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“Grisly Man, Gods, and Monsters,”

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In its most grotesque irony, Werner Herzog's documentary "Grizzly Man" (2005) shows a man literally consumed by the process of self-creation. Timothy Dexter, the conventional suburban Long Island youngster who failed to break into Hollywood and suffered near-fatal substance abuse, recreated himself as Timothy Treadwell, celebrity naturalist and uncanny intimate of Alaskan grizzly bears. Treadwell starred in hours of film that he shot to bring Alaskan bears to life for schoolchildren and nature enthusiasts.

As in the ambiguous names of the organization he helped found, "Grizzly People," and Herzog's film, "Grizzly Man," Treadwell promoted a belief that his closeness to the bears made him a hybrid man and beast akin to mythic satyrs, centaurs, and shamanistic creatures. "In a letter to one of his sponsors in 2003 he wrote: 'My transformation complete—a fully accepted wild animal—brother to these bears.'" At the same time, ignoring the contradiction, he insisted that he was braving mortal danger every minute. The myth took on a life of its own, and Treadwell achieved the symbolic immortality he had sought in Hollywood, when in 2003, weeks after the "complete transformation," a hungry grizzly attacked and ate the hero and his companion, Amy Huguenard. Not for nothing does science label the animals *Ursus arctos horribilis*.

Herzog plays up the controversy enveloping Treadwell's story. To his defenders, Treadwell's death was somehow sacrificial, consecrated by his "love" and dedication. They depict him as an eco-warrior protecting the wilderness from encroaching civilization. This is a canonical American theme, from westerns to *The Great Gatsby*'s lament for the corrupted "fresh green breast of the New World." The global threat is real enough, from climate change to the blocking of once inaccessible places into mining, logging, petroleum, and agricultural concessions. The Amazon has seen lawless encroachment displace indigenous people, with vicious expropriation of resources. The underlying anxiety is that biodiversity is collapsing and species extinction is out of control.

The problem is, Treadwell confronted none of these threats. The Katmai National Park in which he operated is a wildlife sanctuary. Although the eco-warrior swears mighty oaths for the camera, poachers do not menace the bears. In fact their population is growing. The fatally vulnerable creature proved to be not a bear but Amy Huguenard, for whose death Treadwell bore some tragic responsibility. And though he depicted himself as a modern Orpheus charming wild beasts—Treadwell recited poetry to favorite bears—the wisdom of the Orpheus myth ultimately lay in the artist's sudden death.
So there is a serious disconnect between myth and reality. Instead of celebrating a martyr to the cause of conservation, critics from traditional native folks to wildlife biologists and Park Service officials have maintained that Treadwell was invading the bear's space, ignoring scientific protocols and elementary wilderness savvy. To Sam Egli, whose planes ferried him to his camp, Treadwell was childishly goofy, "acting like he was working with people wearing bear costumes out there instead of wild animals. He thought they were big scary looking harmless creatures that he could go up and sing to and bond with as children of the universe or something. He had lost sight of what was really going on."

It would be logical to put Treadwell's name in scare quotes since we only see him through the eyes of Herzog and others, and in his flamboyantly self-conscious role-playing before his own camera. But then, the man is compelling for us in part because he is a cultural fantasy. For example, the "Rotten Tomatoes" website digest of movie reviews fatuously proclaims that "Filmmaker Werner Herzog adds another real-life character to his growing pantheon of people who walk a fine line between visionary genius and madness." The tendentious "conservative" website "Carnage and Culture" uses Treadwell as a straw man to bash "liberals."

The self-consuming ambition to "be somebody" is the raw material of tragedy. To get at the deeper dynamics of Treadwell's story, I want to reconsider it in the context of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Shelley's tale imagines self-creation as an obsessive struggle against death and alienation. Frankenstein's creature embodies crucial qualities of Treadwell's grizzlies. At home in majestic wilderness, the monster is at once an aspiring personality and also a creature of murderous power. Haunted by personal loss, striving to create a compensatory idealized life. Victor Frankenstein is consumed by the object of his imagination as Treadwell was. In Shelley's phantasmagoric Arctic, the creator and the monstrous medium of his recreation both perish.

*Frankenstein* is most remarkable for its effort to dramatize the mysteries of agency in the creature's emerging sense of self. Although the creature is a prodigious autodidact like Victor and Mary Shelley, the novel's conflict centers on repeated failures of communication. Victor's creature is supposed to be indescribably ugly, but the terror lies less in his particular deformities than in his need for other people to substantiate the self. He becomes a monster only when others refuse to relate to him as a person and he faces social death.

We are richly ambivalent about agency. We are programmed to imagine agency everywhere, from "whispering" breezes to "God," the cosmic parent. A lack of nurturant attention in early childhood impairs personality. At the same time we depersonalize others to establish hierarchy and reinforce self-esteem, construing scapegoats and other creatures subhuman. Anxiety about agency is at least as acute in Treadwell's competitive, individualistic United States as it was
in the Romantic era, as in the public concern over autism. Like Treadwell among the grizzlies, we fear and love ambiguously human monsters such as the Arnold Schwarzenegger Terminator cyborg (1984).

Like Shelley, Treadwell was an artist. He dramatized his creatures’ inner life for his audience. As Adam "named" the animals into existence in Eden, Treadwell gave the grizzlies pet monikers such as "Mr. Chocolate" and "Mickey." In his role-playing with the animals, he was trying to meet the primal need for personal substantiation that Frankenstein's monster poignantly voices. Shelley, the literate child of intellectual parents dramatized the need for recognition in her account of the creature’s acquisition of language. For his part, in his quest to become a "bear whisperer," Treadwell claimed to have identified 21 vocalizations and body languages in grizzlies. Like Shelley, he imagined terrific pathos in the inability to speak and be heard. Bear and monster both function as enabling fictions, allowing their "creators" to find a voice and a corroborating audience. For Treadwell, an innocent model would have been the celebrated work of Jane Goodall, whose observations of chimpanzees made their personalities real for humans around the globe.

Shelley and Treadwell had personal reasons to be concerned with agency. In different ways both were resisting social death. Shelley was writing in what amounted to a rebellious self-exile from respectable England and childhood conflicts, even as Treadwell defiantly abandoned the society in which he had been a drug- and alcohol-fuddled nobody. Both exiles were acutely aware of loneliness, and in conflict about it, feeling imprisoned and yet liberated by their isolation. Just as Frankenstein keeps gesturing unconvincingly toward his love of Elizabeth, and refuses the monster's pleas for a mate, so Treadwell had Amy Huguenard by his side yet denied her existence, keeping her off screen and rhapsodizing to the camera about his delicious ambivalence at feeling totally alone. At the same time, Victor passionately devotes himself to the creation of "his" creature, and Treadwell keeps trying to get closer to the bears, reciting his formulaic "I love you" as if that can override his conflicted needs.

For both the Romantic and natural scientist, their behavior can be understood as a strategy—a technic—to protect and intensify visionary self-intoxication. In this respect the bears and monster are projections of an ambivalent drive toward isolation that promises the "scientists" superhuman insight and mastery, but also has suicidal potential. The fear aroused by the grizzlies and the monster makes sense as a response to destructive motives split off in themselves. Tragically, those who would compromise that visionary ambition, in particular the intimates Amy Huguenard and Victor's Elizabeth, unwittingly become a threat killed by those split-off monstrous motives.

But loneliness is not the only problem. The ephemeral nature of agency is a painful reminder of mortality: that death is not simply an end to life, but non-being, nothingness. Shelley mourned for the mother who had died giving birth to her, even as Victor suffers a grisly nightmare about his dead mother as his own alter ego is coming to life. For the troubled creator, the creature and even her novel represent potential problem-solving fantasies whose failure gives the story its tragic impact. Treadwell, too, had left a dead past behind him. In keeping
Amy Huguenard’s camera eye on him, he was tacitly performing heroic deeds for the approval of a lover and mother-figure akin to the woman in Victor’s dream. In the grizzlies Treadwell believed he found the selfhood that the monster pleads for. At one point he tells the camera that the bears enabled him to overcome suicidal alcoholism, failed careers, and social death.

Treadwell's past as the lost Timothy Dexter registers in his identification with real grizzlies, but also with the childhood teddy bear that he kept with him in the wild. By striving to realize a heroic role in Alaska as creator and vicarious parent to the beasts and to schoolchildren, Treadwell was acting to substantiate an incoherent, fragile self, bringing himself as well as the bears to life through his hero-worshiping audiences.

Like Shelley, Treadwell was conflicted about the alter egos he evoked. Both artists loved, pitied, feared, and hated their creatures. In addition, like Victor, they were bound to be disturbed and disappointed in their creation. Bears and Frankenstein's monster were enabling fictions, never able to live up to inner needs as conflicted as they were idealized. And so, like Victor, Shelley and Treadwell obsessively pursued their stories to conclusions that project that inner conflict. The suicidal futility of Victor's and Treadwell's pursuit acts out feelings of unworthiness and guilt. Despite his insistence that he rehabilitated himself through the bears, Treadwell courted death as blindly as he had in a near-fatal drug overdose in his past. Like Victor in the Arctic, Treadwell went back to Alaska on the edge of winter, unable to resolve or to get over his impossible drive.

This self-intoxication is the fatal paradox in both stories. To escape it, imagination would have to confront the flawed identity masked by the heroic role-playing. Ahead lies futility; behind lies intolerable inner turmoil. Neither story can imagine integrating grizzly bears or a corpse-derived monster into a wholesome life. On the deepest level, as Shelley understood, this is the problem of death. If personal failure is associated with social death, the effort to transcend it opens toward fixation on fantasies of heroic immortality: glory, fame, death-defying visionary exploration. Cultures may thrive on such a fantastic ambition, but belief in symbolic immortality is perilous if disenchantment exposes the reality of the despised and deformed mortal self.

In Shelley's and Treadwell's stories protestations of love sustain denial but prove to be compensatory. Despite the protestations, both Elizabeth and Amy Huguenard die as victims of the lovers’ respective monsters. Treadwell has to profess love of the bears or face the reality of deadly violence that cannot be tamed or predictable. At the same time, it is almost impossible not to see the monsters’ aggression as split-off projections of the protagonists’ appetites and anger. Both Victor and Treadwell are contemptuous of the world--and identities--they leave behind. Herzog includes some telling footage of the "loving warrior" throwing a tantrum about Park Service officials and imagined poachers. Pumping up his rage, Treadwell is also pumping up his morale with righteous self-justification, turning nervous system flight to fight. He seems to understand perfectly well that he is recording a rant that would be devastating to his public identity if it became known. But the rage appears to be self-intoxicating. Not to
strain the metaphor: he blindly "hunger"s for vengeance against forces that thwart him, even as end-of-season hunger moved the fatal grizzly to attack.

There is another striking resonance at work in this analogy as well. Instinct drives the grizzlies to kill for food but also for access to females. With anguish Shelley's monster realizes that "No Eve soothed my sorrow nor shared my thoughts; I was alone."iii Denied a mate, he runs amok, murdering his creator's beloved. Victor's conflicted sexuality is implicated in all his actions, most starkly in his pursuit of the creature instead of Elizabeth. In one sequence of Grizzly Man, consoling a bear bested in a mating clash, talking as if to himself, Treadwell growls at length about his rejection by women. Brooding over his own frustration, he compares himself to creatures who fight to the death over sex.

Mating contests are tests of power and evolutionary fitness. In this sense they are immortality contests, and not only genetically. As the monster's allusions to Paradise Lost insist, the bond with Eve brings the consolation of symbolic immortality: children, posterity, mutual substantiation of identity, a life of purpose. In this context, ugliness means not only rejection but annihilation.

To understand this, we need to keep in mind that we are all "creatures" of conventional culture. Until we reach age four or five, we have no memory of the early years in which the world programmed us with values and a sense of what is natural. Deprived of that formative experience and even a name, the monster is an outsider and frightens others. Shelley makes his ugliness ineffable because it stands for all that would violate our accepted sense of "what is right." That in turns puts the creature outside the magic circle with which culture surrounds and protects its immortality symbolism. In a word, the creature is death-tainted. This explains Victor's hysterical revulsion when, shocked out of a nightmare vision of his mother's corpse, he beholds the monster, his death-tainted "ugly" child and surrogate self.

Although he is potentially as amiable as "Mr Chocolate" the bear, when rejected, Shelley's monster flies into a fury to feed his self-esteem and resist psychic death. If we regard "his" grizzlies as Treadwell's projection of his inner life, their fearful hunger resembles his dangerous appetite for success and heroic immortality: his means of feeding self-esteem and avoiding social death. The bears function as enabling fictions. He is using them, thinking through them to think about himself. They are tools enabling him to realize and tame the rage for self-esteem within him.

Tools are prosthetic extensions of us. Among animals, we are virtuoso tool-makers, expanding our selves through prosthetic engagement with the world: through relationships which magnify our adaptive powers and symbolically make up for our creaturely limits. Modernism is a period of radical prosthetic development in human identity. These days we are shod, clothed, housed, and fly faster than birds in sealed metal shells. We blend identities in electronic media such as Facebook, in which individuals share in the idealized qualities of
"friends." In this framework our prosthetic dimension calls into question the kind of animal we are. What is the ground of our experience? Where does self stop and tool begin? If a house or clothes or a muscle car function as a prosthetic shell, where does self stop and environment begin? And since other people can extend our wills as tools do, in a host of relationships from slavery to parenting, we sometimes need to ask, Where does self leave off and other begin?

This is what makes possible Treadwell's conviction that bears have given him new life. Identifying with the grizzlies, the man who nearly died of a drug overdose--or at least wanted to believe that he had--felt reborn. In effect, the failed man perished and came to new life in a self shared with "his" bears. To some extent this can only be a play-death, an enabling fiction, but to the self in crisis, self-esteem and hope are indispensable beliefs. The imaginary, prosthetic quality of this bear identity may have reinforced Treadwell's exaggerated conviction that the bears needed constant emergency protection from outsiders. In a real way his life with the bears was a struggle against demystification.

With the exhilaration of self-expansion comes anxiety about its artificiality. Technology makes us aware of mechanisms and the prosthetic nature of our existence. Fields such as cognitive science and robotics call into question the reality of the self. Media open imagination into a boundless virtual world, but at the risk of disembodied and isolating the self. In this sense the camera both intensifies and consumes identities. Continually filming himself, Treadwell is substantiating his glamorous self yet also reducing self to a facsimile, an illusion. This is the paradox of role-playing, which can liberate but also derealize identity.

It goes without saying that story-telling is one of the most venerable prosthetic behaviors. The creator uses virtual others--"characters"--in parables that explore problems and enrich experience in the real world. In different ways Shelley, Treadwell, and of course Herzog are story-tellers thinking through others. They both dramatize disruptions of ordinary prosthetic relationships that send alienated imagination into the wilderness in search of solace and vindication.

This is an ancient theme. The shaman follows animals into the spirit world. As swan, Zeus impregnates Leda. A she-wolf suckles early Rome. Mesoamerican warriors dressed as jaguars. In America, from Fenimore Cooper and Twain to Hollywood westerns, characters impatient for authenticity light out for the wilderness, where technologies such as the bowie knife and the fur coat enable "authentic" frontiersman to emulate the claws and hide of "real" animals. The conviction that life "in nature" is immune to society's deadly corruption energizes "survivalists." In children's stories animals are usually surrogate children, though the bears in "Goldilocks" reject the child's wish to participate in their parallel family life.

Like Shelley's novel, the camera provides a play-space in which wilderness and society blend. On the page or the screen, limits dissolve and humdrum character may grow into monstrous or heroic shapes. Both media are also prosthetic tools, since they imply audiences who are virtually watching the creator-actor perform. Imagining those spectators, the performer is ambiguously among them, using their responses to guide her next moves. Herzog proposes
that Treadwell was using his role-playing before the camera to explore his inner conflicts, and that makes sense. But just as Shelley is writing for a post-Napoleonic Europe roiled by undigested conservative and revolutionary assumptions, so Treadwell is playing to a stormily complex America.

Although Shelley's monster suffers some of the stings of a servant-class nonentity and the hostility of his scientist-creator, she has little to say about economic or scientific culture as forces in his destiny. What she does feel acutely is his isolated aspiration, pain, and fury. Similarly, Treadwell's wilderness is monitored by scientific systems, but though he nods in their direction, his attention is mostly given to personalizing the wild. His prosthetic use of the bears is based on family and media. His use of the camera and audience favors media voices borrowed from children's television shows and nature documentaries. He can sound like Mr. Rogers or Captain Kangaroo, with bear-monikers to match ("Mr. Chocolate," "Grinch"). Commenting on a mating contest between males, he adopts the role of ringside sports announcer, even pretending to interview one of the adversaries.

The self-styled "Prince Valiant" also emulated melodramas about gentle warriors with the uncanny courage of the wild. Among fantasies such as Tarzan, one that strongly resonates with the grizzly project is the Disney Beauty and the Beast (1991). Disney's Belle uses love to turn a lonely beast into a prince, bringing him back to society, out of desolate magical isolation. Like Treadwell, Belle has been scorned for her romantic imagination by insensitive villagers. Like the grizzlies, the beast represents dangerous, uncanny power. Belle is curious about his realm and comes to share his power. The Disney plot concocts a rival to the beast, a vainglorious, predatory, hypermasculine hunter (Gaston) whom Belle rejects. As a result, Gaston turns the villagers into a howling mob that besieges the beast/prince's castle and is routed by the prince's loyal servants. In self-defense, the beast/prince kills the malicious hunter as Treadwell imagines routing poachers.

Triangulated with Frankenstein, the Disney plot sharpens the grizzly bear fantasies. Where a village mob stones Shelley's beast/monster when he first approaches them, Hollywood allows the beast/monster to become the prince--Victor--who can then marry Belle/Elizabeth. The monster finally gets his ideal girl. The Disney plot spits the low-status villagers into bad servants who persecute Belle and attack the beast as they do Shelley's monster, and good servants, who finally emerge as a surrogate family/audience admiring their regal mistress and master as they waltz to the closing credits. In this fantasy the once-ordinary Belle reconciles village and wilderness and attains commanding preeminence. Learning to love, the beast rescues her from wolves, tames the wilderness and village mob, and is revealed as prince. This is the redemptive dream that Treadwell emulated, idealizing Belle, Prince, and beast, rejecting callous society and the spurned, outraged Gaston. Adopting a courageous, sympathetic feminine role like Belle's, he "brought back" the beast with his fervent cry of "I love you." For a time. In the end an actual woman, Amy Huguenard, would die fighting for her life, and the feminine courage in
Treadwell's role would take on the hypnotic, fatal coloration associated with the femme fatale.

Still, it is telling that Treadwell devoted his energies not to Alaskan foxes, one of whom became a personable, even lovable pet, but to the majestic prince of beasts that would eventually kill him. What are we to make of his monotonous protestations--at times almost a sideshow pitch--that "these bears are dangerous"?

When prosthetic relations--thinking through others--creates a healthy matrix for personality, it feels so natural that it usually remains mostly unconscious. Treadwell kept cutting his ties to others, even to his own birth name. In this way the fabulist who told skeptical friends in California that he was an Australian orphan encountered a dilemma. Self-expansion through fiction paradoxically shrinks the network of prosthetic relationships that supports personality. No matter how rich the fabulist's imagination, the fictional self can never match the reality of actual development. In a sort of conversion experience, Treadwell tried to build his new personality by shifting the prosthetic ground of his childhood to a mystified bond with the grizzlies. This is what makes it so poignant that he took his childhood teddy bear with him to Alaska, as if to bridge the gap he was creating in his identity. In the real world, with the living companion Amy Huguenard, however, the obsession that was sustaining his emerging identity was also constricting his options and his future.

Self-invention is equivocal. It can foster growth or alienation. Before the camera, as Herzog sees, Treadwell is working out inner turmoil. But by projecting an idealized self on screen, for an audience, he is also diminishing the more realistic awareness of personal limits built up in a lifetime. Nevertheless, the question remains: why should Treadwell's particular role-playing have led to provocative, risky behavior around man-eating grizzly bears? Why would the reinvented self prefer death-defying recklessness to some form of heroic prudence--and in particular, care for his defenseless companion Amy?

One way of approaching this puzzle, and granted that we can only speculate at this distance, is to explore the role of berserk style in Treadwell's death-defiance. In conventional wisdom, to go berserk or to run amok is to throw off all controls and plunge into desperate, often violent action. The term derives from the Norse "baresark" or bearskin shirt, which Viking warriors purportedly stripped off in a frenzied attack. Today the term is associated with rampage killers and soldiers under stress. But the reality is more comprehensive. Berserk behavior may be irrational and have a chaotic quality, but it usually has a purpose such as retaliation, intimidation, self-defense, or escape. Very often it has a copy-cat element. The rampage killer may be mentally troubled and incoherent, but he may also be aware of headline-grabbing antecedents and media's habit of keeping score. In this way he looks to daredevil, superhuman violence as an emergency means to fortify the self.
Not only does berserk behavior usually make some kind of sense: it can also be seen as heroic. The soldier who runs amok under fire and takes the enemy by surprise may survive and be decorated as a hero. Extreme sports such as bungee jumping entail a plunge toward death that brings with survival a sensation of mastery and exaltation. Early modern Europe thrilled to bear-baiting, in which dogs attacked a chained, lethal bear.

The underlying idea is that do-or-die risk can snatch life and extraordinary rewards from the throat of death. The belief is that going to the edge of control can unlock taboo and gain access to uncanny resources that lie beyond everyday inhibitions. When the idea becomes popular, berserk behavior turns into a style. At its most ritualized, berserk style conditions religious experiences from crusades to radical abnegation that open access to the beyond. Berserk style makes daredevil circus acts awe-inspiring. The performers dramatize escape from ordinary human limits. They train to master the edge of control, so there is some ambiguous illusionism involved. But danger remains, and the performers may use a safety net or other marker to emphasize the heroic challenge of death.

The grizzly man exploited berserk style. A friend tells Herzog that as a surfer in California, Treadwell appeared fearless. Toward the end Amy Huguenard called him "Hellbent on destruction." In some of his own footage, he exults that "I run wild, like a child"—a formula that takes for granted the promise of berserk abandon, and children's magical freedom from adult inhibitions. This is berserk style. It shows up repeatedly in his role-playing, as when he rehearses "Wild Timmy Jungle Scenes," noting that they can be cut into a larger film later.

Herzog's film opens with Treadwell vowing that he is a warrior, a samurai, He "must be formidable to persuade the bears that I can defeat them, stand up to their challenge, or else they will eat me." His love for the bears, that is, depends on threat display, and by definition, threat display always entails some bluff, a duel of illusions that can easily escalate toward a trigger for action. The berserker keeps proclaiming that he is "on the edge of death out here and nobody appreciates that I can smell death all over my fingers." Pumped up, the gentle warrior boasts not about his killing prowess but that "nobody has ever been in as much danger of death as I am."

Like any other documentary, Herzog's film is a parable. As storyteller, he takes an equivocal position. He plays to our fascination with the moment of ultimate horror even while withholding the actual recording. To include the moment of death would be to invite comparisons to snuff pornography. Martial describes mimes in the Roman amphitheater that staged the myths of Orpheus and Icarus, casting a condemned criminal as the hero and at the climax actually killing him. The spectacles generated thrilling ambiguity. The actual death of "Orpheus" momentarily fuses imagination and reality. The mimes made familiar stories a passageway into the taboo mysteries of death, and created a thrilling illusion of the beyond.

The filmmaker could be accused of emulating Treadwell by exposing himself to the fascination and horror of the recording, interpreting it to us and appointing himself our heroic guide in the shadow of death. For all his gravity on
camera, this is the director of films such as "Aguirre" (1972), "Fitzcarraldo" (1982), and "Little Dieter Needs to Fly" (1998) in which berserk style carries film crews and audiences into uncanny wilderness. This is the personality that cultivated and braved the self-consciously berserk theatricality of Klaus Kinski, making it an important component of his professional publicity suite. There are hints, that is, of the winking come-on that opens James Whale's 1931 "Frankenstein," enticing the audience to imagine what lies behind the curtain even while cautioning that moviegoers may be overwhelmed: "Don't say we didn't warn you."

It goes without saying that Herzog is using Treadwell to explore aspects of his own character. At the same time the audience also participates in that modeling. Invited to join the film's vicarious expedition among bears, audiences are implicitly in a childlike relation to the bears as remote yet uncannily intimate parent-figures, furry and lovable but always capable of consuming the child. Like "Grizzly People," audiences rely on Treadwell and in turn Herzog to mediate their fascination. Amy Huguenard's fate dramatizes the artist's responsibility. Herzog acts as both a critic of, and guide to, abandon. His reportorial tone works to temper the sentimentality and sensationalism his taboo material invites. As critic, he invokes the authority of his personal experience. "What haunts me," he says, "is that in all the faces of all the bears that Timothy Treadwell ever filmed I discover no kinship, no understanding, no mercy, I see only the overwhelming indifference of nature. To me there is no such thing as a secret world of the bears. The blank stares only of a half-bored interest in food. But for Timothy Treadwell this bear was a friend, a savior."

The problem is not simply that "nature" is overwhelmingly indifferent, but that we are social animals and yet all social behavior is complexly contingent—and grizzly bears and humans are not especially compatible. Although they end in futility, Shelley's novel and Herzog's film are haunting in part because indirectly, almost unwittingly, they show how plastic, potential, and insolubly ambivalent human social behavior is. "Grizzly Man" reminds us that we are all embodied, and that creaturely motives such as hunger may trump symbolic identity and social bonds. That said, his folly notwithstanding, there is something poignant in Treadwell's search for agency that audiences recognize. The filmmaker sees what modern humans, religious and secular, tragic and comic, struggle to accept: that consciousness is continually creating a habitable world, and always colored by magical thinking. Treadwell and Amy Huguenard were caught up in their spell as were the professional stage magicians Siegfried and Roy, who produced illusions with a prodigious white tiger at the snap of a finger until the tiger, "intentionally" or not, nearly killed the magician. In Las Vegas and Alaska, with different combinations of naivete and cunning, the magicians held world attention because they dramatized the will to bend nature to human will, and to shape human behavior to "get inside" nature—just as death calls us back to wholesome reality-testing.

In an age of media self-presentation in which "sharing" is usually colored by competition, risk and even self-injury can be more socially acceptable than aggression. The liability of berserk style, as Americans have witnessed in binge
addictions, attack broadcasting, and catastrophic banking recklessness, is that rage insidiously blends with grievance and self-pity. And the lure of the beyond, the ecstasy of the wild, can be innocuous until suddenly a bear mauls you in Alaska or on Wall Street, and death collapses the story.

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iii For a more comprehensive account of prosthetic identity, see Ch. 6 of my Post-Traumatic Culture, "Thinking through Others" (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1998).
iv See the Introduction to my Berserk Style in American Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).