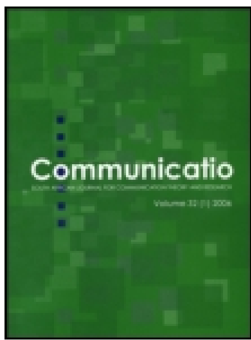

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Between a croc and a herd place: Battle at Kruger and nature interpretation

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Between a croc and a herd place: *Battle at Kruger* and nature interpretation[1]

Ian-Malcolm Rijsdijk*

Abstract

The article examines the popular YouTube clip *Battle at Kruger* and its National Geographic spin-off *Caught on safari: The battle at Kruger*. In seeking to account for the clip's popularity and National Geographic's motivations for making the hour-long feature, the author draws on the burgeoning studies of wildlife film in an effort to contextualise this new 'eye-witness' approach within the traditions of documentary films focusing on nature – particularly animals. Furthermore, do the clip and its online popularity suggest a new direction for wildlife documentary in an age of increasingly advanced filming technologies and digital broadcast platforms?

Key words: *Battle at Kruger*, documentary, wildlife, YouTube

INTRODUCTION

> *I was upset at first as I did not want to watch that baby be torn in half by tigers and aligators, but I kept watching with one eye ... and he got away! Whew!!!*
>
> <michelletolan> on You Tube[2]

> *That was the most impressive piece of video I've ever seen on You Tube. I guess those National Geographic specials I grew up on are now officially irrelevant. Seriously, the internet is the most amazing human achievement ever.*
>
> <gangstories> on YouTube

> *That was great!*
> *It had all of the elements, suspense, danger, a sinister character, revenge, and a 'happy ending.' If I could find some popcorn I'd watch it again and add voices for the 'actors'. I wonder if the lion that gets thrown into the air does his own stunts?*
>
> <Soggy Mountain> on YouTube

Battle at Kruger is one of the most popular clips on the phenomenon that is YouTube. Filmed by an American tourist and posted as a favour to a friend, it started generating unprecedented interest that led to it being one of the most watched clips of 2007, and now one of the most watched clips in the history of YouTube. To date it has racked up over 52 million hits, and still generates debate. It has also spawned its own website (http://battleatkruger.com) and Wikipedia entry.

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On 11 May 2008, National Geographic premiered an hour-long special, *Caught on safari: The battle at Kruger*, in which the original participants – David Budzinski (who shot the footage), Jason Schlosberg (who posted the clip) and Frank Watts (the ranger heard in the clip) – returned to the scene of the event. In addition to 'cleaning up' the footage (which Budzinski had shot on a hand-held digital camera), the documentary also 'deconstructs' the scene, with commentary from specialists on the behaviour of the animals involved.

This article examines several questions relating to the original clip and its reconditioned National Geographic version. First, why was the clip so popular? Second, what are the differences between the original clip and the hour-long documentary, and what might National Geographic's motivations be in making the documentary? Finally, I examine the possible consequences of the clip in an age of increasingly advanced film and editing equipment, and increasingly sophisticated digital broadcast platforms.

My analysis is situated at the intersection of several disciplines. Though *Battle at Kruger* was disseminated via YouTube, the clip's content falls within the ambit of wildlife documentary that, itself, includes elements of film (the influence of early scientific and ethnographic films), television (from Disney's post-World War II 'True-life adventures' to satellite television in the form of, for example, National Geographic, Discovery, BBC Wildlife and Animal Planet), reality television (as an emergent component of wildlife documentary that privileges a proactive – and often interfering – 'eye-witness' point of view), and the philosophy of visual arts (from John Berger's theory of zoos as modernist monuments to the 'historic loss' of the look between humans and animals (1991: 28) to Akira Mizuta Lippit's contemporary proposal that 'while animals were disappearing from the immediate world, they were reappearing in the mediated world of technological production' (2000: 25).[3]

Because *Battle at Kruger* was disseminated via YouTube, any consideration of the clip needs to recognise not only the form of that dissemination ('viral' communication on the Internet), but also the impact this has on its audience and, as a consequence, the possible effect this might have on the representation of wildlife footage overall.

What I have found interesting in informal discussions of *Battle at Kruger* is the interpretative discourse that characterises the responses on YouTube, as well as the ethological nature of the National Geographic episode. Alexander Wilson and David Bunn's work on nature interpretation and tourist experiences of the Kruger National Park, respectively, supply the foundation for the examination of *Battle at Kruger*'s point of view and National Geographic's didactic approach to the original footage.

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POPULARITY, OR 'ITS JUST PATHETIC WHAT SOME ANIMALS WILL DO JUST TO GET ON YOUTUBE'

<1emoguy> on YouTube

So what is so extraordinary about the clip? The action plays out as follows. Tourists in a game vehicle observe, from across a dam, a herd of buffalo approaching a small group of lion. Apparently unaware of the lions, the lead buffalo walks right up to them. The lions leap into action and turn the herd around, singling out a calf and gang-tackling it towards the water. Then a fairly conventional hunt and kill is turned on its head as, first, a crocodile lunges from the water and tries to steal the lions' prey before the calf's bellowing brings the herd back. The herd surrounds the lions with increasing menace, then attacks and scatters them. Miraculously, the calf totters back to the herd, surviving its terrible ordeal.

A sample of viewer comments goes some way to supplying the answer to the question of the clip's popularity. The site currently contains over 60 000 comments, but besides the number, the nature of many responses makes both quantitative and qualitative analysis difficult. Unrelated postings, opportunistic adverts for other clips, bigoted threads, ad hominem attacks, and facetious comments make up the majority of opinions. As the first quote at the head of this article suggests, YouTube is not always the place to seek penetrating analysis or insightful commentary. What it does supply is the conditioned response to animal social relations as seen in wildlife films, what Derek Bousé proposes is 'a kind of vast Rorschach pattern in which culturally preferred notions of masculinity, femininity, romantic love, monogamous marriage, responsible parenting, communal spirit, the work ethic, deferred gratification, moral behaviour, and the sexual division of labour in marriage can all be read' (2000: 157).

Without embarking on a separate enquiry into modes of viewership in different media forms (Internet compared to satellite or terrestrial television, for example), it could be argued that YouTube, through downloads and its viewer response forum, encourages immediate, informal response to unmediated footage (there is no interlocutor to introduce or contextualise the clip). The stand-alone narrative of *Battle at Kruger* also means that it is easy to watch; the viewer can get to the action without having to watch patiently (or cue through) the context of the hunt and the pride and herd dynamics – narrative realism particular to the wildlife documentary form. Indeed, clips extracted from 'professional' wildlife documentaries coexist with artificial 'predator vs. predator' clips in the menu on the side of the screen for further viewing: there is no hierarchy of authenticity here. For example, a clip from a Discovery documentary showing buffalo goring lion cubs to death is titled *Battle at Kruger 2*, subverting the trademarked authenticity of television wildlife documentary in the viral virtual world of the web, while the action in another clip, titled *An other battle at Kruger* (sic), actually takes place in the Ngorongoro Crater.

The first category of online responses expresses relief that the buffalo calf survives and escapes back into the herd. Some of these responses take the form of straightforward sentimentalism – like

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older Disney films where ‘viewers are encouraged to root for one species over another’ (Horak 2006: 467) – while others recognise the narrative quality of the footage, which provides emotional release to the viewer after building almost unbearable anxiety. For example, <HK47Beta> writes: ‘I just thought the video was awesome because there were so many twists and it was hard to tell what was going to happen, not because of the moral standpoint some seem to take.’ These comments demonstrate what Bousé finds to be central to wildlife documentaries, where ‘routine acts of predation … become dramatic conflicts enlisting all the elements of Aristotelian dramaturgy to engage audiences emotionally’ (2000: 153).

<Tabooteasing>’s comment leads on from this first category, but introduces a second: a debate over the condition of the calf after the narrative’s conclusion. ‘Go buffalo. That was distressing initially, but heartwarming and miraculous at the end. Do we know if the baby Buf survived all the bites without infection?’ Killjoy <KNPRanger05> reports: ‘The baby water buffalo attacked in this video died shortly after this was taken due to the dramatic loss of blood and was actually eaten by the lion that was gored by the larger buffalo,’ to which <BlessedBeyondCompare> retorts: ‘Are you really a ranger ... or are you just making this up? And if you are, why do you have to tell us that? This is a really inspirational video .... ’ The lions get some support from a third camp that argues for ‘nature red in tooth and claw’. <HK47Beta> argues: ‘[Lions] gotta eat too … Besides, they’d have to kill something else to get more meat.’

Perhaps it is the influence of combative sports on TV, but some remarks read like WWE Smackdown commentary: ‘Who’s the King of the Jungle now, beeotch!’ exclaims <Mudmaster>. As juvenile as this might seem, it does in fact reflect a shifting trend in the menu offered by most nature documentary channels towards predator vs. prey, or predator vs. predator shows. One can understand how, after years of seeing lions eating other animals on TV, a rousing sense of triumph accompanies this turning of the tables. Several postings highlight the moment, at 05:47, where one lion is tossed in the air by a buffalo. This adversarial context not only applies to the changing content of long-standing bastions of nature documentaries like National Geographic and Discovery, but also the new forms of nature documentary that these organisations represent (such as National Geographic Wild).

Two final types of response represent smaller samples, but they are both instructive. One interprets the incident explicitly in religious and moral terms. <Juniatapark> views the clip allegorically (even if the post stumbles over its premise by denying lions their God-given rights): ‘When the Buffalo returned I was thinking about Our Creator and how he installed courage and faith and intelligence and love in us but the animals have this as well as this was miraculously shown … It just made you feel good to see the Buffalo win … I think it shows that we can over come our major problems in life as well if we use what God has given us!’

The last group worth noting is the trade union lobby, that sees the clip as the epitome of effective unified action: ‘This is a lesson to all oppressed ppl in the world (especially here in africa) that no

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matter how powerful a tyrant thinks he is, with unity true libeartion can be achived' <Manayesh>. 'The union makes the force' <pesdelviento> is a phrase that is repeated several times.

If one examines the clip in its YouTube context, the following points emerge: despite the varying points of view, the overwhelming majority of postings respond to it in terms of human values – strength in numbers, the family unit, rising up against tyranny – no matter how contradictory this might seem (those supporting the buffalo overlook the lion pride as a family unit, as well as the success of cooperative hunting).

The second point is that *Battle at Kruger* is powerful because it strikes directly at our human desire for story-telling; as Graeme Turner notes, 'story-telling is part of our cultural experience, inseparable from and intrinsic to it' (1993: 67). The clip has wonderful narrative organisation and resolution through its perfect three-act structure, with heroes and villains, a twist in the tale, and a triumphant resolution pulled from the brink of despair. As <Soggy Mountain> notes (above), this is documentary realism equal to the conventional pleasures of going to the movies to watch fictional narratives.

The attack by the crocodile is also undoubtedly a component in the clip's popularity. David Quammen writes of crocodiles that 'it's uncanny that an animal so armoured and heavy and huge can be, also, so liquid and discreet' (2004: 152). Indeed, the crocodile's sudden eruption from the water is typical of its mode of attack – stealthy, sudden – and the thrashing about of prey in the water is likely to draw a crocodile in a place like Kruger. However, what is significant in this instance is the timing of its appearance and the way it compounds an already notable moment for any tourist 'on safari': witnessing a kill. By attempting to grab the calf away from the lions, the crocodile complicates what might otherwise be a prosaic and gruesomely drawn-out death as the calf is slowly suffocated. Now the lions have to fight not only a competing predator, but one that might also attack them, should they slide into the water. The calf's doomed state – being ripped apart from both ends by two of the world's most feared predators – makes its rescue proportionately remarkable.

One can get carried away by the awestruck responses, and so it is worth stepping away from the context of YouTube for a moment. When compared with other examples of professional wildlife documentaries, *Battle at Kruger* may not be as remarkable as it seems. Without sounding too dismissive, the lion attack and the offensive regrouping by the buffalo are far more dramatically and emotionally depicted in a film like Dereck and Beverly Joubert's *Relentless enemies: Lions and buffalo* (2006). This close study of lions and buffalo on the Duba Plains of the Okavango Delta is an engrossing and beautifully filmed study containing numerous extraordinary scenes of attack, defense, ambush and counter-offensive. Given the Jouberts' narrative of the lions' relentless following of the herd and re-attacking previously wounded animals until they get their meal, <KNPRanger05>'s joyless pronouncement about the calf's later demise that takes the wind out of everyone's sails seems plausible. The Jouberts present a more sustained and coherent picture of

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lion-buffalo interaction that takes seasonal changes in climate into account, and the effect this has on migration and territorial conflict.

What the Jouberts do not have is a cameo croc performance that points to *Battle at Kruger*'s trump card: a rare interaction of predators and prey occurs, and it could have been you or me who witnessed it. As everyman-tourist and amateur-videographer, Budzinski may not have achieved what the Jouberts have painstakingly put together over a period of years, but his point of view – in the game vehicle amongst the nattering, awe-struck passengers – draws the experience closer to the verité context of YouTube than the privileged perspective which characterises the carefully packaged authority of shows on National Geographic or Discovery.

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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC AND THE CONTEST FOR AUTHORITY

Caught on safari: The battle at Kruger (National Geographic Television) seeks to perform several duties. Most importantly, National Geographic incorporates the viral success of the clip into its own realm of 'quality assurance', authorising it by interpreting the events through a traditional educational discourse. In other words, National Geographic promotes its own identity as gatekeeper of educational, ethically sound wildlife documentary, cleansing the footage of all the possible detractions such unmediated viral enthusiasm for the original clip might imply (see, for example, all the fake versions of Steve Irwin's death on YouTube).

There is no doubt that many online viewers celebrate the clip because it *is not* on National Geographic, Discovery, BBC or Animal Planet. <Blueaeroplane10> notes mischievously: 'David Attenburgh will be raging; a life spent filming animals and this is better than anything he has … lol.' The fact that it is shot on a basic camera by an everyman tourist next to a waterhole in the park (i.e. not a guaranteed Big Five drive in a private reserve) makes it more accessible to viewers, those who have never been 'on safari' as well as those who live in South Africa and go to national parks regularly.[4] I would argue that the 'cleaned-up' footage has more to do with National Geographic authorising their own interpretation of the event, than the legibility of the footage itself (the millions of YouTube viewers didn't seem to struggle).

The footage itself also has three distinct differences to the type of programme one finds on National Geographic: the most obvious point is that the quality of the footage is far from the standards National Geographic expects in a nature documentary. It is clear, then, that the footage has been chosen because of its popularity in another medium. Second, *Battle at Kruger*'s uninterrupted narrative shows a scene that in most documentaries would be cut together from masses of footage shot over a long period of time. In this sense, the majority of wildlife documentaries are built on narratives that, if not contrived, are artfully constructed to erase the evidence of their fragmented nature. As Horak notes:

> Nature filmmakers produce at very high shooting ratios, then construct specific events through editing, utilizing images which may indeed have no spatial and temporal relationship to each other and may involve dozens of animals, rather than the one example ostensibly being depicted.

> Indeed, the unity of space and time is only established artificially through cutting, much as is the case in classical documentaries. (2006: 462)

Third, by filming across the waterhole, the scene is allowed to play out in long shot, allowing a full sense of the context through the audience's recognition of off-screen space. For example, at one point someone says, 'here come the buffalo' before the herd is seen on camera. Conventional wildlife documentaries use frequent cutting, mobile cameras and shifts from wide shots to close-ups in order to build excitement in hunting scenes.

One strength of *Caught on safari* is that the experts provide their ethological interpretation within an analytical rather than emotional discourse by breaking up the clip, thus analysing the behaviour section by section. This contrasts with the more conventional National Geographic approach that privileges close-ups and sophisticated point-of-view set-ups that might come from several different times and places. *Relentless enemies* opens with narrator Jeremy Irons describing, in rather typical terms, the brutal world of predator and prey in the wilds of Africa, while a menacing (and beautifully filmed) thunderstorm builds in the distance. Flashes of lightning are intercut with close-ups of chasing lions and wary buffalo. Later, Irons' sensual narration describes the lion cubs feeling the grass against their faces, and the smell of the blood of the first kill.

While National Geographic is behind both productions, it opts for straightforward, less thrilling ethology in *Caught on safari*: both the lion and buffalo protagonists appear youthful, perhaps accounting for the blundering behaviour of the lead buffalo and the lions' inability to close off the windpipe of the wounded calf. For the South African viewer, this style has more in common with the Veldfocus segment (hosted by resident expert Quinton Coetzee) on SABC-TV's long-running environmental series *50/50* than the National Geographic style or the grand scale of BBC's *Planet Earth* series (2006).

CONSTRUCTING THE VIEW: TOURISTS AND CAMERAS

In assuming this interpretative role (as opposed to YouTube's expository role in simply hosting the clip for general consumption), National Geographic operates in the discourse of nature interpretation, as outlined by Alexander Wilson in *The culture of nature*. 'By the mid-twentieth century, it seemed, nature had to be explained to its human inhabitants; it was not enough to just try to experience it,' he writes (1992: 53). Game parks and safari tours might market the experience of pristine wildernesses and close contact with wild animals, but the entire experience is mediated, and not just through concerns for the safety of the client. Wilson notes:

> The primary purpose of interpretation is to teach visitors about what they're seeing first hand, using signs and pathways, guides and actors, games, plaques on buildings, stories told round a campfire, video monitors, slide shows, photographs, and other visual displays … [I]nterpretation also accomplishes various management objectives, such as resource protection, public safety, law enforcement, and public relations. All of these activities have had an impact on the land and the way we experience it. (ibid.: 55)

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The consequence of this discourse of interpretation has taken many forms. For one, the select few who were adventurous, fortunate or possessed the means to travel to exotic destinations 'abroad' has grown into the cosmopolitan mass accessing almost any part of the globe (even Antarctica now has regular touring parties). And what was once offered by the authorities is now demanded by the tourist: a site (or game experience) without the requisite guide or marker is deemed to be exploitative or even dangerous. Third, tourists are, more than ever, seen as vital for the sustainability of nature 'experiences'. Wilson writes, in a section titled 'The construction of the visitor':

> In the past forty years the early focus of interpretation natural history has given way to a concern with attracting a broader audience and keeping people entertained. In this regard, the history of nature interpretation parallels that of modern marketing and communications, much as tourism has. (ibid.: 57)

In his article in *The Times*, 'I reject the notion that the tourist can only destroy what he seeks', British journalist, Simon Barnes, responds to the criticism that increasingly cheaper travel harms the environment, by saying: 'If there were not people like us, there'd be even less *wilderness* left.'

> Across Africa, the safari industry makes its millions, brings in foreign currency, and prestige with it. As a direct result, gorillas, lions, wildebeest and zebras are in no immediate danger and the places where they live are not going to be concreted over this year. The visitors are contributing to the continued survival of something beautiful and meaningful. I don't think that is a bad thing. (5 April 2008: 4)

The 'dollar value [of] wild places and wild creatures' is the corollary of nature interpretation, and it is implicit in National Geographic's *Caught on safari*. Now, a lucky eye-witness account has 'meaning' for a broader audience, many of whom may only have seen a lion on screens or monitors (or as animated Disney creatures).

The rise of the nature film owes much to Disney, of course, with its 'True-life adventures', starting with *Seal Island* in 1948 and ending in 1960.[5] Gregg Mitman writes that the 'True-life adventures' 'portrayed a fantasy of pristine nature far removed from the commercial world of modern industrialized America. Disney took great pains to emphasize that in these films nature wrote the screenplay; the eloquence, the emotion, and the drama were nature's own' (1999: 110). 'Nature writing the screenplay' could very well describe *Battle at Kruger*, an unscripted drama whose background commentary of awed onlookers is more compelling in the situation than Jeremy Irons' narration in *Relentless enemies*. For some, the consequences of this idealism are problematic; Karla Armbruster asserts that 'not only do [wildlife movies] fail to bridge our culture's dualistic conception of nature and culture, but they all too often reinforce it. They do so by representing nature as a place that is most properly empty of human beings, thus denying the complex physical and perceptual connections that irrevocably wed humans to their natural environments' (1998: 222).

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Battle at Kruger and its National Geographic sibling reveal to what extent Armbruster's concerns are complicated by media channels such as YouTube. In one sense, the clip's lack of non-diegetic sound and the constant stream of unprepared commentary by the off-screen onlookers make the viewer constantly aware of the scene's context and point of view. However, as a free-floating particle in the virtual world of the Internet, it also lacks the full ecological context that many contemporary nature documentaries attempt to address (the fragile state of wildlife conservation and the impact of tourism on wilderness areas).

David Bunn's essay, 'An unnatural state: Tourism, water & wildlife photography in the early Kruger National Park' (2003) offers another context for *Battle at Kruger* and the relevance of its online success. Bunn examines wildlife photography (particularly the 'waterhole work' of early photographers in Kruger) within a complex set of relationships of class and language (white English-speaking middle-class and Afrikaans working-class), race (the place of 'natives' within the park's borders) and national identity ('the campfire [as] primary reference point for the white body imagining itself at risk in majority darkness') (ibid.: 200).

Of particular interest is the 'view' available to the park visitor; from the privileged view of select photographers amongst whom 'the most jealously guarded commodity … was knowledge of secluded waterholes' (ibid: 202), to the increasingly democratised view available to the average motorist following the construction of more (and more usable) roads and strategically placed waterholes. The increasing availability of affordable cameras, along with the gradual alteration of the park's spatial organisation to lure (and later satisfy the expectations of) independent game-viewers in private vehicles, changed the 'view' of the park.

> An economy of wildlife viewing – originally the domain of select amateur naturalists but now more widely available – was seen to be under threat from the increasingly disruptive excesses of white working-class tourists. (ibid.: 209)

Bunn articulates two intertwined processes here: not only the changing context of class and recreation and the etiquette of game-viewing, but also the dissemination and interpretation of knowledge through the capturing of unique images of animal behaviour. Today's carloads of twitchers and amateur game-spotters may not chase animals in order to see them run like some 'raucous and ungovernable' tourists of the 1930s, but Bunn's amateur 'camera tyros' threatening 'the domain of select amateur naturalists' is, in some ways, still relevant (ibid.: 209). Even relatively cheap 'point-and-shoot' cameras have good enough resolution and large enough digital storage capacities to provide opportunistic snappers with a chance of capturing an amazing image or scene, and the volume of visitors to the park (both local and international) makes it more likely that someone, somewhere, will witness (and film) a remarkable piece of wildlife action.

The point is not that there has been a return to the earlier Kruger experience Bunn so incisively deconstructs. Rather, the changing face of the 'constructed visitor' and the accompanying transformation of recording, exhibiting and disseminating technologies (so dizzying compared to

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a readership and viewership of the 1930s) poses a different type of challenge to a new hierarchy of privileged 'view'. Now the global television audience waits to consume the view of a 'pristine wilderness' – a privilege not because the scene is far away, but because it forms part of an ever greater concern for the world's remaining wild places and the inhabitants of those places. This is the motivating force behind the BBC's *Planet Earth* (2006), whose massive budget produces little that is new in the way of insight into non-human nature, but produces spectacular imagery of wildernesses under threat.

The issue that *Battle at Kruger* most obviously illuminates is the transformation in filmed representations of nature. Just as Bunn's amateur snappers let loose on the tourist-friendly infrastructure of the Kruger National Park threatened a particular experience of photographing and representing wildlife, so the advent of increasingly sophisticated and affordable photographic hardware (and the accompanying array of software applications) potentially poses a challenge to the venerable institutions responsible for the representation of wildlife on screen.

In some ways, YouTube marks the possibility of new forms more than new technologies. Bousé's book deals with several potentially massive shifts in wildlife filmmaking, from sync-sound to television and, more recently, high-definition television (HDTV), but in many cases, those in the best position to adapt to new technologies are organisations that already possess the wherewithal to adapt through research into new technologies, or more financially expansive filmmaking practices. Writing pre-YouTube, Bousé notes:

> The legions of newcomers with their mini-DV-cams and computer editing softwares did not storm the industry's gates, steal its fire, or demand the heads of its leaders. Instead, lacking organization and resources, they stood outside and asked in the most polite way possible to be let in, or short of that, for the leaders' blessings and assistance. (2000: 187)

The question, then, is whether or not *Battle at Kruger* is an example of free exhibition and 'knowledge-sharing' typical of Internet communication in a manner that challenges the conventional television representations of wildlife. Importantly, Budzinski's behaviour as tourist/videographer is relatively conventional: he doesn't rush out of the vehicle and try for a more exciting angle, or add music and other post-production effects to the clip. As a result, *Battle at Kruger* is in line with a more traditional ethos of filming wildlife, tame compared to the antics of, for example, *Mad Mike & Mark*, who are always attempting a better, closer shot, thus evoking, in Pat Louw's analysis, the Great White Hunter from the imperial past.[6]

Bousé and Louw are both pessimistic in their assessment of the changing nature of wildlife filmmaking. Louw's ecocritical concern, perhaps paradoxically, criticises shows like *Mad Mike & Mark* for their invasive approach and yet wonders whether people will be so 'satisfied with the "second-hand" packaging of nature, [they] will not be interested in going into a wilderness area themselves' (2006: 159). Bousé considers a consequence of new technologies to be that 'the future of natural history television may hold little place for serious environmental documentaries, while welcoming increasingly elaborate and spectacular diversions' (2000: 188).

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Battle at Kruger's reiteration as National Geographic Special does not really alter it at all. National Geographic's approach – explaining the action through the ethological analyses of experts – cannot fully effect the shift from melodrama to ethological study, because of the scene's deep populist undercurrent in which flows our collective cultural understanding, from David felling Goliath, to the downtrodden masses rising against a terrible tyrant. As Bousé argues in his discussion of the 'values' of wildlife documentaries, 'attempts to render [animal] behaviour intelligible to audiences have often entailed finding simple human analogies for it which, in turn, have forced it into familiar, moral categories'. As a result, 'what makes popular film and television "popular", after all, is that they do not pose concerted challenges to deeply held values, or to beliefs about the way the world works' (ibid.: 152). In this context, *Battle at Kruger* manages to satisfy two types of audience expectation: while the eyewitness account convinces us of a thrilling reality that challenges the glossy, staged nature of conventional wildlife filmmaking, the narrative coherence and outcome allows for a comfortable fit within the context of just such conventional wildlife filmmaking, represented here by National Geographic.

In the end, *Battle at Kruger* maintains a precarious balance between the sober, scientific observations of wildlife typical of wildlife filmmaking in the mid- to late-20th century, and more recent forms of radical individual accounts of wildlife captured in a more reflexive and personal manner. More significantly, though, is that this debate was never Budzinski's intention. As much as the clip might herald a new democratised approach to filming wildlife, it is also founded in the conventions of wildlife filmmaking espoused by organisations like National Geographic, whose shows, at some point, were likely part of the reason Budzinski made his journey to begin with.

ENDNOTES

1 The joke is made by <borichawk> on the YouTube comments list.
2 All YouTube comments are reproduced in their original form in terms of grammar, spelling and expression.
3 For work on the wildlife documentary film, see Bousé (2000) *Wildlife films*; Chris (2006) *Watching wildlife*; and Mitman (1999) *Reel nature: America's romance with wildlife on film*. For the growth of wildlife documentary on satellite channels, see Chris (2006: 80–93).
4 The official website states that the scene 'was filmed in South Africa at Kruger National Park's Transport Dam, a watering hole between Pretoriuskop and Skukuza camp'.
5 The 'True-life adventure' name was only officially coined with the following two films, *Beaver Valley* and *Nature's half acre* (Mitman 1999: 109).
6 Louw, 'Nature documentaries: Eco-tainment? The case of *MM&M* (*Mad Mike & Mark*)'.

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