

Ms. Mauer

Pre-IB English 9 (4)

3 October 2018

### New York Times Op-Doc Review: Polar Bears of Hudson Bay

Polar Bears of Hudson Bay, directed by Ian Kerr, is a call to action for climate change and pollution. This film focuses on the polar bears living outside a small town in Canada. Kerr and his team followed the bears around Churchill, Manitoba for about 6 months. Over this span of time Kerr struggled to film a picture-perfect home for the polar bears. In his director's essay Ian Kerr tells us about the living conditions for the polar bears. Their habitat is littered with "ruins of cold war projects, shipwrecks, plane wrecks, and the abandoned material dreams of the residents."

The theme of this film is that humans are reckless and messy, and they are destroying the habitat of animals who are innocent and defenseless. Because there is no narration or dialogue, the film emphasizes the theme through the use of dramatic sounds and visual content. The opening scene shows a small section of the town, Churchill, on a day when the weather is harsh and gloomy. There are a few parked buses on the side of a road, and a huge dirty-looking building in the background. The feel is very industrial and cluttered, with lots of power lines and street lamps crammed together. On top of that, the sound for this scene is similar to a forklift raising and lowering, a stereotypical mechanical noise. The sounds and visuals emphasize the unnaturalness of the man-made materials scattered throughout this otherwise wild environment.

Kerr followed the same few polar bears around the entire film. One male featured is always alone. He is very lean, and sulks through the snowy weather attempting to hunt. Distance shots are used to emphasize the seclusion and starvation of the bear. Most scenes are shot with a lot of empty, cold, space, highlighting the isolation of the bears and solitary nature of their lives. The final scene of the film illustrates the intersection of the bears' lives with the lives of the townspeople. A bear sleeps in the middle of the road leading out of the town, as the camera pans out to take in the desolation of the environment around it.

Ian Kerr shot most of his film from an onward angle. This might be because he wanted it to seem minimalistic. The onward angle gives the effect of a raw and rustic environment, emphasizing the bleakness of both the town and the wilderness. If he had used a high angle shot he could have better emphasized the loneliness of a polar bear's life. High angle shots are known for creating a feeling of being overwhelmed. The viewer might feel overwhelmed by the loneliness of the polar bears if a high angle shot had been used.

Unlike many other op-docs, this film does not use music of any sort. To enhance the stark visual aspects of the film, the "sound is entirely designed, working from... [Kerr's] memory of the experience." The wind is always whipping in the background, and sometimes there are sounds similar to metal scraping against metal. This negatively dramatizes each scene. Cold wind and clanging metals are not welcoming, friendly sounds. Hearing these sounds immediately sets an unfavorable mood for the scene. Kerr uses a customized, non-diegetic soundtrack to make viewers feel like they are in the frigid, barren environment right there next to him. The lack of sound in some scenes is also worth noting. For example, at one point when Kerr is following the starving polar bear, the camera slowly angles downward to reveal a carcass

and bones. The carcass symbolizes the future of polar bears. At this moment in the film, no sound accompanies the scene, enabling viewers to process what they are seeing.

This film is very impactful and information-filled. It is an excellent example of how important the use of camera angles and sound are in the making of a documentary. One really gets to see what life is like from a polar bear's perspective - cold and lonely. Polar bears must not be dismissed or forgotten, and they need humans' help in order to survive.