forget my dying words. This country holds your father's body. Never sell the bones of your father and your mother.*"

I look down. The bones underneath our feet lay lonely. It has been over a hundred years since fathers and sons have been buried under the same soil as their ancestors. The story of this tribe unfortunately resonates with a most tragic chord of history, as most of the Nez Perce's land was taken from them with a series of unfair treaties when white settlers arrived. By 1863, less than ten percent of the Nez Perce's original land was left in their domain. Led by Chief Joseph, (known as *Him-mah-too-ya-lat-kekt*, or "Thunder Rolling Down from the Mountains") the Wallowa band of Nez Perce desired to remain in the place that cradled them between canyons, tethered them to tributaries, and fed their spirits in salmon.

Chief Joseph and his band held their ground for five years while the US government tried to persuade them to sell the land that held their father's bones, memories, spirits, stories and salmon. They would not budge. Finally, an ultimatum led to an epic chase of nearly 1,200 miles, the Nez Perce fleeing on horses with all of their possessions to safety, and US army troops stumbling on horseback behind them. Tragically, a mere 42 miles from the Canadian border, (which would have been out of US

jurisdiction and a safe land), the US army troops caught up to the tribe and forced them onto the Idaho reservation, ending a hope of remaining free and holding onto all of the things that rooted them in place (Wheeler).

Salmon were an integral aspect of this loss, which wasn't just physical, but cultural, spiritual, nutritional and symbolic. The Nez Perce, were first and foremost fisherman, so the loss of salmon mirrored their loss of pride, strength and identity (Landeen 1). Diminished and defeated, Chief Joseph asked again and again to return peacefully home to Wallowa Valley, agreeing to live by the white man's rules. He was denied, taken away from his people to live in a reservation set up in Colville, Washington, dying brokenheartedly on foreign soil.

On the long and forced migration from home, few returned. Joe McCormack is one exception. He is one of only two exceptions actually, as only two Nez Perce tribe members reside in Wallowa Valley today.

I look up at Joe, and wonder if he is lamenting the loss of this way of life. The wistfulness of the swallow story seems to flutter away in the wind, and I imagine the words becoming thinner and thinner with time, dissolving in the sky. Those bones are lonely in the ground. Not betrayed, and not all forgotten, but alone.

But Joe is already headed back down to the river. On its banks he will show us his lab where he works to track and allow salmon to keep returning home. I quickly learn that Joe doesn't like dwelling on the past. He likes talking about salmon.



This interaction I had with Joe, two summers before I began this thesis project, remains clear in my mind. Joe stands with one foot in the past, stepping through the dusty

canyons of the Imnaha and another plunged into the river as it pushes ever onward, following time, existing between two worlds. Navigating with hope and persistence, he looks to salmon and the Nez Perce Fisheries as a way to move forward, be productive and adapt in a situation that feels hopeless to many, beaming of optimism amidst a lost landscape.

For reasons I am sure will be exposed to me in many ways for the rest of my life, I am drawn to the mysteries and stories of the natural world, including and beyond scientific explanations. This experience with Joe during my summer in the Wallows sparked something inside of me, and has intrigued me to pursue this story, exploring the connections between my heritage and his to discover what it is about his work and what he has shown me that is so inspiring.

To further explore my interest in the topic, I began planning the production of a documentary film about Joe and the Nez Perce Fisheries for this thesis project. As a hope to bring an audience into to the landscape and the insights of Joe, I turned to the most realistic visual form of documentation I could, hoping that if an audience could *see*, then they would understand. Plus, I was attracted to the idea of being a filmmaker, posed between two worlds, (the one in your own mind, and the subject your lens focuses on) to mirror Joe's straddle.

I felt compelled to share his tale, because I think Joe's optimism is miraculous, but not the only one of its kind. Many people can understand loss in varying capacities, and I believe his sanguinity can resonate a sense of hope, adaptability and persistence as we try to move forward with our ever-changing surroundings. Above all, I anticipated that this film might be able to instill a sense of compassion for many of the stories and

species that teeter on the brink of extinction. Without such stories and reminders we might forget that the natural world is a place that fulfills us in more ways than simple relaxation or economic gain. I am drawn most strongly to the ability to make visible to beauty and depth of what is beyond human making and control. I believe if we have an insight into the richness of our surroundings, we will become more compassionate toward them.

The root of the word compassion comes from the action to “suffering together with,” and is often also equated with the desire to relieve the pain of those suffering. It is a kind of fellow-feeling that we often are struck with when a loved one is in such a predicament. It is sometimes said that we become *moved* to act, or to feel for someone else who is in distress. This movement occurs not only in the sense that we tend to follow and mirror the feelings of another, but also who we are and what we care about moves too. In a sense, who we are moves to something beyond what it was before. Our matters of concern and care extend to become more capacious. It is my hope that accessing compassion in an audience of a film can inspire them to reach outward to care about something more than themselves.

A complete absence of compassion can result in the denial of not only a sense of co-suffering, but also a sense of empathy, which broadly encompasses our ability to understand the feelings or experiences of others. With a lack of these extending, capacious regards, it becomes easy for us to treat the people and things around us as if they were objects. David Abram, an ecologist, philosopher, magician, and writer notes this danger,

“We conceptually immobilize or objectify [a] phenomenon only by mentally absenting ourselves from this relation, by forgetting or repressing our sensuous involvement. To define another being

as an inert or passive object is to deny its ability to actively engage us and to provoke our senses; *we thus block our perceptual reciprocity with that being*” (Abram 56).

This objectifying perspective, lacking compassion or connection to the things or people around us, often results in exploitation, defining another as passive and using them for our purposes. In the case of our environment, this often takes the form of degradation of habitat in the pursuit for economic or personal gain.

Conversely, compassion is about a connection to something other than ourselves, allowing us to feel what another is feeling, blurring the lines between the self and the other and enabling us to act as more thoughtful and respectful occupants of this planet.

Gary Snyder, an environmental author and poet heavily influenced by Buddhist philosophy, extends this idea of compassion beyond the traditional assumption of human-to-human compassion to encompass a more-than-human world<sup>1</sup>, a deep interest of mine in my project. He establishes this radical compassion through a deep understanding of ecology. He states,

“An ecosystem is a kind of mandala<sup>2</sup> in which there are multiple relations that are all powerful and instructive. Each figure in the mandala—a little mouse or bird (or little god or demon figure)—has an important position and a role to play. Although an ecosystem can be described as hierarchical in terms of energy flow, from the standpoint of the whole all of its members are equal” (Snyder 65).

Through this understanding of ecology, where each piece holds an essential role and is hinged to many others in that ecosystem, we are able to reorient our perspective from seeing ourselves as the central figure in a situation to seeing ourselves in relation to an entire system. Art critic, John Berger notes on our approach of contextualizing ourselves

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<sup>1</sup> This word is borrowed from David Abram in his book, *Spell of the Sensuous* and I will use and further define the term throughout this piece.

<sup>2</sup> A mandala represents a symbolic and symmetrical relationship between deities.

through sight, “We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are” (Berger 9). Snyder emphasizes abandoning our hierarchical relationships to become more focused on our commonalities, and to mirror Berger’s language, focus on the *relations* between the ecological systems and ourselves. Snyder continues, “Ecological science clearly throws considerable light on the fundamental questions of who we are, how we exist, and where we belong. It suggests a leap into a larger sense of self and family” (Snyder 66). When exercising Snyder’s radical compassion, we extend ourselves outward, reaching our care, protection, sympathy and investment to things beyond ourselves, re-envisioning our roles and responsibilities as creatures on this Earth.

Joe McCormack acts with a kind of radical compassion in the work he dedicates himself to with tracking salmon. Like the Nez Perce, salmon have been channeled out of their homes and the ones swimming in the waters of the Imnaha are nowhere near their historical levels, when the Nez Perce resided in their summer pit homes. The salmon face eight massive dams and increasing pollution, in addition to their historical industrial capture and slaughter in canneries. Now with the onset of climate change, where the lush, free flowing rivers will become increasingly scarce in the arid west, as will the salmon that swim in them, I hoped that Joe’s dedication and admiration of the fish and their deep significance would make a great film to inspire environmental compassion.

But I didn’t know what I was doing. Cloaked under a hefty blanket of naivety, I was walking a fine line between admiration and essentialism. After establishing my bearings, confronting my own biases and ignorance of the matter, I soon realized that this

project was not one to be taken lightly or completed in a single semester. The following paper is a step away from the amateur film production and rather an attempt to unpack some of my initial intrigue and fascination with this project through storytelling, film, compassion, loss and hope.

What follows is the evolution of my sparked intrigue in five parts. First, I muse on the power and intrigue of storytelling and what happens when the story takes the form of a photograph or film. Second, I look back into my own life to find connecting threads that primed my initial draw to this project. Third, I philosophically examine an “active-passive” approach to filmmaking and storytelling. Fourth, I critically examine an environmental documentary film with the desired qualities of my hypothetical project. And finally, I will conclude by reflecting on the bigger picture of this project and the way of thinking and seeing it clarified for me, and hopefully my readers.

## 2 | Recording Stories

“Stories do not give instruction, they do not explain how to love a companion or how to find God. They offer instead, patterns of sound and association, of event and image. Suspended as listeners and readers in these patterns, we might reimagine our lives.”

–Barry Lopez, *In This Life*

Good stories arrest us. Drawing us away from monotony and familiarity, they suspend us in a new world, a new pattern of thinking, a new logic embedded in something other than ourselves. If the stories are especially good, they spit us back out into reality and make us pause, rethink, and reimagine the familiar things we once took for granted, walked by and never noticed, thought we understood but really didn't – extending our compassion and intrigue outward.

Stories have been used to relay ideas, messages and events ever since we can recall, and as far back as we can investigate. As Walter Benjamin notes in his essay, *The*

*Storyteller*, “A story is different [from experience or media information]. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time” (Benjamin 90). We have continued to call back upon stories of antiquity, resurrecting them in the present to release the insights they hold from the past.

Many of these early tales still resonate deeply with us today. Whether it is the pursuit for revenge in *Moby Dick*, the plunders and pilgrimages in *The Odyssey*, the quest for immortality in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, or the daunting fiery circles of *Dante’s Inferno*, complex aspects of human existence and the questions they elicit are explored and highlighted in nuanced narratives throughout the ages. Through stories of our past, we are able to uncover some of the many possibilities of our present existence, engaging on journeys created and experienced by the human spirit and imagination.

Much of our intrigue of stories is the opportunity to escape our current predicament, and drift off, wander, explore, and discover by means of a character, setting, or idea far away. The elements of fiction and fairytale are often a given when engrossed in story. What is real and powerful in a story is often not what is exactly happening, but rather the ideas and messages that get passed through the story. The story becomes a medium in which real ideas and events can become known and relatable to an audience, even though the events portrayed have been altered (dramatically or ever so slightly) to enhance the story. One of the miraculous things about this alteration is, if done correctly, it does not detract from the message or value of the narrative, it only enhances an audience’s interest.

While other inventions or creations that were revolutionary at their time, (think telegraph, typewriter, printing press) easily become obsolete, the inexhaustibility of the

interpretations and interactions we have with stories in constructing our own lives keeps them relevant. Walter Benjamin writes,

“Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it...The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connections of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks” (Storyteller 89).

It is this ambiguity that allows a special kind of interaction to take place between the reader or viewer of the story and the story itself. The ambiguity, or openness to interpretation then presents the possibility of creation on the audience’s end. Creative space is crucial for the impact of a story upon its reader. As audience members, we want to be able to relate to the story, blend it into our own lives and add our own insights and experiences.

Think about the first time you watched your favorite movie, or read a favorite book, and recall what you got out of the experience then, versus what you glean now from the same story now. Obviously the story has not changed, but you have. This exercise is a way tracking how we have changed our own perspectives, and the expanse of possibilities over time, and to also notice the numerous conclusions and messages one individual can receive within a narrative. We also realize in hindsight that a story can give us only what we are ready and primed to understand and receive.

Most stories are not created to simply preach to the choir. Our desire for them comes from a longing to be enriched in some way, and that often means challenging, rather than simply confirming our current worldviews. If we notice the things that snag us in stories, that stop us in our tracks, and reveal the tension between what we expect and

what happens, we reach a point that reveals the possibility of transformation, where we might be able to understand something new (Davis). The story creates the context for investment in the players in the performance (be it characters, ideas, settings, events, etc.) where we might be able to accept the invitation to challenge our assumptions.

Walter Benjamin's take on our attraction to stories is to compare and contextualize our own lives. He says, "What draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about" (101). In other words, as we learn about the circumstances of another, we are then able to use that knowledge to understand and contextualize our lives.

This strong desire and gravitation toward stories almost seems primal. Poet Muriel Rukeyser famously stated, "The universe is made of stories, not of atoms." And although stories do not necessarily need to orient us away from scientific explanations of what things can be physically measured, they do allow us to creatively make sense of the possibilities of our surroundings, which can introduce us to the ways in which we can grow and renovate ourselves in the process.

For the purposes of reconnecting ourselves to our surroundings in terms of the natural world (a goal of mine for this hypothetical film project and beyond) stories play a crucial role. In a conversation between food writer, Michael Pollan and environmental historian William (Bill) Cronon that was recorded and put in the environmental magazine, *Orion*, this importance of storytelling and re-seeing our relationship to the natural world arises. Pollan says, "When you tell an audience [a] story, it fill them with hope and a sense of possibility...I'm always looking for stories that refresh this narrative about nature that we're so stuck in" ("Out of the Wild" 71). Cronon agrees, "The ability

to laugh, to experience hope, to be inspired toward action at the personal and political levels –these strike me as the work of engaged storytelling in a world we’re trying to change for the better” (71). The conversation continues to follow a hope to change the world for the better, and hones in on my shared admiration and goals for good environmental storytelling. The two mention Rachel Carson and her ability to bring neurotoxins to life –creating narratives everywhere to shed light on the vibrancy and beauty of the world around us. Cronon ends the piece with a crystallizing quote, “When we lose track of the narratives that human beings need to suffuse their lives and the world with meaning, we forget what makes the world worth saving. Telling stories is how we remember” (71).

Just like Joe’s narrative about the salmon and the swallows keeps their memory and meaning alive for me standing at the riverbank, watching the birds dance above my head, I wish to pursue stories that bring us to remember what matters and holds meaning in the world surrounding us.

Barry Lopez, a National Book Award winner, and avid writer and traveler, offers one explanation for a reason we need stories as reminders, “I believe in all human societies there is a desire to love and be loved, to experience the full fierceness of human emotion, and to make a measure of the sacred part of one’s life. Wherever I’ve traveled...I’ve found that the most dependable way to preserve these possibilities is to be reminded of them in stories” (Lopez 13). Barry Lopez follows the existence and recognition of patterns as a way to understand some of the deeper threads of humanity and nature. Stories offer patterns of remembrance, so that we can preserve the possibility of ideas (in Lopez’s case of love, human emotion and sacredness) to remain resilient

regardless of cultural change. For Lopez, these patterns represent deep threads of humanity that reappear in different forms and can show us more what it means to be alive. I agree with Barry Lopez, and as it will become evident in my concluding chapter, “Seeing the Sacred,” the remembrance of what is sacred is a key goal and intention in my steps forward with this project, as sacred things remind us of our own existence amidst a host of others.



In the 1820’s, the ability to tell stories changed forever. This was the age in which the first photographs were taken: often blurry and grainy black and white images of painted light, recorded by a machine made to mirror reality. The camera had both a power and a danger in its accuracy of recording the things it focused on, creating life-like images and adding an air of truth to stories that arose with or from the photographs. These images made moments feel permanent and easily reproducible to be taken almost anywhere. Never before had a machine been able to replicate a scene or a story in such accurate and vivid reality as the camera.

In his book *Ways of Seeing*, art critic John Berger notes our inclination toward sight and image as a primal way of knowing. He states,

“Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes out place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled”

(Berger 7).

Our biology confirms such claims –around seventy percent of our sensory receptors are located in our eyes, and close to half of our cerebral cortex is involved in some part of

our visual processing (Martini, 2009). We are both physically and philosophically drawn to seeing as a way of understanding what surrounds us, and our place in that world.

We have come to identify what is real and true based on whether or not we can see and discern so ourselves, and our language has fallen in suit. Many of the idioms we use to express understanding are derived from our terms for seeing. For example, “I see”; “I was being short sighted”; “I’m blinded by tunnel vision”; “Can I take a look?” all confirm or explore knowledge through the act of seeing. Author of *The Nature of Photographs*, Stephen Shore, comments on our use of vision language, stating, “in both language and experience it is the sense that seeing is believing. The experience of sight is perpetually symbolic” (Shore 7). Given these associations with seeing, and the clarity and accuracy in which photographs represent a visual copy of the real world, we have related seeing realistic photographic images as a vicarious viewing of reality. Because of this, photographs are used in courts as evidence, and regularly in newspapers, journals, and magazines to add a visual depiction of real events. We rely on the photographic image to supplement or tell us what is real, so we can see (as if for ourselves) what is true.

To note on the environmental significance of seeing, I will turn again to David Abram who comments on how imagery rather than words communicates and brings us sensorially closer to what is more-than-human. With the shift from hieroglyphics and other image-based communication to the phonetic alphabet, Abram comments on what we lost, alphabetic letters “Could no longer function as windows opening to a more-than-human field of powers, but solely as mirrors reflecting the human form back upon itself. Only thus, with the advent and spread of phonetic writing, did the rest of nature begin to lose its voice” (Abram 138). Photography, more than words, allows for images of the

more-than-human to speak for themselves again, and give voice and significance to that which we so often speak for.

However, photography, like all art forms, has limitations in representing reality. Art critique, Tom Gunning sets up and challenges our natural inclination to view photographs as true relics of the past.

“The claim that the digital media alone transforms its data into an intermediary form fosters the myth that photography involves a transparent process, a direct transfer from the object to the photograph. The mediation of lens, film stock, exposure rate, type of shutter, processes of developing and of printing become magically whisked away if one considers the photograph as a direct imprint of reality ” (Gunning 40).

In other words, when we see photography as a mere data collection and a direct transfer of reality, we ignore the photographer’s technical and creative choices of alteration and mediation that happens within the camera itself. In her book *Photography and its critics*, Author Mary Warner Marien comes to this same conclusion, that photography cannot represent what is universally true. She presents a new role for it –a special, realistic artistic representation of reality, and proposes it in a unique location among other art forms and imaginative stories.

“As a new kind of verisimilitude, not quite a copy, not quite an actuality, photography defined modern vicarious experience. It teetered between authenticity and artificiality, knowledge and deceit. As both an idea and an imaging system, photography enhanced the tension between art conceived as the secular agency of truth and art conceived as the mirror of transient effects in nature and in society. The medium was, therefore, concurrently nostalgic and progressive” (Marien 111).

Even with this recognition of photography's bias, (which is becoming increasingly visible today due to Photoshop and other post-production processing programs), images still hold our initial trusting instincts, acting as a kind of vicarious vision of another viewpoint.

In his truth-claim analysis of photography, Tom Gunning parses out the tension of reality and representation. He remarks on its ability to hint at a different kind of truth than a universally objective one. "Photographs are more than just pictures. Or rather, they are pictures of a special sort, ones who visual accuracy invites us to a different sort of observation. The photograph does make us imagine something else, something behind it, before it, somewhere in relation to it" (Gunning 44). By distinguishing pictures (which can be taken by anyone snapping the shutter on their camera) from photographs (which inspire us to explore a relationship to something else), Tom Gunning allows us to recognize the way that photography can lead us to a different kind of truth: having to do more with relationships and interactions between things rather than a direct copy or emergence into reality.

What becomes true, or rather invites us to imagine a new possible truth, in a photograph is its ability to communicate and engage sincerely with a viewer, rather than represent a rigid reality. Photography as art becomes a powerful medium to utilize both the creative and realistic characteristics of its form, as it sends its message its audience, leaving a gap for interaction as Benjamin talks about in "The Storyteller". The key phrase in Gunning's explanation is *in relation to*. Just like with more traditional storytelling methods, photography relies on the *interaction* of what the photograph is of, and what that represents and evokes in its viewers.



As far as storytelling goes, photographs have temporal limitations, as they can record only a single moment in time per frame. Whether it be from a shutter clicking at 1/8,000<sup>th</sup> of a second, or a 20 minute exposure, each photograph holds movement still in a single image. Sometimes this form is most powerful, as it allows us to dwell on important moments of tension crystallized in an instant. But sometimes the photographs can lose some significance with the lack of context, and slip from our memories. An early study by psychologists Goldstein, Chance and Buescher showed that long-term recognition memory was best achieved through moving stimuli when compared with static stimuli (Lamberts 20). In psychologist Eleanor Gibson's ecological theory of development, he suggested that because motion is the norm for all visual stimuli, recognition memory should essentially be better for moving images than for static images (qtd. In Lamar).

Stringing photographed moments together in rapid succession provides the illusion of movement –time passing, moments changing. This is the prototype of the motion picture. Add in the element of sound, and the possibilities of creative communication exponentially increase. The depiction of reality, or rather the vicarious viewing metamorphoses to become more controlled, but also enhanced, enriching the moving image with a mood or tone that embodies a particular kind of meaning. We are drawn to such moments with a sense of clarity, because unlike our own lives, all of the elements on the screen harmonize –at times coming together more realistically and relatable than our own lives (Davis).

Although most films produced now are fiction, erasing the assumption of reality (though still powerfully engaging the audience, pulling them into the projected world),

the sector of documentary filmmaking still holds the tension of is truth and fiction.

Documentaries add the opportunity to both represent and alter unscripted images, their sequence, voiceovers, musical tone, and pacing in an especially realistic fashion unfolding before us as if we were living it.

Documentary film gives this illusion of reality unfolding before your eyes, but it is a careful, intentional arrangement and message that *is* scripted. It is not scripted in the traditional sense by a written document, but rather by the way a filmmaker sees the events and edits their assemblage. John Berger comments on the contextualizing power of film, “The meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it” (29). Directly contrasted with a photograph where the viewer is presented with all of elements simultaneously, and contextualizes its meaning within the photograph itself, film can work to manipulate how each image is read and consequently received by an audience. Berger notes, “When a painting is reproduced by a film camera, it inevitably becomes material for the film-maker’s argument...the film unfolds in time and a painting does not. In a film the way one image follows another, their succession constructs an argument which becomes irreversible” (26). Herein lies both the danger and power of the documentary form: a believable alteration of reality. It has a similar tagline, “a creative treatment of actuality” (Corner 13).

However, a typical critique of documentary films in comparison to other art forms is that they are not creative—or rather they are didactic, boring, and doctrinarian. When done well, I have found documentary filmmaking to blend art and storytelling with reality in a way that reveals new ideas to the viewer as if they were experiencing this other

reality themselves. But, this craft has proven to be very difficult to create and maintain, as many documentary films are used as mere information transmitters, or worse, propaganda, falling into the archetype of being purely expository, rather than engaging and artful. I believe this is so because you have so much control over how your message is contextualized, and like Berger notes, film gives you the opportunity to create an irreversible argument. Many films fall into this kind of expository trap.

Consequently, as an art form, documentary film is not as well established, as say, photography. However, it can be used more artistically, and early on was used and conceptualize in such a manner. Two founding documentary filmmakers, Grierson and Flaherty argue that, “This realism was not an attempt to authentically record reality but an attempt to use art to mimic it so effectively that the viewer would be pulled in without thinking about it” (Aufderhiede 26). Using artistic qualities to mirror reality, and in effect engage a viewer, a successful documentary is able to blend the two realms, and engulf its audience in story, forgetting the tension between authenticity and artificiality.

However, for a long time, many documentary filmmakers believed that there was a possibility of capturing absolute truth and reality on camera, by encouraging people to act like the device was not there. This style of documentary filmmaking, first coined by the French, is called *Cinéma Vérité*, or *truthful, direct cinema*, and has many of the same problems as the truth claims in photography. Stella Bruzzi, author of *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*, introduces filmmaker Emile de Antio’s passionate disregard for this attempt. “*Cinéma Vérité* is first of all a lie, and secondly a childish assumption about the nature of film....Only people without feelings or emotions could even think of

making Cinéma Vérité” (Bruzzi 67). In a more composed and diplomatic manner, Bruzzi herself explains the ignorance of the truth claims,

“Direct Cinema is a problem because... with the advent of portable equipment and with the movement’s more informal style, they [Cinéma Vérité filmmakers] believed they could indeed show things as they are and thus collapse, better than any other form of documentary, the boundary between subject and representation” (68).

If this boundary were to collapse, however, the practice would be incredibly invasive, risking preserving and flattening subjects for exploitation or posterity’s sake. People would have to force themselves to become unaware of the reality that they are being filmed, collapsing the respect and genuine possibilities of interaction between the filmmaker and the subject. When we catch people looking at us through a camera lens we almost always instinctually become self-conscious of ourselves, and change how we are acting in some way to preserve or promote an image of ourselves, or for entertainment or attention –editing and deciding which parts of ourselves to show. This renders an explanation for some of the many of the flaws in our more crude form of Cinéma Vérité today, Reality TV.

Bruzzi comments on this phenomenon of self-awareness and image, and offers that “the important truth any documentary captures is the performance in front of the camera” (74). A documentary film, (just like any other experience communicated through art) holds within it an element of performance and creativity in translating actual to artistic representation, and this performance varies depending on the audience. Thus, depending on the relationship between the filmmaker and the subject, the subject will show or find themselves exposing or allowing the filmmaker into different parts of themselves and their performance or presentation.



As I explore documentary filmmaking and the ways in which it can effectively communicate stories, in the following pages, I will be keeping in mind Bruzzi's perspective that they work and act as a kind of performance, or conscious or unconscious self-editing. For as we have seen with stories, as they are portrayed on paper, photographically, or in a film, it is the interaction and relationship which the piece invites others to relate to which makes it most powerful, not the truth that the story claims in itself. In most cases, I believe a kind of compassion can occur for a viewer stemming from their engagement with a story and its characters, rather than through a didactic or forced agenda of the film. I will continue to pursue in this paper the possibility for revealing and truthful *interactions* within the production of a documentary, since film is one medium I find myself drawn into without noticing.

As I turn my attention to the project with Joe McCormack and salmon, I will first show in the following chapter's creative piece, "Casted Out" some of my past interactions with fishing and how Joe's story intersects with mine so I can best understand how a proper interaction might take place in this documentary film. In this next chapter, I will share about my own life as I gather together ways in which I have been primed by experience to take a particular interest in Joe during my summer in the Wallawas. I will then critically analyze some of these moments in the chapters to come. My hope is that by returning to my past, I will explore how it has helped me discover why I have been so drawn to this particular story of tracking and telling the stories of salmon, and help me discover the right kind of approach to share it through film.

### 3 | Casted Out

“When you gaff [fish with a pole and curved hook], you just don’t put your pole in the water and pull something out. You feel for the fish. It’s a touch to feel for them”

-Larry Green Sr. (Nez Perce) in *Salmon and His People*

Hip-wader-deep in fifty-three degree water, I am holding a fishing net, its metal pole stealing the last traces of warmth from my icy hands. My classmates and I are cheating the patience out of the catch, following our field instructor against the current of a small headwater stream pulling down snowmelt from the Swan Mountain Range in northwestern Montana. We are on a scientific scramble, following the pulse of our instructor’s fish shocker as it enters the water, her voice echoing through us, “Catch the fish! Get it! Get it! Get it!” The fingerlings reacting to the shock slow and surface, revealing their white undersides, allowing us but a second to scoop them up in our nets before they become faster and cleverer than us again.

We are catching these fingerlings to count, measure, and record for a scientific study on a non-native brook trout population who threaten the balance of this fragile riparian ecosystem. Once we have the data, turning fish into figures on charts, we will release them back into the stream.

When we first arrive, our instructor asks us how many fish we think there are, and we quickly scan the stream. We see none and guess ten. By the end of our segment, I am amazed at how many we grab: seventy-six little buggers hiding between the crevices of rock, under banks, beneath the current, all invisible to our naked eyes. These hidden fish are no bigger than the length of my hand –many of them smaller than my pinky finger. The moment of surprise when we release them, scales and tails vanishing from view into the thick aqueous world, carves a crevice in my memory. *Beautiful and vibrant life is so often hidden from an everyday glance.*



Before that trip, I had not caught a fish in years, not since standing on the worn wooden dock in the warm Florida sun, beside my clear-blue-eyed grandfather. Melvin, or as I always knew him, “Grandpa Mel,” was an avid fisherman and bird watcher, scanning the skies and seas for beautiful creatures skirting his horizons. Fishing wasn’t his religion, although if you asked him, he would have laughed and let you think so. But only for a second. He was Jewish and damn proud of it. The most religious in our family, he had helped build the first temple in the conservative town he lived in, could be caught singing in Yiddish on many an occasion, and had Jewish frugality on the tip of his tongue (his favorite phrase was “Good deal!”) The two of us never talked about Judaism on the dock; we let the silent spiritual moments speak for themselves—soaking our skin in sun,

pulsing water pressing against wooden posts, swift pelican wings gracing sky, all punctuated by the heartiness of laughter. Grandpa's soft and robust guffaw still echoes through the breeze on warm winter Florida nights, kissing my face, reminding me of the spirit of the sea.

By the time I was ten, I was fishing with Grandpa Mel every day during my family's yearly two-week vacation to Florida. At the beginning of each visit, we would pick up shrimp together at the local tackle shop to use as bait. Grandpa Mel kept them in a bucket, hanging off the dock, which allowed us to go out with our rods at a moments notice. Grandpa would encourage me to reach in and grab a slippery, flipping crustacean to string on my line. If I only squeezed them a little bit harder, he said, they would stay in my grasp. He laughed as they flung their way from wet hands to wood to water. I never could hold onto such slippery sea creatures for long –they always seemed to search for, and end up in the aquatic world from which they came.

“Someone's getting a free lunch!” Grandpa laughed.



I have always been fascinated by, but never graceful with water.

I am eight, and she nine, my sister Sara and I are chasing waves on the beach in Northern California. Mom and Dad are on a walk, foggy figures faded in sight along the shore. Watching the waves crash and spew water droplets like confetti against the pixed sand, I am mesmerized. The fluid substance always seems to draw me close, the way it bends and bobs, light and heavy at the same time, holding and moving sunshine across its surface in illusive and sinuous swirls. Mom and I share this fascination, tangled into our DNA or not, our drive presents itself in an almost primal gravitation to the water.

Running too close to the margin where the sea and sand collide, my feet lift at the wrong moment and I lose my land grip, swept up into the turbulent waves. The water crashes into my body relentlessly. So wet I don't know what dry is, gasping for air, I grab sand that slips through my fingers. My body is snarled, further dragged under waves. I gulp in salt water. My neck has no gills, and the salt stings. I reach out again, desperately, fumbling in the dark, trying to hold something, anything land. Finally, I feel something squishy and solid. It's Sara, our swimmer, coming in to save me. She grabs my arm and swims hard for a second, and then stands up, pulling me with her, and walks. The whole time, I was but three feet from the safety of solid sand, flailing all the while. Embarrassed, coughing up oxygen mixed with two too many parts hydrogen; I realize that stepping too far into this foreign world will swallow me whole. The shoreline and the dock will be as close as I get to this aqueous abyss.

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*My dad told me a humorous story about an old man at Celilo who had fallen in the water. He was carried a long ways and was swept under water several times. Many feared that he was going to drown. Someone was finally able to help drag him in with the aid of a dip net. He appeared to be unconscious and several people kept asking him how he was doing or whether or not he was all right. Someone asked him if he needed anything and with a great effort the man finally replied, "Water, I need water." Everyone laughed. We were so glad the man was all right and still able to have a sense of humor. -Wilfred Scott (Nez Perce) from *Salmon and His People**

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I wasn't a natural angler in the same way I wasn't a natural swimmer. I'd hold the rod up tight against my right shoulder, nervous with anticipation, and fling my line out a mere foot or two. The "plop" was inescapably pitiful. For the first few years, Grandpa would cast out for me. Mesmerized by the purring of the line through the air, I practiced. Before too long, I could swiftly send my line of communication across and into the water. A tether between the gulf and me, my line lay limp. Unless of course, a fish decided to start a conversation, taking my bait and slipping onto the hook, pulling me hard into the posts of the dock, toward its aqueous depths—blending its world with mine.

Grandpa Mel and I were always out for sunsets. We would watch the sky saturated with deep fire oranges and vibrant pinks, making friends with the great blue herons that landed on the dock posts, while we tied our bodies out to the water with each cast. I often would gaze out to sunlight dancing on the water's surface, eye landing on the horizon, water's collision with sky. In those moments every nerve in my body stretched outward, expanding myself to something bigger. The feeling was intoxicatingly ethereal. These times there was no coughing up water. I haven't gone too deep; I'm right on the edge. With a flounder, grunt, ladyfish, or redfish my hook, I imagined myself deep under water, curving and turning, swimming with ease in the aqueous world. My arm muscles following and mind vicariously embodying the fish's fight, muted and transmitted to me like a childhood tin-can telephone. I was living in two places at once. The feeling entered deep into me, and without shame of sounding too schmaltzy, I'd say I could sense that this other world held the substances of life itself.

We never caught for keeps. Grandpa used to catch his dinner, but he's gotten too old to fuss about fish cleaning. Instead, he performed a kind of ritual every time either of

us would make a catch. It wasn't a Jewish ritual, like the ones we had inside the house, singing for Shabbat, lighting Hanukah candles, or eating horseradish and gefilte fish. This ritual was much more organic and free, performed the open air, responding to happenings in real time, not dusty Haggadahs.

Grandpa wiggled the hook out of the fish, breaking the tether. Pulling back his slimy fish rag from the aquatic dweller, he exposed its scales to the gleaming sunshine. Holding the fish over the edge of the dock, he'd pucker up and kiss its sheen skin before loosening his grip and letting its shimmering body dive back into the water from which it came.

“Good Deal! What a beauty!”

We'd both watch in wonder as the magic disappeared into the depths of the gulf.

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Usually electro-shocking in the manner my class and I performed in Swan Valley is harmless. The fish feel a jolt, slow down for a bit, and either get caught by our nets, or dart back under hiding spots. The post-catch solution that we use is sedative, dazing the fish so they won't leap out of the bucket before we can measure them, but it usually has no lasting effect.

One fish in our batch does not react normally to this undertaking. She is the largest, 11 cm, and stays at the bottom of the bucket, slowly wiggling her pectoral fins back and forth, listless even for a sedated fish. I take her by the tail fin and slowly drag her on the bottom, hoping the force of water against her gills would give her a little bit of fish CPR. She starts moving more—or so I think. For reasons justifiable or not, I am hopeful. I know I should be paying more attention to the trending number of the fishes'

sizes, but I've never been good at focusing on number details—they always feel empty and abstract, like their core is missing. Instead I am reminded of my grandpa, and his ritual of kissing fish, before sending them back to the water and it feels whole.

“Faith, that’s not going to work.”

I look up from my daydream, and see Sky, our education intern for the semester program. He’s from Helena and is a mutt, a mix between traditional Montanan persistence and gut with some liberal environmental ideals. He has a scraggly beard and does great silly voices. We get along pretty well, but he thinks I’m naive.

“Well, I’m at least going to try,” I mutter, hopeful and defensive.

As the team is wrapping up, the one lone female fingerling is still swaying and slower than the others, but faster than before. I think we should let her back into the stream. Everyone else is distracted and gathering equipment, getting ready to hike back to the car. Sky picks up the fish and dangles it right in front of my face. I think about how I want to kiss it, and send it back to hide under the rocks. It is more than a data point, I have not forgotten.

Before I can get caught up in my daydream again, Sky snaps the fish in half, four inches from my face. It cracks like grinding teeth chipping away. I feel it in my spine. Bones betraying bones, she folds over, limp. Gone.

Sky looks at me, hiding a smile.

“It was going to die anyway”

I glare at him fuming, and walk away. He thinks he’s done no harm. Besides, animals kill animals all the time in the wild.

Not all animals are capable of rituals, I remind myself.

Sky tells me he is going to eat the fish for dinner. I think to try and rationalize his kill to the others. He doesn't, and for the next three days, I see and smell the fish rotting outside the cookhouse.

I knew he did that just to shock me. Because I'm a dainty and spoiled little California vegan who knows nothing about the rugged life of Montana wilderness, I must not understand how things have to die.



But I do. Standing in the Gulf of Mexico, water lapping at my legs, I wade through the water and sand where my grandfather's ashes are scattered. My legs sting as mosquitoes feast on them, 47 bites I count afterwards, but I do not complain at the time. I recognize the sacredness of this ceremony, as my family and I are scattering my aunt's ashes in the same place as my grandfather's. The breeze is warm and we talk about cherishing life, and the beauty of saying goodbye, say Kaddish. When my family turns to Judaism with a crystallizing focus whenever someone dies, I tend to follow the curious rituals. The humility and lack of answers takes over any religious doubt. We kiss each other on the cheek, and then on top of the box that holds my aunt. Ashes in hand, I walk out deep into the calm water, scattering the burnt flakes of Aunt Freddi's body across its surface. This is not fish food, I remind myself: this is a human body. The sunset a brilliant burnt orange, and water calmly pulses against my calves, as if imprinting this moment in memory. I look out into the border between water and sky, and remember what it felt like to be suspended between two worlds with Grandpa, agape with rods in hand. In this moment of bittersweet goodbye, I am again cast out onto the horizon.



These events all hook me back to Imnaha Canyon; where I have seen painful moments of loss, synchronizing somehow into a story of hope.

Just like the Nez Perce, many salmon have been channeled out their homes in the past 100 years and now run at a mere *three percent* of their historic numbers in the Imnaha and throughout the Pacific Northwest (Landeen). It is true though, that even after eight dams were constructed along the Columbia River, some fish still make their way home to the Imnaha and its tributaries to spawn, climbing the fish ladders as they go, fighting against the current all the while. But even though as individuals they are strong and persistent, that does not mean that their species is without struggle and without danger. It also doesn't mean that we haven't mostly forgotten some very important ways of understanding them along the way. The swallow story that Joe shared with my classmates and me is not one that we usually hear when we talk about salmon nowadays in the Pacific Northwest—our narratives are narrowing.

At the bank of the Imnaha River, my classmates and I watch Joe climb onto a metal fishing weir that bridges a section of the rushing river. He explains to us that the name of the valley, “Wallowa” comes from the Nez Perce term for these weirs, fish traps used to capture salmon. Smiling, he scoops out the few fingerlings caught in the weir. He invites us to follow behind him into his lab, which looks like a teepee with solar panels on the roof. The thick canvas envelops us as we enter. Joe balances a fingerling between his pointer and thumb and carefully inserts an electronic tag, the size of a grain of rice, under its fin. He tells us that this device will help their research team track the salmon on its journey to the ocean and back to the tributaries to spawn, and see how many survive the passageway through the eight dams along the Columbia. These electronic trackers are

called pit tags, he tells us, and my brain starts buzzing. Pit tag, pit home, Chief Joseph, Joe McCormack. Two different worlds begin to overlap in my mind. Through this scientific project, the landscape breathes new life, telling two stories simultaneously, separated by time, yet united by ancestry, significance and belonging. Science and spirit spill over each other in this humble teepee lab.

There is a link that preserves and connects these stories, the ancient histories and modern inquiries, enriching them both, keeping them porous and adaptable, and for reasons unknown to me at the time, draws me near. Even though I don't have one hooked to a fishing line, I know the salmon are this thread, pulling on and holding these disparate stories together, breaking through the nostalgia of the past into new possibilities of the present.



*The salmon is an integral part of our tribal and family traditions. Even white people can understand the importance of preserving family and cultural traditions. How can I explain to people what it means to me to go down to Rapid River and dip net for salmon? How can I describe the feeling of putting that dip net in the water and feeling the power of that salmon...? It is something that you feel in your heart, and is something that you hope can be taught to our children and future generations. As Nez Perce people, we need to fight to save the salmon.*

-Aaron Miles, (Natural Resource Manager for the Nez Perce Tribe) from *Salmon and His People*



As I think about my own relationship with heritage and spirituality, I can't help but be taken back by the warm breeze of ritual and song to days spent with Grandpa Mel on the dock at sunset, listening to his singing about Grandma Elsie in Yiddish: "I'm meshuga for my sugar, and my sugar's meshuga for me!" I think again of kissing fish, of gazing at the horizon, and how childlike curiosity and compassion follows some of us to the end. I think of the strength and grace in knowing how to say goodbye, but remember how I still never want to at the time.

Something has puzzled me for a while, when I really think about what it means to be Jewish, exploring the pains and privileges from where I come. I wonder why my family cremates our dead, after so many innocent Jewish bodies were sacrificed by fire, burnt whole, not one hundred years ago. And oddly, something about Joe's story offers a possible explanation, even though the loss is of buried bones, not scattered ash.

Lamenting what is lost only allows those who have caused our ancestors hurt and pain to continue infiltrating our current fears and actions. We remain dammed in our thoughts of nostalgia and sorrow, casted out by those who denied our humanity, trapped in a world we didn't choose. Moving on, pushing through, holding on to what is important and letting go of what needs to die is something that Joe McCormack practices every day of his life. And it is something that the salmon themselves exemplify in their relentless persistence and adaptability to survive.

Science and other western practices, threaten to diminish the depth of Nez Perce spiritual and cultural interpretations of salmon, just as cremation threatens to undermine the suffering of many Jews. But if we take ownership of those practices, and define them as a new kind of ritual, we can empower them with our own meaning and purpose.

As ashes, my grandpa can blow in the breeze and float on the water, sink into the sand, and swim with the fish. We can remember him for building the first Temple in Lakeland, and going fishing on the dock; we can go to the place where we let him drift on, being reminded always of how he loved the water and the sky.

Using science and electronic tracking, the Nez Perce can help their salmon increase in numbers. The Nez Perce way of life has been altered in the past 150 years, no doubt, but through their fisheries program, it is possible for an aspect of its essence: their care, admiration, and inspiration for salmon to remain. What swallows once signaled by song is now signaled by a beep from an electronic receiver, but it still holds message and meaning. The salmon are coming home.

Swimming upstream for salmon means going backwards and forwards at the same time. Backwards, against the main current, back to the exact spot where they were born, and forwards to spawn a new generation. In some ways, our culture is doing the same, as we move backwards in ways, losing some of the narratives and meanings, simplifying histories to histograms. But we can move forward too—adapt, become anadromous, switching between modes of science and spirit, breathing new life and purpose into our origins. As we cast out to a new frontier, our lines sink deep, and we straddle two worlds, navigating past and present with strength, persistence and adaptability.



As with the swallow's tale of salmon, and Benjamin, Lopez, Cronon and Pollan's insights, I wish to understand the power of storytelling in reminding us what is worth preserving, before it is lost. Fishing is a practice that ties all of these fragile worlds together, connecting my roots with Joe's, bridging worlds of land and the sea, and

through the salmon, connecting the past and present in a persistence for the future. This is something that I will dig into in the following chapter, where I use the philosophical frameworks introduced by Martin Heidegger and Wendell Berry as I attempt to find the right approach to tell this story (or any of its kind) through film.

#### 4 | Active-Passivity: Philosophy Behind the Lens

“The cameraman’s camera should have behind its lens the eye of a poet.”  
—Orson Wells

To access the depth of the relationships present in documentary films, and their potential to generate compassion, I will further focus my analysis on a particular kind of film—one that showcases the intimate relationship between an artist and their material. I define artists broadly: anyone who takes his or her work to be an act of thoughtful creation, which is enriching in the act of making itself. Echoing what writer Elbert Hubbard once said, “Art is not a thing, it is a way,” I believe that a photographer, painter, architect, traveler, and even a scientist, can be an artist with the right yielding approach toward their material. This approach gives and reacts to the certain ways the material expresses its form. Whether this be a sculptor’s attentive working and responding to the

density and flexibility of the clay in his hands, or the way a photographer notices what kind of conversation or poses make their subject most comfortable, this act of yielding seems to present itself often in the process making of art. Under these simple categorizations, in my project Joe would be the artist and salmon the material.

More broadly, I am interested in exploring artists because they so often find themselves in places where they are able to become compassionate towards unlikely things and pay attention to their nuances. This makes not only for interesting stories, but also introduces us to the expansive nature and possibilities to re-see things as worthy of our compassion. The artist recorded in the film can become a kind of window into a new world for the viewer, allowing us to first see the person as a mirror of ourselves and our likeness, and then through them, we can be inspired to follow a new dimension of their understanding and interaction with their material, their thing.

We are given insights into two worlds in this moment –the thing, material, its form, (although we can never completely know its existence, only our now broadening understanding of it) and also we have a clearer insight to the artist’s “way of seeing.” As Berger notes, in his book titled *Ways of Seeing*, “Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights. This is true even in the most casual family snapshot. The photographer’s way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject” (Berger 10). I would agree, and also note that another world is recorded at that moment –the subject’s way of seeing the artist. In photography and film, this relationship seems to be most clear or unaltered by the artist (although, of course in ways it is.)

With these insights into ways of seeing, I am interested in the presence and possibility of a compassionate understanding of something or someone through another's approach to seeing.

If we think about the artist filmmaker, we realize that the filmmaker's art is to play with the material of reality, through understanding and respecting the form of their subjects, but also in the practice of approaching their surroundings with a kind of compassion. As an artist, the filmmaker needs to understand the supple and flexible qualities of the subjects they are interacting with, to direct and construct their approach as an act that serves to evoke the essence of their subject's artistry. In the same way a custom guitar maker must understand the wood he is working with, a filmmaker must attempt to understand their subject, and notice what resonates with them, and what works to bring out their passion for their material. The artistry of documentary filmmaking that I am most interested in is the interactions between the filmmaker and their subject and how the compassion that we usually employ only for those surrounding us (family, friends, loved ones) can be elicited during our immersion of a story through the vividness and closeness of film.



My theory for revealing the possibility for compassion through documentary filmmaking requires a series of four interactions that creates space for four different close and compassionate connections and elisions of worlds to take place. Consisting of invitations rather than assertions, these four spaces each abide by the same general principal –energy flows between the two things, and introduces the possibility of growth

or compassion in one or both parties. The four relationships most present in film are the following:

Artist and Material (Thing)<sup>4</sup>

Filmmaker and Artist

Filmmaker and Material (Thing)

Film and Audience

Each of these divisions follows the same general principal, of which I will soon elaborate. Before I proceed I want to unpack this point of intimacy, and introduce some of the thoughts of David Abram who helped inspire these ideas.

In his book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, author David Abram indentifies a similar space to the intimate space between components in a film, which an indigenous shaman can occupy. He states, “Intelligence is not circumscribed *within* the society –its place is at the edge, mediating *between* the human community and the larger community of beings upon which the village depends for its nourishment and sustenance” (Abram 6). In the same ways that a shaman, like Abram, can mediate between the intimate knowledge of natural and human communities, I hope to explore the ways that filmmakers can navigate and communicate an intimate perspective of an artistic practice that arise through inviting two different arenas to interact.



Reevaluating how we approach connecting to another is possible, but often difficult to do since we so often reduce things to our own terms, without even noticing. To deconstruct this blind spot we have in doing so, in order to create the space for an inviting and honest exchange, we can look to German philosopher, Martin Heidegger,

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<sup>4</sup> This will become much clearer in a few pages where I get into Heidegger’s definition of a “thing.”

and learn from his expansive critique of the “thingness of a thing,” which for clarity’s sake, I will refer to as its “essence.”

In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Heidegger has an entire chapter titled “The Thing” in which he goes into detail about being near enough to a thing (in his case, a jug) to be able to see its essence. In an attempt to reveal a nature of the thing which is so often hidden to us, Heidegger believes we must first understand the purpose of the thing, by means of what the role of the thing is in terms of a fourfold which consists of the four main components of what he believes to be holding the world together in full (earth, sky, divinities, and mortals.) Heidegger argues that a thing gets its “thingness” from an internal and inherent relation to these four factors.

The important philosophical move that Heidegger makes in this particular instance is the articulation of the right kind of distance to have between oneself and a thing in order to be able to be exposed to its essence, a distance which he terms “being near.” Heidegger is not asserting that simply being physically near to something means that one can understand the nature of the thing better, but rather allowing the thing to “bring us near.”

According to Heidegger, a sure-fire way to make sure that one is *not* being brought near to the essence of a thing is to acquire a belief that we can understand the complete reality of something else through only using scientific investigation (or perhaps in my case, a systematic or unyielding formula for interview questions) which completely ignores the relation to the fourfold. Using a jug as an example of a “thing” to illustrate his point, Heidegger asserts:

“In what does the jug-character of the jug consist? We suddenly lost sight of it—at the moment, in fact, when the illusion intruded itself that science could reveal to us the reality of the

jug...Conceived in terms of physical science, that is what the void really is; but it is not the jug's void. We did not let the jug's void be *its* own void...In the scientific view, the wine became a liquid, and liquidity in turn became one of the states of aggregation of matter, possible everywhere. We failed to give thought to what the jug holds and how it holds" (Heidegger 171).

The last sentence really gets at the concept of what we lose when we attempt to fully understand something else through a set parameter of investigation, whose terms have already been defined: what is the jug's void, what does it hold? The answer becomes a type of matter that can exist anywhere, an interchangeable meaningless piece of information. Instead, if we allow the thing itself and the possibilities it elicits to shape how we interact with it, we can be "near" to it, as it draws us into its world, we can respond reflexively.

Heidegger elaborates on what nearness means, in terms of the fourfold. He says, "The thing brings the four, in their remoteness, near to one another. This bringing-near is nearing...nearness is at work in bringing near, as the thinging of the thing" (178.) The thing in question, like all things, has a unique relationship between the earth, sky, divinities, and mortals which manifests in the essence and form of the thing itself.

Each thing enacts the fourfold in a kind of mirror-play, reflecting each part as a kind of relation or tether to the others. Heidegger claims, "Each of the four mirrors in its own way the presence of the others...the appropriative mirroring sets each of the four free into its own, but it binds these free ones into the simplicity of their essential being towards one another" (179). Suspended between the four elements, each thing holds a distinct purpose or meaning, which cannot be accessed by an approach that seeks to diminish its meaning (again, for Heidegger this is science) to only what *we* can see it as or use it for. He states, "The failure of nearness to materialize in consequence of the

abolition of all distances has brought the distanceless to dominance” (181). In other words, by not being near to the complex forces that make the thing’s essence, we are to distance ourselves from its capability to exist as something beyond our comprehension. Smothering it by our desire to define and dominate it, we destroy its essence.

Stepping back from Heidegger and back into the “thing” at hand with my project, the salmon, I will demonstrate one reading of how the salmon fits into the fourfold – acknowledging that this exploration attempts to do just that—explore, not explain or define their integral role to the earth, sky, divinities, and mortals.

Before I proceed, I think it is important to note that of the four divisions I have made in documentary filmmaking of points of contact where a “nearing” can take place, there is one that was the most difficult for me to pay attention to as I first approached this project because it is often hidden from the audience: the relationship between the filmmaker and the thing itself. I was so drawn in by Joe’s balance of the western world’s science while still holding onto belonging with the salmon and hope from stories of the past, that I centered too closely on him as a focal point. Distracted, I did not explore the salmon’s significance, and rather approached Joe with a desire to capture his character, instead of reacting to and developing a nearness to him or the salmon themselves.

The filmmaker’s understanding of their relationship with the “thing” can prove to be a very important personal exploration, which allows them to confront and discover their personal biases in creating the film in the first place. Additionally, a deeper connection between the filmmaker and the subject can be formed through a shared intrigue of the thing itself. The following is my attempt at applying my fourfold theory with Heidegger’s through the salmon.



Stronger than any fish that I've wrestled with on a rod, salmon swim upstream hundreds of miles to spawn, navigating between mountain tributaries' freshwater and the ocean's saltwater. Anadromous is the technical term for this, derived from a Greek word meaning "running uphill." An apt root, seeing as some salmon catapult their bodies against the river current for close to 900 miles as they return from the ocean back upstream. They are also some of the only fish that are anadromous, and able to make this switch, adapting from one environment to the next, morphing their bodies along the way—from silvery blue to blood red.

According to Joe, in the height of their time in Wallowa, salmon were not just a resource, but a way of life for the Nez Perce. The beginning of each spring season was signaled by the return of the salmon, the Nez Perce always included a ritual and ceremonial feast, known as the *ka-oo-yit*, or the spring thanks giving. Gratitude was expressed to the Creator and to the salmon for returning to the people. This celebration was no small matter. The salmon coming home was an event that resonated with the core of what it meant to be a Nez Perce for many tribe members. A sentiment from Horace Axtell, known as "uncle" to almost everyone on the Nez Perce reservation, states, "In our family we had a feast of the first salmon, and the people would tell fishing stories or other stories. My grandmother would bury the bones in the ground after the feast, which we were taught to do with a lot of things. It was a way of giving things back to Mother Earth" (Landeem 93). The salmon and their ceremonial celebrations seemed to orient not only a respect to the Creator, but a particular kind of belonging with the landscape for many Nez Perce.

Biologically termed a “keystone species”, salmon stabilize the intimate and tangled web of over 150 ecological connections that thrive in and by the river, and just like a keystone in a bridge, work to hold them together. The lifeblood of Nez Perce communities, salmon navigate between providing rich spirit and sustenance.

All of these qualities of salmon can be parsed out to fit Heidegger’s fourfold. Salmon mirror *Earth* (the building bearer and nourishing source), as they act as a nutrient pulse to people, to riparian systems, to forests, to ecosystems. They mirror *Sky* (the year’s seasons, fluctuations of light and dark) as their return upstream in spring signals the changing seasons and work as markers on the year’s calendar. Salmon reveal *Divinities* (God emerges as what he is) as they have symbolically and physically served as spiritual and godly reminders to the Nez Perce of their Creator. And they mirror *Mortals* (capable of death) for in their dying, they add nutrients to the soil, and provide for the life of the people. Another way the salmon mirror what is *mortal* now is that they symbolize the death of a culture and way of life—in the way that all cultures, humans and animals will fade from being, the salmon’s meager numbers reflect this passing and death. But in their resilience and adaptability, in their current strength, they can inspire a hope to continue to reassign meaning and persistence to our progression forward in the face of our inevitable end.

If I am able to approach salmon, or any thing for that matter, with a regard that it holds these four forces in a mirror play with one another, I may begin to be able to focus and be near to the essence of what makes the salmon such a sacred thing.

To avoid arrogance in this process, Heidegger suggests, “The first step toward such vigilance is the step back from the thinking that merely represents—that is, explains

–to the thinking that responds and recalls” (181). In other words, the way we approach a thing must be reactive. I will further this concept in film through the idea of active-passivity.



When applied to interactions with another person, as the Heideggarian “thing,” this is a kind of active participation that asserts one’s presence, yet is not dominating. It instead acts to present oneself in a way that *allows* for the participation of and interactions with another. The essence of the thing can be preserved when not merely represented or spoken for by the filmmaker, but rather responded to.

This situation is something that I would like to term, an *active-passivity*<sup>5</sup>—where you are actively creating the space for someone or something else to come into, if they choose. An invitation to a space you actively create, but becomes passive in the sense that it allows for another active person or thing to enter into.

In his essay, *Getting Along with Nature*, Wendell Berry mimics this role of active-passivity when he creates a small, intimate patch of farmland that he works with a team of horses. Because of this space’s invitation to the natural world (as it is not entirely part of his world, for he is aligning himself with a team of horses instead of machinery) it allows for certain kinds of meetings to take place, which might not have otherwise (Davis). In Wendell Berry’s essay, this involves an interaction between himself and a curious hawk. The wild woods on one side of Berry’s patch, the domestic farmhouse on the other provide entries into two separate worlds, but in this arrangement, the farming patch Berry has created, allows for a combination and meeting of those two worlds. In

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<sup>5</sup> A term coined and introduced to me by local filmmaker, Sarah Koenigsberg, owner of *Tensegrity Productions*, where I have been an intern for the past year.

order to communicate with the hawk, Wendell Berry eventually figures out that he must mimic some of its body language, by stooping to see it, rather than looking at it head on, like we are so often tempted to do in the domesticated human world. In Heidegger's language, Berry "responds" and "recalls" the form or "thinging" of the hawk and changes his approach accordingly. He practices a kind of stepping back and allowing for a kind of mirroring to occur between the two of them.

For Berry in this exchange, the edges of borders and margins bleed into one another. Like a Venn diagram, a mixed space forms in between two worlds, holding the similarities and connections that both sides share; yet exposing and creating possibilities that were unavailable to either side in their separation. At its most basic form, active-passivity is an exercise in the creation of new possibilities by exposing what were once hidden parts of either side (Davis).

This is a bit like what people do when they are fishing. Creating the possibility to interact with a fish, a landscape, or what is hidden from view under the water, a fisherwoman casts a line out into the water, hooking herself to it and inviting fish to connect to her. Once the bait is in the water, there is a time where she must become passive, and wait for the fish to bite. Casting the line, stepping back and letting the fish speak. In other words, she has created the possibility for a connection between herself and the fish, through the line. This arrangement creates the possibility to merge into another world, hidden from view, deep under water, but can only be activated by the fish.

This fishing analogy is a good introduction to the active-passive relationships that might take place while making a documentary film, and interacting with a perspective beyond our own, but it is important to note that the analogy breaks down, and also

presents some of the risks in attempting an artist and material focused documentary. First, in order to have an active passive relationship with the water and possibly a fish swimming in it, the angler has to come up with some kind of bait, which can result in a disrespect of boundaries since it is a disguise or trickery. When using a lure or bait, the fish usually has no idea what it's getting itself into.

However, if you go fishing with the intent, respect, and humility to somehow learn from the experience and the fish themselves, it is possible to have an interaction that serves to deepen an understanding of the possibilities that fish introduce to us about connecting to our surroundings<sup>6</sup>.

The root of the problems in the fishing analogy comes from the risk of using something for your own purposes. This risk is especially true when drawing from someone's real experience to make it into an artistic story in the way that documentary filmmaking does. The phrases *capturing* a shot, or *catching* a fish are quite problematic. It puts the actor (the filmmaker or fisherwoman) as the authority on the matter, and fish or photograph is being defined and emphasized in terms *of the actor*. As a result, "I captured that on film", or "I caught that fish", reduces the subject of the film and the fish to merely flattened interpretations by the filmmaker or angler of what those things are.

*Capturing* fish and film is not about a congenial or common creation, but rather becomes an issue of possession. The problem with the word capture, and the associations it elicits originate from the French root of the word, meaning to forcibly take or seize, and was often used in war –from captive prisoners (OED). The word I have been using throughout this paper to get at the same concept of capturing something on film is *record*.

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<sup>6</sup> Which I will explain more in depth in the following chapter

Conversely, the root of record implies a thoughtful remembrance: the word defined as “putting something on record,” but also to remember, recall, repeat, relate, learn by heart, reflect, ponder, or narrate (OED). *Recording* rather than *capturing* brings the power and importance of the piece to focus on what is playing out in front of the lens in addition to what is behind it.

Additionally, instead of capturing fish, I prefer the term *hooking*, since it is closer to the truth, because when angling, you are using the hook to connect to the fish. It also implies a kind of fastening of oneself to the fish, where both become more equal players than a capturer and a captive.

Both the terminology and the concept of *capturing* eliminates the possibility of the fish or the subject of a documentary film to be recognized on their own terms, and become a commodity or possession of the fisherman or the filmmaker. Rather, by *recording* something to be remembered, responded to or recalled and being able to be *hooked* to something else that tethers you to it and reveals another world is a more respectful and responsive approach in reaching the nearness of the subject or thing’s essence.



In order for a film in particular to expose or shed light on the connection and intimate space of active-passivity between the artist and their material, that bond must be either something that we can see or discern through audio. For example, lets go back to the guitar maker who respects and attends to the way each kind of wood responds to being shaped in a particular manner. The sharing of his artistry can happen in multiple different ways. For example, the tone of his voice, the look in his eye or the articulation

his words when talking about his process can illuminate the respect he has for the wood and the guitar itself, showing that the work of art is not entirely his—it is a meeting of himself and something else, something more than himself. This could be evident in the way he is shaping the wood, the way his hands react to the curves and bends, exposing the care he employs in the specific choices he makes.

Without being able to see the way the artist approaches their way of working with their material through sound or sight in a recording, the audience of the finished film is unable to be drawn into the depths and possibilities of the thing—in this case, the resonance and qualities of the wood. A film that makes a convincing case of this connection will be able to seek out and communicate multiple ways that the artist respects their material and introduces its viewers to possibilities of the thing that are visible to the artist—something whose quality is often seen as somewhat spiritual. To emphasize this in terms of my fourfold, at each intersection of the four, if the kind of Heideggerian approach is exercised, it allows for another layer of nearness to exist in the final piece. Each relationship of compassion allows for the work to reach out and connect in a deeper level and thus the closer each connection can become, the more powerful the film can be.

In this next chapter, I will apply the philosophical relationship of nearness and active-passivity, in a documentary film, *Spoil*. This film showcases how an intimate active-passive relationship in photography, and at times in the execution of the film itself can be used to generate compassion. I have chosen this environmental documentary because it explores salmon, native people, and the sacredness of a symbolic animal that brings people closer to the mythic and multidimensional aspects of the natural world.

## 5 | Recording the Green Fire in *Spoil*

“You have to try and find the single image that implies everything instead of trying to make the film that contains everything specifically” -Lindsay Anderson in *Documentary Explorations*

The main problem I have noticed in environmental documentaries is that they have carved out a niche as advocacy pieces trying to relay information and create a strong argument, often ignoring rather than engaging and recognizing the role of the filmmaker and their partiality in the process. Photography, on the other hand, seems to successfully carved out multiple different identities: as an art form, as snapshot documentation, and as photojournalist documentation. As we will see in *Spoil*, the environmental documentary I will focus on in this chapter, a few elite wildlife photographers featured in the piece fall into the final category of journalistic documentation –able to balance representation and reality in ways that reveal engaging stories, and pull the viewer near to their subject.

*Spoil* is an environmental documentary following a few of the iLCP (International League of Conservation Photographers) on their mission to communicate the diversity and beauty of the Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia through intimate and powerful photographic images of wildlife. Given the pertinent substance of the film (an examination of how visual media is used to generate care and compassion for a rainforest) I would first like to look at the relationships that the film illuminates between photographers, wildlife subjects, and wildlife guides, before moving on to critiquing the methods of the film itself.

*Spoil* was created as a response to Enbridge Inc.'s proposal to create a pipeline for heavy crude oil from the Alberta tar sands through the coast of the Great Bear Rainforest: a healthy, vibrant and diverse marine ecosystem with intricate water passageways. The Great Bear Rainforest is also home to many Gitga'at First Nation People of Canada who have lived there for thousands of years. The route would be extremely difficult to navigate with giant oil tankers, and the film's title presents the viewer with what is at risk if there was to be a spill—the luscious resource is to undergo spoilage.

A highly acclaimed documentary piece, *Spoil* has won “Best Environmental Film,” for the 2011 Vancouver International Film Festival, “Best Film- Mountain Environment” for Banff Mountain Film Festival, “Best human interest” for Flagstaff Mountain Film Festival, among many other awards. Directed and filmed by Trip Jennings, a renowned National Geographic filmmaker, the film has a far-reaching audience, yet still maintains a sense of intimacy throughout its production. Even though this film could be categorized as an advocacy piece, I experience a much more personal and responsive feel to the film.

Encompassing many elements of my hypothetical film project, *Spoil* is a story about protecting cultural and spiritual resources of indigenous, First Nation people from industrial processes. The film does emphasize salmon in the area, their lifecycle and the systems the support, but the focus is on the iconic Kermode bear, known throughout the film as the “spirit bear.” The spirit bear is genetically rare white colored black bear, and is a symbol of hope and spirituality to many of the First Nation’s people residing in the Great Bear Wilderness, as well as a source of wonder and fascination to many travelers. In the same way salmon works in my project, getting near to this bear serves as the climax of the film, as photographer Paul Nicklen seeks out an intimate connection with the animal to use in a piece for National Geographic Magazine. His photo essay will be an argument for one of the reasons we should save the rainforest from the proposed oil tanker route: save this sacred species.

For this particular project, the central focus of the film is image, most specifically the whiteness of the spirit bear, its charismatic coat of fur—a unique variation of wild beauty. Almost genetically identical to a black bear (it actually is a black bear—a white black bear) the spirit bear is something sought after for appearance. But its importance and resonance but it goes beyond its façade. Like a photograph, a film clip, or any story for that matter, the image of whiteness is only so powerful as what it provokes in us. To many, the bear represents a rare beauty, a kind of pure, sacred icon of many Gitga’at people that represents the “spirit” of the wild—the more-than-human. The bear is an enigma, yet tangible icon encompassing what we could lose if this land were to spoil. Spotting the bear’s whiteness serves as a moment to recognize the multiple values and

depth of the wild, and presents us the possibility to recognize the worth of this world before it becomes lost to an oil company's desire to increase their profit.

Ian McAllister is one of the photographers and the Conservation Director of Pacific WILD, and liaison in a lot of ways between the environmental community of photographers and the Gitga'at First Nation People. He is closest figure the film has to a consistent narrator, and explains the necessity for the photo project (and by extension the documentary film), stating, "Living in fear of a catastrophic oil spill is really real [for members of the Gitga'at Nation and those who love the Great Bear Rainforest], and that's why a league of internationally known photographers are here, to really showcase this place and to put it on the map" (Jennings *Spoil*). This map he is talking about is not just the location or knowledge of the bear's existence, but our mental map, our conceptual framework of what is important, and by extension an element worthy of our compassion. Showcasing the spirit bear, the salmon and other wildlife through close, intimate photographs, the photographers hope to symbolize and communicate the ecological and spiritual health of a larger system—a system that as it stretches outward to include the Gitga'at First Nation people and those viewing the images. A deep reading of ecology that bleeds into radical kind of compassion, is made visible through their powerful imagery.

This story, like Joe's, is about maintaining hope in the face of loss, and trying to recognize the worth of something more-than-human before we lose it forever in the name of human dominance —of control and capital. For my purposes thus far in my project, I have focused on science as the mode of human dominance, used as both a threat and a tool —diminishing the worth of fish as seen in my experience in Swan Valley, or

reincorporated as a tool to preserve them as I have been so inspired by in Joe McCormack. In *Spoil*, the threat takes a different form: Enbridge, a wealthy oil company. Instead of working with the oil company, the iLCP has turned to storytelling. Hoping that they can get an intimate moment between themselves and what will be lost if there is an oil spill, the photographers aim to communicate a mysterious quality that we cannot replicate through our streamlined control. In a sense, they are trying to record a moment of resonant wildness. This echoes with a moment that iconic conservation writer, Aldo Leopold experienced and recorded in *A Sand County Almanac*. After shooting a wolf (with a gun), he writes

“We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then and have known ever since that there was something new to me in those eyes, something known only to her and the mountain. I was young then and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters’ paradise. But after watching the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view” (Leopold 130).

In a sense, the photographers are trying to record the exact shade of the green fire in each iconic wildlife figure’s eyes in the Great Bear Rainforest so people can see it and fight for its preservation, not standby and let it be extinguished by an oil spill.

The first world-class conservation photographer profiled is Thomas Peschak. He comments on the difficulty of his assignment (taking photographs of salmon), representing a story in a still image. In an interview before his first attempts, he questions, “How do you capture that? How do you capture 1000 salmon in a dark pool on a rainy day with no light?” (Jennings *Spoil*). At this point in the film, there is an image of him suited up in a wetsuit with scuba gear, holding his protected camera under the water,

entering into a world that is so foreign to him, he needs heaps of gear to breathe, to protect himself and his camera to even have a chance of snapping a photo. He continues in non-diegetic narration, (with the moving images shown to the audience, not his face), “You stick your head in the water and it’s very primal, it’s dark, its mysterious, there’s water rushing over you, fish are leaping out of the water, trying to catch the current. How do you capture that in a still frame? What do you...How do you shoot that?” (Jennings *Spoil*). The video shots at this point are fuzzy and dark, interspersed by his final artwork—surreal, clear and bright still portraits of salmon. He expresses how he overcame the challenge, “So I wrenched myself in a crack under the waterfall and basically wait for the salmon to start migrating up the waterfall...I think I spent about three hours in there total, I think the water was 50 degrees” (Jennings *Spoil*).

For wildlife photographers, harsh conditions and patient waiting is all part of the job. A behind the scenes episode of *Planet Earth* is all you need to watch to understand this. In that way, wildlife photographers have to be sensitive to their surroundings and try to and figure out the best place to locate themselves to have a significant and intimate encounter with the species without being too invasive. This reminds me of the tendencies of a naturalist: curiosity, observation and respect for the natural world and the creatures that inhabit. The photographers, like naturalists, are on a mission to give themselves and other an insight into an often hidden world.

However the language in Peschak’s quote is full of violent connotations like *capture*, which I have gone into detail earlier. *Shot* is a word also used with photography and is a violent and possessive word often used in the context of hunting. As I have mentioned, I prefer the term *record*, but perhaps going along with the hunting metaphor

can give insight to how hunting, or even shooting photographs does not have to be diminishing. The Nez Perce salmon harvest, a form of the hunt, was an act to be close to the animal, the Creator, and give thanks for the possibility of their own survival. Levi Holt, a Nez Perce member, reflects on the respect possible in a hunt,

“I am honored that I have that remembrance of watching my elders fish from those platforms [at Celilo Falls]. It gave me a feeling and assured me that all Indian people honored the Salmon in the same way. They respected Mother Earth and the strength of those great rivers. They not only respected the life that they gave but also respected the life that they could take as well” (Landeem 79).

I would argue that a hunt for sustenance in an earthly sense is different than this attempt to capture, to shoot, for the purposes of conquering. In this vein, the photographic act of shooting in *Spoil* is rooted in a desire to suspend an image that can be easily translated to other people that evokes a sense of being surrounded by and sustained by a world beyond ourselves. So even this moment of a snapshot, or capture by a conservation photographer, the hunt to pursue and discover as they attempts to “engage the media and be tipping points around conservation issues,” the photographic hunt is almost ceremonial in nature (Jennings *Spoil*). Hoping to tip over its audience to see the importance of the green fire we might lose, these photographers exercise their hunt in a respectful and awe-struck manner.



Another way of articulating this act of recording is to let the “material” of the wild animal resonate through the lens of an artist. This concept is something that multiple photographers explore. Another photographer who is capturing images of sea lions for the iLCP mentions, “Very often I’ll observe an animal for an hour before I take the first

image. The key thing is really understanding your subject and really anticipating what it's going to do" (Jennings *Spoil*). Like a dance with two partners, the professional wildlife photographer must understand the nature, drive and tendencies of his partner in order to fully illuminate them in their interactions and the final performance or photograph.

Photographer Paul Nicklen, assigned to photographing the illusive spirit bear, articulates the necessity for a sense of nearness and understanding with his subject. He has gone out multiple times with no success for this project and this time he has chosen to ask for the assistance of a Gitga'at Nation spirit bear guide, Marven Robinson.

"You hear of horse whisperers, and I really do feel like Marven is a spirit bear whisperer. And Marven has seen many of these bears since they were cubs, they've grown up knowing each other, and so Marven is showing me the way of the spirit bear... These images are being used for the iLCP RAVE [Rapid Assessment Visual Expedition] ...and National Geographic Magazine... that's an opportunity to reach 40 million people around the world. My job as a photojournalist is to bring people into that story, and to do that, they can't just be snapshots of this animal, they have to be close, intimate portraits" (Jennings *Spoil*).

Although the focus of the film seems to be on the iLCP, and their artistry, the artist I am most interested in, in terms of active passivity is not the photographers, but the Gitga'at spirit bear guide, Marven, who acts as a translator for Paul. Marven can read the signs and tendencies of the spirit bears better than the wildlife photographers, attuned to their habits, and dwelling spaces, mannerism, fears, more aware of their ways of both being and seeing. He enjoys introducing tourists and those interested to the bears, claiming, "A lot of people find it really spiritual when they get to see this rare bear, and they come here as one of the things they see before they die. That's really why I do this to

get to experience, and get to see their experience when they do get to see this rare bear” (Jennings *Spoil*).

I think it’s interesting that he mentions here is that many people want to do this before they die—to me that hints that this is something that has not really been documented, and for them, they want to believe that something like this exists in the world before they leave it, so they go out to see it.

More broadly though, Marven’s job necessitates that he is aware of the bears’ personal space and habits, anticipates their behavior and allows them to become familiar with him. However, this is an interesting case (between a wild animal and a wildlife guide) where it is clear that the guide knows something about the animal, but we can only really speculate on how the animal is processing the interaction. There is no moment of enlightening exchange that occurs between the animal and the guide that we can see on camera in *Spoil*, and the bear seems to be more-or-less undisturbed by the presence of Marven and his friend. Even though we cannot discern the feelings of the bear, we can justly conclude that on some level the bear does not feel threatened by Marven and has some degree of trust, or at least indifference to his presence.

Marven’s relationship is described by Paul Nicklen who claims, “I couldn’t believe the pictures we were getting, the bear had just accepted us, it had accepted Marven, who was introducing me to this bear...Marven’s known this bear for 5 years, I’ve never seen anyone get as close to a bear as I’ve seen Marven, two feet away. And Marven is going to introduce me to his friend, which is the hugest honor I’ve been paid in a long time” (Jennings *Spoil*). Paul is agape, with an almost breathless excitement. His word choice, and understanding of the bear as Marven’s friend is a clear sign of the

respect that Marven and Paul have built up for this subject. The docile nature and relaxed movement of the bear going about its everyday life caught on camera serves as a confirmation of these values.

To further understand this series of interactions, I will turn to acclaimed documentary filmmaker, Albert Maysles, who has made award-winning films such as *Salesman* (following door to door Bible salesmen) and *Grey Gardens* (which illuminates the hidden life of a mother and daughter who have not left the house in over 50 years.)

Commenting on this kind of interaction in film, he states, “It’s not “fly-on-the-wall... You need to establish rapport even without saying so but through eye contact and empathy” (Maysles). In Marven’s case, the rapport is more an issue of body language, and small movements rather than eye contact, but the resonance of empathy and compassion for the bear is still there. His caution in following the bear, which he normally does not do after the first sighting (but does so because he recognizes the importance of Paul taking good pictures), shows his respect of the bears’ boundaries.

In an impromptu interview Marven states, “This guy is pretty comfortable with me, so I’m going to take Paul in there and try and get him the shot he really needs, which is pretty hard to get with a camera trap” (Jennings *Spoil*). Something is clear to both Marven and National Geographic –there is a stark difference in the space between a photographer and a subject compared with a camera trap and a subject. Paul again highlights this intimacy, “And the bear walked within two feet of us, and you could smell his breath and look into his eyes, and I was just in disbelief, living the dream at that moment, being so close to such a great animal” (Jennings *Spoil*).

Cristina Mittermeier, founder of the iLCP and coworker with Paul for the Spirit Bear assignment (she was unsuccessful in recording one) shares her interaction with Paul after his assignment in her blog,

“‘This was Marven’s gift to me,’ he tells me. When Marven showed him the bear he told he has known him since he was a cub. ‘Stay close to him and you will get your pictures’, Marven said. Paul did stay close to the bear and was able to create a photographic essay of a rare and elusive animal that has seldom been seen. The images are intimate and poetic; they reveal the secret trails that the Spirit Bear travels, and like the Gitga’at did for me, the bear offered Paul a glimpse into a magical world very much in danger of changing forever” (Mittermeier).

The closeness that Mittermeier talks about mirrors Heidegger’s nearness, evoking intimate, poetic kinds of respectful exchange between the bear and Paul.

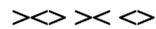
Although *Spoil* emphasizes Marven’s role at the end pretty heavily, I am interested to know more about how Marven performs his art. We get to see his body language, confident but not overbearing, his respect and fascination with the spirit bears, but the main focus of the film is really on the photographers. The space that is focused on is the space between the photographer and the wildlife, which in this case includes and necessitates Marven. As a viewer, and especially as someone interested in creating an effective active-passive space like Marven does, I’d love to see the space between the bear and Marven showcased in the film. Perhaps hearing an interview with Marven about how he is able to construct this relationship with the bear and how he navigates and maintains it, or see him approaching the space closer to the bear would help illuminate this. At the end of the film, they show the conference in which all the iLCP display their photos and share their stories. Paul remarks,

“As a National Geographic photographer I’m traveling around the world about 300 days a year and I’ve had a lot of incredible encounters with wildlife, so it means a lot for me to say that I had

the greatest experience of my photographic career just three days ago while on this RAVE...and that gift came from my friend, Marven Robinson” (Jennings *Spoil*).

Gratefully, Marven accepts the honor. All parties acknowledge it would be impossible to have the impacts the photographs did without Marven.

Jane Goodall, an advisor for the iLCP remarks on the organization’s goals, “If the photographer is using the camera to express his feeling, the relationship that he has with this being that he’s capturing through his lens, then that picture, that image is going to reach out to the people looking and reach into their hearts—that’s what’s going to make them want to help” (*Witness*). A reminder that this feeling of closeness that Paul was able to experience can be translated through the lens to evoke compassion for this sacred land and its inhabitants.



Although the substance of the film focuses on an intimate exchange of the artists and subjects, the techniques of the filmmaking are more complex –holding elements of both connection and dissonance with their audience. The film as it contextualizes itself in its unfolding is more argumentative than artistic, and sometimes loses its viewer connectivity and compassion. However, the editing of narrative structure creates a vicarious experience for the viewer, leading the film to challenge and outgrow many didactic environmental documentary traps.

In the majority of the film, the photographers and Marven are the active-passive figures in the production, and the filmmaker and cameraman, Trip Jennings, serves to fulfill the role of documenter. Something important that all artists must be aware of is that sometimes the topic they are representing becomes so interesting and compelling that the aspect of craft, and artistry becomes minimally important compared to the content itself.

Sometimes, you are just in the right place at the right time. As an amateur photographer, I can assure you that many of my best shots occur simply from being in the right place, using the mechanical eye to transport a viewer into my position and catch a glimpse of something revealing itself. However, creating the situation where someone or something is inspired to reveal something about themselves is a different story is not prominently found in *Spoil's* documentation.

I have seen moments of this in Maysles films and commend their ability to connect with their subjects. In their film *Salesman*, the Maysles share a mutual interest and background as their subjects in being door-to-door salesmen. When watching, I feel both connected and distant to the salesmen, as the Maysles must have felt while filming. The Maysles mattered. People do not go around revealing themselves to just anyone. Because of who the filmmakers were, and what they were able to connect with their subjects about, they were able to bring out sentiments of truth and deep longings and reveal them to an audience. But this connection and craft was not showcased in the film, but rather exists behind the scenes—in moments they deliberately did not put in the final cut. Films like *Salesman* stand apart to me, although they are hard to extensively critique because they hide rather than expose their relationship to their subjects in their final piece. However, the brothers share some advice to help mirror their approach: “love your subjects” (Maysles).

*Spoil*, unlike *Salesman*, seems to miss out on a few moments of filmmaker-subject connectivity in service of documentation. There are moments that the filmmaker decided to step aside, like when the spirit bear, Marven, and Paul are all interacting. The filmmaker is obviously there also, and to a degree, the spirit bear must have accepted

him, as well as Paul and Marven, although there is no mention of the cameraman behind the lens we as an audience are looking through. In fact, Trip Jennings has remarked on his experience filming this documentary in an interview by his employer, National Geographic. He comments,

“The most amazing experience I've had in the field was shooting the final scene in the documentary *Spoil*... we had been invited there by the Gitga'at people because their culture is under attack by the oil industry. They felt if we could document this special place and this special bear, people would be inspired to protect it from the proposed oil pipeline from the tar sands in Alberta ports on the coast of British Columbia” (Jennings *Spoil*).

I believe this choice to hide his presence is a function of allowing the viewer to “pulled in without thinking about it” (Aufderheide 26). Trip Jennings functions as our lens, and our eyes are pulled into the moment, taking up his place. The film, since it is not the central artistic medium that is revealing (in this case, photography is), it seems to take a seat in the background. Even though the bear intrigues all three men, Jennings takes on a more passive position in this case, and the photographers are the ones actively passive with their material.

The strength in the film lies in the combination of the video clips and the iLCP's photographs interspersed throughout the unfolding footage. It is a successful piece of communication because we can see the intimate moments occurring between the photographers and their wildlife subjects through their final images, while the documentary film acts as an exposition of the relationship between the photographers and their subjects. There is nothing wrong with expository documentaries, and most environmental films serve to occupy this genre, with a call to action or agenda and a clear sense of shaping or controlling the message throughout. However, what I am interested

in is how the expository nature of the filming process can be more intimate. *Spoil* does tend to fall into the expository trap at times explicitly directing its viewers to act in a certain way in response to the proposed oil tanker route, but it does have some redeeming moments of sensitivity to particular subject matter which enters into the active-passive approach.

Towards the beginning of the film, McAllister's gestures to the cameraman and as a viewer, it seems as if McAllister is directing us where to look. The camera cuts to images where our gaze would be tempted to follow. The openness in which McAllister talks to the cameraman, but the cameraman's lack of response, leaves that space open to be filled by the viewer, which allows for the viewer to embody the space that the cameraman occupied with the photographers and really bring them into the scene, similar to the moments with the spirit bear. Creating an invitation for the viewer to step out of their own lives and become immersed in the film, it is possible with this feature of editing and narrows the distance between the audience and the film.

Another successful instance of active-passivity is when a Gitga'at Nation member is asked to speak about Enbridge, the oil company, and their proposed oil tanker route. He says, "It was easier for me to draw something than to say something, like about Enbridge" (Jennings *Spoil*). The film shot then transitions to a picture that this speaker has drawn, showing "Mother Nature crying and her eyes filling up with oil from the tankers" (Jennings *Spoil*). The oil stained paper drawn on with a ballpoint pen is hardly a masterpiece, but the decision of the filmmaker to include it in place of a typical interview, (which would've been painful with someone not comfortable expressing

themselves that way), was a conscious decision allowing someone else to communicate their deepest sentiments in a way best for them.

Another example of bringing the audience closer to the subjects in the film is the establishing shots that set the scene for each expedition. Leading into each new space, we are given some things that the filmmaker notices and connects to, and are put together to form a more holistic image of the locale. A variation of long shots, close ups, and diegetic sound (in real time) all serve to place the viewer near to the atmosphere of the action.

Although it's not exactly visible to the audience, since the roll of the filmmaker is hidden in the expository style, we see the spirit bear through the eyes of three men, Trip Jennings, Paul Nicklen, and Marven Robinson. Between each of these parts must exist some sense of compassion and closeness in order to translate the importance of this place, this animal, and ultimately for the ecosystem and community. The bear is, after all, a symbol for something bigger than itself, including the health of the salmon, and the health of the bay and the First Nation culture that resides in the healthy robust marine ecosystems. At its core, this is a film about weighing the importance of economic value or the relationship values of spiritual, cultural, nutritional, and ecological health. The film mentions the Great Bear Rainforest was once was called the McCoast Timber Supply Area—which exemplifying the possibility of the loss of these relationship—the destruction of a spiritual dimension, a part of the fourfold, in search of economic gain. This film and the photographs are all in effort to prevent such a loss, and diminishing of a cultural richness.

Although the film does fall into the “expository trap”, slipping into purely documentation and information reception and delivery mode, (there is an entire section that is narrated by someone we never meet, giving us background information on the issue, breaking the intimate tone of the film) the strength of the film is being guided by the thoughtful artists’ approach toward recording, only for a moment, what might be lost if there was an oil spill, and this system would be spoiled. This message rings loud and clear to its audience.

## 6 | Seeing the Sacred

“It is when the magician lets *himself* be captured by the magic that his audience will be most willing to join him” -David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*

In mid-October of this year, I drove down to Joseph, Oregon for an initial meeting with Joe McCormack to gather some preliminary footage for the documentary film project I thought I was going to make, hoping to get a direction and form a relationship with him. He welcomed me into his home, even though I am sure he didn't remember me. I had an “in” given the school I came from and the relationship that some of the professors had formed over years with him and other prominent figures in Wallowa. In a way, I was just riding on the coattails of those who had come before me, hoping that my good intentions would create a space where Joe would be able to share with me some of the key issues and difficulties he faces. I thought we would be able to talk about his feeling of being torn between the past and the present, the spiritual and the scientific, the

white and indigenous cultures and that it would give a direction to the film. I didn't know what I was going to ask, I just wanted to know what I could gather from being in the presence of him, reacting to his inclinations, and checking out what the fisheries tech people were doing. He had inspired me in some way and I wanted him to remind me what that was.

Filmmaker Georges Franju comments on what I didn't have,

“You illuminate the subject, go beyond the subject—and that's documentary. It's as useful to have a precise question to answer in a documentary as it is for a fresco painter to have a wall—if there's no wall, what the hell is he going to do with his fresco? Documentary is to the cinema what the poster is to painting. A poster has a clear, precise question to resolve, which is why there are rarely good posters. The narrower the question, the better your chances are of going beyond it” (Levin 120).

I didn't have a question that I was poking at, but I knew I wanted to go beyond something, beyond pure exposition. But without a crafted question to raise, I was lost.

Making me further confront my naivety, it was the wrong time of year for salmon tracking and Joe drove me two hours to the Imnaha River from his house in Joseph to see six fingerling fish scanned, and one tagged. To say the least, it was a lack luster experience. Having woken up at four in the morning, to drive down for the morning scan at six, (after driving close to three hours in the dark the night before to get there), I was tired, I hadn't done enough research beforehand and was lost. Asking questions felt like I was fumbling through a bag with no light, grasping at nothing, searching for something I never knew was there, but thought would present itself to me in time. I felt like I *wanted* something from Joe, a direction, a quote that held tension and passion, a story. Unable to reach any sense of substance of my own character in our conversations or to his, I learned

instead of details I should've been aware of before I came: the Nez Perce hatchery in Idaho, a bit about the tribe's stance on dams.

I left hours later, confused why the inspiration of *why* I wanted to do this project didn't gush back to me in the visit.

Only in hindsight can I really evaluate what happened. I was trying too hard to walk a fine line of respect and admiration without presenting my own biases and myself. I was trying only to listen, neglecting my own story and personal intrigue. My motive was to get results, not to connect. I needed to find a compelling story and reason why Joe should be featured in a documentary film about persistence and strength, but denying the fact that "why" he should be featured was a question for me, not him. After all, he inspired me to want to do this. This project was coming from somewhere inside of me, and that part was largely unexamined.

I failed to find a point to connect with Joe and treat him like an equal, bonding over something that would allow both of us to gush with fascination and empathy, I now realize that this flaw was the thing holding my project back. I was trying to be an observer, not myself. The whole exchange felt contrived, and I was worried especially since he was a Native American, that I would do something wrong, that I would essentialize his culture, step over some boundary, turn a stranger into a spectacle. I took a step back, and realized this project could not be cranked out over a semester, and contain the depth, intimacy, respect and level of connectivity that it deserved. After some advise from my boss who owns a film company of her own and struggled with the same pressures of cranking out a piece she would not be proud of to fit a deadline, I decided I needed to proceed forward, but in a different manner.

The main problem was not that I didn't know enough about Joe or the Nez Perce (although that was an issue), but rather that I didn't feel comfortable presenting myself as a participant in the project—I had left hidden why I was even interested in telling the story.

This written thesis project, has largely been an exploration of why—why this story, why do I care, why should this be shared in this way?

I came across an article in *Orion Magazine* that crystallizes a lot of the theory that I have been parsing out philosophically throughout the piece, and gave me a new refreshing clarity on what it really was that I was missing in my visit with Joe, and what exactly I needed to examine in myself.

In the article, *In the Black Chamber: On Seeing the Sacred in Nature*, author Paul Kingsnorth writes of an experience he had while standing in an ancient French cave, looking at the ancient artistic carvings on the walls. Buffalo, ibex, and mammoths, all lined the cavernous room around him, but were not drawn for the purpose of utility. They are not being hunted, not seen in terms of their meat or fruitfulness to the people, but rather seem to be appreciated in their form, for what they are. While looking at these carvings, Kingsnorth has an acute feeling of their significance, “They surely sprang from the same sense of power and smallness and wonder and awe that I feel as I stand in the place where the artists would have stood. This was a reaching out to, for, something beyond human comprehension. This was a meeting with the sacred” (Kingsnorth 31).

Upon reading this statement, I came to realize that what I have been searching for this whole project pivots on his final word: “sacred.” Although the usual connotations of

the word are derived from religion, Kingsnorth points out that the Latin root *sacrare* also meant to “set apart” (31). His definition resonates with me,

“If anything is sacred, I have thought since I can remember thinking, surely it is this thing we call ‘nature’...it is the fear and violence inherent in wild nature, as much as the beauty and peace, that inspires in me the impulses that religions ask me to direct toward their human-shaped gods: humility, a sense of smallness, sometimes a fear, usually a desire to be part of something bigger than me and my kind. To lose myself; to lose my Self” (32).

This is what I was introduced to for the first time on the dock with Grandpa Mel, it is what I feel when I go for a long walk, stand on the peak of a mountain or sink into the grass in my front lawn. It is that stretching, searching and extending to another world. When I am fishing it is not just straddling the aqueous world, and the earthy land, I am experiencing what Kingsnorth calls, “a desire to be part of something bigger than me and my kind” (32). This too, is what Joe can see in the salmon. They are sacred to him too.

Conversely, what threatens the sacred is the streamlining of meaning of the things around us, so that there is nothing that we ourselves cannot create. This highlights Heidegger’s fear of our world being reduced to scientific readings of things, missing the essence of the things themselves in our effort to control and define them. Kingsnorth muses on the talk of having the extinct species he sees on the walls resurrected by biotechnology, by work of the ever-dominating human mind. “Our world of science and industry, of monocultures and monotheisms, marks a decisive shift in human seeing...our world is not alive” (32). The way we see will change, where what is more-than-human will become less-than-human. He calls upon the words of Francis Bacon in 1597, talking about what he considered the noblest human aspiration, “to extend power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe” (35). This assumption only works if the world

does not hold anything that we can not manufacture ourselves. But our world is alive. It is so much more alive than we can ever know, which is why I was so broken when Sky snapped the fish in front of my face, and knowing that the salmon have been thoughtlessly slaughtered. We were blind to what we were losing.

What I had been missing in my approach to the film project was what I really wanted to preserve, what “way of seeing” I felt so drawn into and what compelled to need to share. And through time and personal reflection, I realize that this is not a story about Joe, and his relationship with science, spirit, past and present. Joe is someone I admire who can still access the sacred in the western world, and has introduced me to this idea. Joe is a guide, the same way Marven is a guide to access the more-than-human, the sacred world.

What I have been drawn to all along is the sacredness of *salmon*, as a window into the sacredness of the more-than-human word. This is widely recognized by Joe and the Nez Perce, but can be seen by me, and by others, if we see it with the same respect and admiration as Heidegger approaches a “thing” that holds the fourfold.

But if we notice the sacred, and share the sacred, what implications does it have for compassion?

Another word for something sacred is something *holy*, which shares the same root with *whole*. Kingsnorth notes this and says, “If you see the earth as whole, entire in itself, interconnected, then you see yourself as part of a wider living thing” (36). Compassion for oneself and surroundings is sure to follow in Snyder’s sense if we can call on to remember, recall, respond to and reflect upon “things” that are sacred, that help remind us that we are part of what is whole and *holy*. As I have explored through the salmon’s

suspension between the fourfold, by maintaining its place as something that pulls together human and nonhuman threads, it is an example of how we might then think about the natural world: as something that holds a sacred element we cannot replicate, but connects us to the wholeness of its and our own existence.

My desire to preserve stories and sacred meanings of the more-than-human lives around us comes to fruition at the end of Kingsnorth's piece. Standing in front of the cave wall in awe, looking at all the species carved onto it, whom are now long extinct, Kingsnorth comments on the importance of the drawing, the record, and the necessity of preserving the way of seeing the bison, ibex and mammoth. He says,

“The animals on the walls are the same animals in our minds, and neither have yet fade from view. Stand and look at them long enough and we may begin to grasp what they meant and why they matter. Refuse to look and they will stay asleep, like Arthur's knights under the hill. But unlike Arthur's knights in those old legends, they won't rise up to save us in our hour of need. Nothing will rise but the roots and tendrils, growing over the remnants of our projects and our wishful thoughts, as they have done so many times before. And the bison and the ibex will still be there, deep in the rock, waiting to be found again” (37).

The record remains of these drawings of sacred animals so that even after they themselves are long gone, the idea of something sacred, that something beyond us can hold significance, can still be preserved. The record causes us to remember, to reflect, to meditate on why those animals were seen in that particular way by the artists. The photographs of the spirit bear, and the documentary, *Spoil*, also follow this pursuit.

Now, as an aspiring recorder, an aspiring artist, how might I proceed to follow this idea and embody it in my own work?

To convey such meanings that Kingsnorth sees in the cave drawings or that National Geographic readers see in Paul's photo essay, is a life goal of mine that I will

continue to work through in my photographic and film endeavors. Although the resonant feelings that one has while looking at a piece of art could be done with a blindness by the artist, an accidental snapshot that turns into a phenomenon, I do not want to proceed with ignorance. I believe it is much easier, and immensely more fruitful for an artist to accomplish the depth that Kingsnorth can see in the cave drawings and translate the sacred, if that communicator understands the nature of what they are trying to record too.

This act of connection, of understanding the sacred nature of salmon, and by extension the more-than-human world, is one that I am now deeply and directly drawn to. I will approach these things with curiosity and compassion, and like Grandpa Mel, Joe, and Marven, I too will try and guide myself (and hopefully others) an opportunity to be near to them.

The film project that sparked this document is on hold for now, because it is time for me to reconnect to this sacred world behind the lens and practice doing so. When things reveal themselves, I hope to be there, ready to hit record. With time, and conscious active-passive practice, I believe that someday I can be part of and be near to the unfolding of our sacred surroundings, including that of the salmon.

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