

Herzog and Auteurism

Performing Authenticity

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Michel Ichat's *Victoire sur l'Annapurna* (1953) is incomplete, André Bazin tells the reader of "Cinema and Exploration," because an avalanche "snatched the camera out of the hands of [Maurice] Herzog" (1967: 162). Bazin's description conjures up a film camera immersed in snow, its lens obscured. No act of photographic registration can take place here: there is no distance between the hapless camera and its object. Struggling to delineate cinematic realism, Bazin evokes a limit case in bringing the real into the film frame, one in which the camera seized by an avalanche figures the collapse of world with filmic apparatus. Its existential weight intensified by its unrepresentability, Maurice Herzog's peak experience is sublime. It's the explorer's brush with death that evokes Bazin's central metaphor for the indexical image: the *Veil of Veronica* "pressed to the face of human suffering" (1967: 163). I have long suspected that Bazin's account is what inspired Werner Stipetić to change his name to Werner Herzog, perhaps also to assume his particular aesthetic stance, since Bazin's story contains all the lineaments of the portrait Herzog draws of himself as auteur. It's the portrait of someone for whom the conquering of a mountain is co-extensive with filming it, for whom filmmaking demands a physical investment, and landscapes produce essential images because death lurks in the natural world. Most centrally, it's the portrait of a filmmaker for whom authenticity is at stake. But what is the nature of this "authenticity"? It doesn't reside in Bazinian realism in a strict sense, although it's connected to its more metaphorical, expanded expression. Herzog's relation to reality is evident in his images: more than one of Herzog's films document the water droplets that splash up onto the camera lens as it almost merges with the watery scene it seeks to capture. Such moments span the trajectory of Herzog's filmmaking: we find them in films that stretch from *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972) to *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), to his joint effort with Zak Penn, *Incident at Loch Ness* (2004), even to *Rescue Dawn* (2006). More is involved than

simply the indexical relation that all film images bear to reality: moments such as these trump indexicality by figuratively eliminating the gap between sign and referent.

Authenticity: Ecstatic Truth and Physical Investment

What is meant by authenticity, then? Can it be conferred? How is it expressed? It is certainly not the “accountant’s truth,” a conventional realism that Herzog disparages in his Minnesota Declaration of 1999. The governing idea of Herzog’s manifesto—that “there is such a thing as a poetic, ecstatic truth”—has been so often cited by the director and his critics that it’s become a cliché (Cronin 2002: 301). Herzog asserts that there are “deeper strata of truth” in cinema, strata that can only be reached “through fabrication and imagination and stylization” (Cronin 2002: 301). And while the Minnesota Declaration may very well have originated in the uproar at the Berlin Film Festival surrounding the screening of *Lessons in Darkness* (1992)—an aestheticizing film essay about Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion—Herzog claims that his manifesto was the product of a sleepless night spent watching TV. Everything he watched, he tells Paul Cronin, was banal and inauthentic until, at 4 a.m., hardcore porn was on the screen. Its images suddenly conveyed “something real,” a “real naked truth” (2002: 239). Herzog’s investment in the “real naked truth” lies in its zero degree realism, grounded in the assumption that the sex act simply is what it is, the real. But in addition to the value placed on the real as beyond signification, the privileging of the pornographic image points to Herzog’s assertions concerning the physicality of filmmaking, as well as to a mystical belief that its corporeality will somehow be taken up into the image to reside there as “truth” or “authenticity.” The most notorious instance of this belief involves the full-size ship in *Fitzcarraldo* that—at Herzog’s insistence—was hauled over a mountain with pulleys and ropes: it is the extraordinary human effort required to perform this act, when registered by the camera, that renders the image authentic. It’s not the blood, sweat, and tears of the actors alone that is taken up into the images of a film, it is centrally the physical investment of the director, who treks through jungles, contracts fevers, and makes the difficult ascent himself. This is the point at which Herzog’s assertions betray their mystical dimension. For Herzog the physicality demanded by cinema involves a subjective effort not only to merge with the material world, but also to merge with the image itself.

How, then, is the privileging of physical investment, of the real, related to the Minnesota Declaration’s emphasis on the production of an “ecstatic truth?” This question calls to mind the troubled image of Herzog as a maker of so-called documentaries whose artifice is criticized for undermining the objectives of the genre. Somewhat idiosyncratically, Herzog makes no distinction between films with a documentary focus and fiction films; he asserts that documentaries are “just films”

(Cronin 2002: 95 and 240). When it emerged that Herzog had invented the purported line from Pascal that is the epigraph of *Lessons in Darkness*, he justified his fabrication as a routine aspect of the fiction-making process. The ends justify the means: the fictional line ascribed to Pascal—"the collapse of the universe will occur like creation—in grandiose splendor"—invests the film's images with apocalyptic, sublime import.¹ For Herzog, this false citation is no different from the other devices that inflate the film's meaning. As in *Fata Morgana* (1969) and *The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner* (1973), *Lessons in Darkness* features frontal shots of war victims delivering scripted poetic monologues, one of which voices the recurrent Herzog theme of the insufficiency of language. Is it a paradox, then, that like so many of Herzog's films, documentary or otherwise, *Lessons in Darkness* has recourse to voice-over narration. Here, too, it is Herzog's own voice, awe-filled and somber, that sets the tone. "I am a storyteller," says Herzog, "and I used the voice-over to place the film—and the audience—in a darkened planet somewhere in our solar system" (Cronin 2002: 249). It's not the referential dimension of language that's at stake, but rather its affective, lyrical function. Herzog is present in this text as a voice that haunts it, that produces affect. Herein language and voice are aided by music: as in earlier films such as *La Soufrière* (1977) and *Nosferatu—The Vampyre* (1979), *Lessons of Darkness* draws on musical passages from Wagner operas (specifically *Das Rheingold*, *Parsifal*, and *Götterdämmerung*) to evoke an atmosphere of foreboding and death.

Not surprisingly, *Lessons* also exhibits its constructedness by citing other films in the Herzog canon: self-citation serves as a means of constructing both self and text, further blurring the difference between the two. The footage of abandoned vehicles rusting in the sand is lifted from *Fata Morgana*, for example, a film with which it has a great deal in common. As in *Fata Morgana*, images in *Lessons* have the look of a mirage: the real landscape becomes surreal as the color, composition, rhythm, and sound of the film are synchronized with fine arts precedents in mind—evocative of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, for instance, or of the earth sculptor Michael Heizer. For the sake of effects such as these the film's images are sometimes deliberately duplicitous, as when—Herzog admits in an interview—"little heaps of dust and oil" (Cronin 2002: 243) stand in for desert dunes. In seeming contradistinction to his insistence on physical investment and photographic registration, then, Herzog's film practice welcomes all manner of artifice, provided that it promotes an "ecstatic inner truth," that it lends the film image the poetic qualities he admires. No matter—it would seem—that the filmic means that confer this "ecstatic truth" upon the image produce another type of authenticity, different in kind from the authenticity conferred by physical investment. Both ideas of authenticity have their origins in a subject who affirms its mystical apprehension of the world.

Brad Prager has pointed to the relevance of Adorno's *The Jargon of Authenticity* to Herzog's filmmaking (2007: 3–5), but it may be profitable to elaborate on the points of connection between German existentialist discourse of the early

twentieth century and the underlying concerns of most Herzog films. When, for example, Adorno accuses “the authentic ones” (1973: 27)—naturally Heidegger is pre-eminent among them—of “existential adventurism” (1973: 32), this is a term easily applied to Herzog. Pertinent, too, is what Adorno calls a “pose of existential seriousness” (1973: 34), perhaps most easily located in the earnest, hushed voice-overs of so many Herzog films. It goes without saying that a “pathos of uniqueness” (1973: 35) attaches to his work as well: witness the documentary *La Soufrière*, a film shot on the evacuated island of Guadeloupe while the volcano of that name was threatening to erupt, or *Heart of Glass* (1976), the fiction film in which Herzog hypnotized his actors to enable them to speak more poetically. In fact, there is even a certain overlap between “the authentic ones” and Herzog in the matter of language since, for Adorno, existential “babble” actually reaches for something behind language, something that evades its grasp (1973: 48). And insofar as existentialism does privilege language, *qua* Adorno, behind this privileging there lurks the premise that it’s “the whole man” who speaks (1973: 14), not simply the intellect. As Adorno is at pains to point out, many of the ideas espoused by “the authentic ones” were adopted by the National Socialists: among these are the “gesture of rooted genuineness,” and a “penchant for primitivism that privileges the indigenous and the mute,” which Adorno exposes as “belonging to the historical conquerors” (1973: 48). The rhetoric of the genuine and the privileging of muteness are at home in Herzog’s films—the latter literally, in *Land of Silence and Darkness* (1971). Like Adorno’s “authentic ones,” Herzog values inwardness. But, more importantly, Herzog seems to share their belief that death is the sublime counterpart of life, that it is the guarantor of authenticity, perhaps even the authentic itself. An existential belief in authenticity, writes Adorno, is located in the cast of mind for which death is the substratum of the self.

In its investment in authenticity, *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974) is the fiction film that has pride of place in the Herzog canon. Kaspar is a character who—like “the authentic ones”—is identical with himself, at one with the world until the fall into language introduces the difference that culminates in his death. In one episode after another, Herzog’s film emphasizes Kaspar’s uniqueness, illustrating this quality by way of visions of landscapes. The aura of the genuine—enhanced by music—carries over into other images of the film, many of them set pieces from Romantic lyric. As for the relation of authenticity to the physical engagement of the auteur, it’s telling that Herzog claims to have planted the beans and flowers in Daumer’s garden himself (Cronin 2002: 103). *Kaspar Hauser’s* stunningly beautiful images—Kaspar’s name spelled out in watercress and the flickering dream of the Caucasus—seemed at the time of the film’s release in the United States to be wholly new images, although even then Herzog’s posture of creating *ex nihilo*, was discernible as a pose.² Is the film “genuinely unique”—or does its investment in uniqueness serve an end? In *The Jargon of Authenticity*, Adorno reads the rhetoric of uniqueness as a feature of the marketplace; while such rhetoric may appear to attack modernity, in actuality, Adorno asserts, it is modernity’s waste product (1973: 45).

The discourse of authenticity surrounding Herzog's films was read as a marketing strategy by Jan-Christopher Horak as early as the mid-1980s. Premised on the notion that Herzog creates a public persona that resonates with that of the visionary characters in his films, Horak's indictment of Herzog is in many ways convincing. As Horak argues, a consistent authorial persona emerges from Herzog's films, books, scripts, interviews, and from the films about him. At issue specifically is a Herzog text called *Of Walking in Ice* (1980), purportedly a journal of a walking trip from Bavaria to Paris. This written text shares with Herzog's films a concern with the insufficiency of language, suggesting that even poetic language can merely gesture in the right direction. The text promotes Herzog's walking tour as a sort of pilgrimage undertaken to "prevent" the death of Lotte Eisner, doyenne of the New German Cinema. Emphasizing Herzog's physical investment in the pilgrimage—he purportedly carried a reel of his film *Kaspar Hauser*, dedicated to Eisner, all the while—walking itself functions as a guarantor of the genuine and authentic. In this instance it was Herzog's belief that the effort expended by the pilgrim would buy off the Fates and keep the ailing Eisner alive. (She did, in fact, survive.) But, like Herzog's documentaries, *Of Walking in Ice* is fictionalized in a number of ways: Herzog presents himself as passing through forbidding landscapes in which he encounters few people, although—as Horak points out—the regions he describes are among the most thickly settled areas of western Europe (1986: 32). Further, in this text Herzog as self-proclaimed vagabond claims to have resorted to thievery in order to survive—another way of living on the edge. This rhetoric recalls Herzog's claim to have stolen his first 35 mm camera, and it gives one pause—even if pointing out the artifice in Herzog's self-stylizations is tantamount to subscribing to an "accountant's truth."

Today, of course, we can include Herzog's DVD commentaries on his own films among the proliferation of texts in which Herzog's authorial persona also resides. (There is also his Web site, www.wernerherzog.com.) Especially enlightening is Herzog's commentary on the DVD of Les Blank's *Burden of Dreams* (1982), the film made about the filming of *Fitzcarraldo*. This commentary enables Herzog to amplify and correct Blank's view of Herzog's shoot. (Not that one can really blame Herzog for doing so, since the press raged about human rights violations of which Herzog was later exonerated by Amnesty International.) And then there is the recently translated *Conquest of the Useless* (2009), a transcription, as Herzog would have it, of the diaries he kept while shooting that same film, diaries which he wrote in a miniaturized script, presumably in order to conserve paper while in the jungle. Interestingly, what one notices when—in fairly quick succession—one reads *Conquest of the Useless*, watches Herzog's *My Best Fiend* (1999), his film about Klaus Kinski with Herzog's voice-over, and reads the interviews by Paul Cronin is that many formulations, even longish passages in all three texts repeat one another word for word. This, too, smacks of crafting a persona, of performing rehearsed texts.

How do such strategies relate to the discourse of authenticity that haunts Herzog's oeuvre? Are they reconcilable with this discourse, or are they in fact

responses to marketplace pressures? For Timothy Corrigan, like Horak, “Herzog’s is a practice aimed unmistakably at calling attention to itself, mimicking an industry’s tactics for self-promotion and representation” (1986: 21). Certainly the many forms of textuality that encase *Fitzcarraldo*—arguably Herzog’s greatest commercial success—point to a desire to capitalize on what sells. In many ways I am convinced of the rightness of this argument. And yet there may be another way to read the deliberate intertwining of life and work, of fictional character with authorial self, of text with text.

The pro-filmic is central to Herzog’s filmmaking. As I’ve claimed, Herzog’s intense concern with the physicality of filmmaking emanates from a belief that the filmic image is somehow imbued with the reality involved in the circumstances of its making—with the effort of the bodies of those who create it. This (mystical) belief extends beyond Bazinian indexicality—it is an intensification of what Philip Rosen has referred to as Bazin’s subjective obsession. For Rosen, Bazin is “a subject obsessively pre-disposed to invest belief” in an image that contains something of the real (2001: 21) and, to my mind, Herzog shares this predisposition. But might the desire of the subject to engage with the pro-filmic in order itself to register as a trace in an “authentic” image not have as an equally compelling corollary the desire that this self be contained within multiple forms of representation? I am thinking of Herzog’s voice-overs in his “documentary” films; of the Herzog featured in *Burden of Dreams*, but also in *My Best Fiend*; of the staging of the self in films such as *Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe* (Les Blank, 1980); of the commentaries on DVDs; and of the written texts. It’s no accident that *I Am My Films* is the title of the Erwin Keusch and Christian Weisenborn documentary about Herzog (1978). Just as the “authenticity” of the Herzog film is equally predicated on the belief in a relation to the real conferred upon the image by physical investment *and* by the repeated recourse to artifice, what I am calling the performance of authenticity has two dimensions. As we’ve said, Herzog affirms physical investment for its ability to infuse the image with the real. From another perspective, however, the various forms of projection into the image are procedures that enclose that self within representation. As such, they can be read as fantasmatically protecting the real, temporal self within the imaginary, atemporal world of art. The melding of the real with representation effected by these practices may be their goal because this confusion effectively blurs the boundary between life and death.

It is to the art historian Michael Fried’s work with its various forms of figured permeability between the real (the artist or the spectator) and the painted image that I owe my interest in this (figured) movement between representation and the real.³ But although I choose here to mention Fried and Diderot in connection with such issues, I could have elected to look at contemporary installation art with the same problems in mind. As in our time (think reality TV and videogames) the juxtaposition of representation and the real were much in vogue during the eighteenth century, as Diderot’s reviews of contemporary French painting in his *Salons* make clear. In one text, to cite an example, Diderot as spectator describes

a walk he is taking through the countryside—only to reveal at the end of his detailed description that it hadn't been a natural scene, after all, but rather a landscape painting he's been describing. It is the realism of the depicted scene (in the conventional sense) that promotes Diderot's figurative entry into the painting, of course, and he uses his description to make that point. But Diderot's conceit entails more than that. In Diderot's *Salons*, the (figured) movement into the image world is often accompanied by a counter-movement: the (figured) movement out of the painted surface into the real world, as when Diderot describes fruit in a Chardin still life as being so real that he can (almost) reach in, pull it out, and peel it. It is in this reciprocal gesture that representation is figuratively brought into reality and vice versa. In visual and other representational practices, there is often a deliberate blurring between the—aesthetic? psychological?—goals of figuring the real and a satisfaction in the role played by illusion. In such practices, reality and fiction are permeable to one another: the movement between them is a two-way street. Immersion is their object.

What factors contribute to artistic practices of this sort? Rosen's work on Bazin argues that the lynchpin of Bazin's concern with indexicality is temporality. Bazin's obsessive interest is essentially defensive: there's a sense in which time is both preserved in film and, when it's projected, experienced as duration. Film, in other words, simulates control over time. Further, as Rosen puts it with Jean-Louis Comolli, an obsessive investment in an image that registers the "real" is indicative of "the struggle of the subject to maintain itself in the face of materiality" (2001: 34)—that is, it's a protection against aging and death. The Bazinian project, Rosen convincingly argues, lays bare the "irrationality at the heart of cinema, a desire for *permanence* (of subjective existence, of identity)" (2001: 39). Similarly, Herzog's projection of an authorial persona into textuality—through physical investment in the image, through identification with the films' characters, and by a variety of formal means—may likewise originate in a drive for preservation, imaginary as such a solution to the problem of temporality may be. (Such strategies recall Adorno's perception that an existential belief in authenticity is typically grounded in the feeling that death is the substratum of the self.) We will return to this issue later.

Theatricality and Identity

Herzog's authorial identity is performative in the sense of being an acting-out: identity is performed and its performance is identity-creating. Even the early documentary, *The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner*, conveys the sense that when Herzog's voice-over speaks reverently of the "ecstasy" Steiner experiences through the "art" of ski-flying, Herzog is also referring to his own art of filmmaking, replete with "ecstatic truth." At the biographical level, Herzog's identification with Steiner is corroborated by the interview with Cronin, in which Herzog mentions

his own earlier participation in the sport of ski jumping. Further, Herzog connects Steiner's ambition of flying—"defying gravity"—with the obsessive behavior of Fitzcarraldo, who similarly rebels against this law of nature.⁴ Filmmaker, documentary subject, and fictional character merge through authorial self-projection; subject and object are blurred. At one point in *Conquest of the Useless*, Herzog muses whether he should not play Fitzcarraldo himself "because my project and the character have become identical (2009: 140). But Herzog's connection to Steiner has a physical dimension as well: "I could feel the weight of his thigh on my shoulder," Herzog tells Cronin about the film crew's efforts to coax the reticent Steiner into opening himself up to the camera by carrying him through the streets. "At this moment," Herzog continues, "the film suddenly became quite clear for me because of this immediate physical sensation with this man. I know it sounds strange, but only after this did I truly respond to all those shots we had of him flying through the air and understand how to use them properly" (2002: 96). Here touch replaces words, establishing a physical yet nevertheless mystical correspondence between filmmaker and subject, visionaries both. Mystically, the real of the body imbues the image with authenticity. Only after this corporeal experience, Herzog claims, did he know how to edit the slow-motion shots of Steiner's flights through the air, the sublime shots that speak equally of ecstasy and death. Action is slowed, Steiner is suspended in flight, the moment of flight is artificially extended. Herzog goes so far as to suggest that his identification with Steiner is so profound that even Herzog's stylization of Steiner's monologue is still "true," brings out the "truth" of Steiner's identity—and justifies Herzog's unacknowledged borrowing from the writer Robert Walser to express it. Once again the loosely worded citation—approaching the fictional—is justified because it promotes the ecstatic truth that is a goal of Herzog's filmmaking.

Years later Herzog made yet another documentary whose governing metaphor is that of flight: *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1998). The film was commissioned by German TV for a series called *Voyages to Hell*, and the choice of subject was Herzog's: Dieter Dengler, a pilot who survived a plane crash and imprisonment by the Viet Cong in the mid-1960s. For the film's somber epigraph, Herzog draws on *Revelation 9:6*, lines which had already made their appearance in *Lessons of Darkness*: "And in those days shall men seek death and not find it, and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them." Once again written language sets the tone of existential angst that hovers uncomfortably over the film's opening sequence, even as Dieter enters a tattoo parlor. Irony is only partly at play here: the tattoo that's been created for Dengler is of galloping horses he saw in a dream, an image that alludes to the four horses of the Apocalypse. But in his monologue—scripted by Herzog—Dengler deems the tattoo inappropriate, claiming that the vision he'd intended the tattoo to capture was not of death, since "Death didn't want me." By way of the film's opening sequence, then, the sublime import of death is deliberately undercut, suspending *Little Dieter* between high seriousness and absurdity in a discomfiting fashion. Herzog's film seems to want it both ways.

Herzog's voice-over intones over black and white archival footage of bombers in flight; Dengler's voice speaks over aerial footage of napalm explosions in color. As in *Lessons of Darkness*, the alienating beauty of horror is underscored, this time by bursts of red and orange in the green lushness of the jungle. At one point in the film, Dengler insists that it was only when he was on the ground, a prisoner, that he understood these landscapes to be anything other than "a grid on a map," that he realized that there were people down there "who suffered and died." Death and absurd humor, aesthetic experience and death: to these antitheses the film adds another. Repeatedly the film hugs the interface between reality and representation. Says Herzog: "everything is authentic Dieter, but to intensify him it is all re-orchestrated, scripted, rehearsed" (Cronin 2002: 265). It's difficult to say whether the biographical incident on which little Dieter's dream of flying was founded was scripted or not: Dengler tells us that an American bomber pilot, shooting all the while, flew so close to his house that the child Dieter and the pilot locked eyes. In interviews, Herzog asserts its truth (Cronin 2002: 264).

The film is structured to emphasize similarities, as well. In addition to a prologue, the film has four parts, complete with titles that give another narrative away: The Man, The Dream, The Punishment, The Redemption—setting up a narrative that is equally readable as the story of its author Herzog, a topic to which we'll return. (In addition to these, the DVD of *Little Dieter* also includes what Herzog calls a post-script: Dengler's military funeral in 2001.) From the beginning biographical ties between Dengler and Herzog are emphasized. Dengler, a German, was a small child during the postwar years. Like Herzog, he grew up hungry and without a father; like Herzog, he admired his grandfather who, in Dengler's case, resisted the Nazis; like Herzog today, Dengler loved to cook. Archival footage has a role to play here, too, such as when Allied bombers attack German cities, creating fields of rubble that, in Herzog's words, constitute "a dreamscape of the surreal" (Cronin 2002: 265). Footage filmed in Germany, archival (in black and white) and contemporary (in color), is cut with Dengler displaying his war medals in his California house (on a mountaintop, of course), protesting that he is not a hero because "only dead people are heroes." Occasionally the voice-overs—spoken by men who speak very good English, but with slight German accents—are difficult to distinguish from one another. At one point one wonders whether Dieter is speaking of himself in the third person, or whether Herzog assumes the voice-over in mid-story. Is this confusion an accident of editing, or is it intentional? Later on in the film, Herzog will speak on behalf of Dengler when he says: "Vietnam didn't seem real at all, so alien, so abstract." But Herzog was not there. My point is not only that the film figures a blurring of auteur and protagonist at the biographical level, since we have noted this feature in other Herzog films. It is also that by way of this merger, and by various other, sometimes formal means, Herzog contrives to position himself within the film in a way that exceeds his roles as interviewer and filmmaker.

It is its hybrid quality and mix of ontological registers that characterizes *Little Dieter* most profoundly. The film brings together several locations (California, Germany, New York City, Vietnam, and Thailand, where Herzog's film was shot), several temporalities (the present of the film's shooting; archival footage of World War II, of post World War II New York City, and of the Vietnam War; footage shot in 1966, after Dengler's release; footage shot after his death in 2001; the "present" of an instructional film purportedly made for the U.S. military), five kinds of footage (fictionalized, as in the tattoo parlor; archival footage; Dengler's narration and reenactment; 1966 footage of the newly released Dengler; the instructional film) plus photographs, and voice-overs spoken by two voices—Dengler's and Herzog's. It is not surprising, then, that some degree of confusion ensues. As mentioned above, Herzog's film contains clips from a military instructional film designed to teach survival methods in the jungle. (Herzog uses clips from it in *Rescue Dawn*, as well.) But the last shots of the instructional film that we see—shots of an American waving a white cloth frantically—are preposterously protracted, given that a plane has already spotted the man. Was this sequence appended to the instructional film by Herzog? It would seem so, since when *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* reenacts the scene of Dengler's rescue, such excessive waving is again on view. Indeed, it recalls images from Herzog's earliest feature film, *Signs of Life* (1968).

When Herzog took his production to Thailand, near the Laotian border, he shot reenactments of scenes from Dengler's war experiences—not with an actor, however, but with Dieter himself. This choice promotes several boundary crossings between acting and experiencing: on one occasion, Herzog's voice-over points out, the filming became too real for Dengler, it was "too close to home," he says, although the spectator is assured that, even for Dengler, "it was only a film." As Herzog puts it to Cronin, Dieter "had to become an actor playing himself" (Cronin 2002: 265) amidst the Thai actors who assumed the roles of the Vietnamese. Dengler's expressions and gestures seem to produce a reality effect in those around him. When one of these actors is affected by an episode Dengler is recounting, Dengler reassures him that, unlike the prisoner of war whom Dengler has been talking about, *he* shouldn't worry—he still has his finger. At times Dengler performs the motions of the actions he performed in the past, but against landscapes he never managed to reach, as in the scene filmed on the banks of the Mekong River. Temporalities, places, and identities are intertwined and role-playing produces real feeling. The latter effect also promotes an authenticity of sorts.

The occasional glimpses of mountains, the lush jungle foliage, meandering streams, and rice paddies also give the film the weight of the real. It goes without saying that Herzog's film was shot on location—or as close as possible to it—but the prison camp where much of the action takes place is of necessity a set. There are sequences in which the Thai actors in costume simply stand around near Dengler; not knowing, perhaps, what to do. In such moments, they seem to function as local color for Dengler's oral recitation. But are they in fact performing their role as actors—or are they just being themselves? As so often in Herzog's

documentaries, the camera shoots Dengler and the actors frontally, home movie style, thus lending the film the amateurish feel that simulates a lesser remove from reality. The film camera moves to track the action; only rarely does it investigate spaces on its own. (When it does, it lingers on the landscape.) But reenactment is only one of the ways in which Herzog's documentary attempts to narrate the actual but now past events of Dengler's personal history. Artifice takes several other forms, as well. Often Dengler simply tells his story to the camera, but occasionally he uses black and white drawings that resemble storyboard images to assist him in his narration. Does the presence of these drawings make his tale more real, or more artificial? Like a film's storyboard, the drawings in *Little Dieter* inscribe a camera position into the image, and thus vary in point of view as well as content: one is of the prison camp from above, for example, while others depict moments of action, with the protagonists sketched into the scene. Undeniably they make Dengler's story come alive. On the other hand, when the film resorts to the authority of photographs to authenticate events and persons, their static quality and out-of-time feel render the narrative less vivid. Along with the archival footage, the photographs serve as "guarantors" of documentary—not of ecstatic—truth. In these various ways, then, *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* oscillates between reality and artifice, generating a seemingly endless series of figure/ground effects.

Two of the more "poetic" sequences in this film are vintage Herzog. Aerial footage of a plane "cemetery" features the camera tracing a huge circle from above, a signature movement of futility across this field of "birds."⁵ Recording—and aestheticizing—the detritus of civilization, this sequence echoes similar scenes in *Fata Morgana*. Of particular interest in this sequence are signature images introduced by an abrupt cut, images we'll turn to below, since the sequence preceding the cut is also of importance. The cut occurs during an interview in which Dieter is seated in the cockpit of a plane such as the one he flew in the Vietnam War, wearing an airman's suit that resembles the one he wore as a pilot. A great show is made of Dengler's "costuming" for this sequence as he removes the suit from a mannequin such as one might see in a flight museum (Figure 1.1). In other words, in Herzog's film the "real" man sits in an "authentic" airman's suit in an "authentic" plane—they are not replicas. What is awry is the temporality of the scene—it merely simulates the past it seeks to evoke. But once again the film stresses reenactment, a register in which actual but past events are staged using "real" elements—in this case, most significantly, the actual person whose story is told. While I would argue that reenactment may generate an emotional response in the performer of his or her own story—a response that closely resembles the affects he originally experienced—it cannot breach the temporal gap that separates it from the original event. Reenactment's attempt to recover the original event elides the passage of time.⁶

Then, as Dieter's narrative continues, there's the unexpected cut to Dieter in an entirely new location.⁷ Now he's positioned in front of a tank with jellyfish floating dreamily through its blue water. It is a signature shot for Herzog, vividly recalling



Figure 1.1 Dieter Dengler removes a flight suit from a mannequin in *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1998). Directed by Werner Herzog, produced by Lucki Stipetić and Werner Herzog/Werner Herzog Filmproduktion.

the bats gliding through a similarly luminescent blue medium in *Nosferatu*, a slow-motion shot the film uses more than once, the sea turtles that glide limpidly through blue water in *Fata Morgana*, and the diver in the icy blue depths of *Encounters at the End of the World* (2007). In *Nosferatu*, the bat sequences overtly suggest that they are equally signs of the visionary (they are suspended in the “blue” of Romantic inwardness that saturates the German tradition) and of death, connected as the bats are to the vampire who brings the plague. Not surprisingly, then, Dengler’s voice-over in the aquarium also addresses this topic. Dengler insists that when near death, he felt himself to be floating through a thick medium; death, he says, looks like a jellyfish tank. Needless to say, this sequence was scripted by Herzog. Significantly, the abrupt cut from reenactment to a signature image privileges the authenticity conferred by artifice and emanating from a fear of death over the incomplete “reality” conferred by reenactment. Reenactment’s erasure of “history”—of the passage of time—can never be complete enough to arrive at the past. On the other hand, the sequences replete with lyrical figures in slow motion, suspended in a blue medium—sequences that are deliberately “out of time”—may overcome by imaging the fear of death that colors the experience of temporality.

If the titles that separate *Little Dieter* into parts tell the story of a man’s “Dream,” his “Punishment,” and his “Redemption,” what is implied by this sequence? At one level the film demonstrates the emergence of a personal narrative out of an historical narrative, the story of how Dengler survived not one war, but two. Yet “Redemption”—this is the title given to Dengler’s tale after his escape from the Viet Cong—follows Dengler’s “Dream” of flying and his “Punishment” by imprisonment and torture. In what sense is Dengler in need of redemption? Is it because he—like Icarus, like Walter Steiner, like Herzog himself, and many another Romantics—dared to rebel against Nature by defying the laws of gravity? Or is

Dengler in need of redemption because, when he bombed Vietnamese villages, he was oblivious to the fellow humans whose death he caused? And why, exactly, is the urge to fly born of Dengler's brush with death by bombing while a very young child in Germany? Does this incident figure the emergence of imagination—or does it suggest that the desire to fly is an unconscious desire for retribution against the pilot? Why does the American pilot Dengler purports to have seen in close up serve as his role model? Isn't he a punishing father figure like the one who inexplicably stabs Kaspar Hauser? While his childhood in Germany is integral to Dengler's experience and identity, it wouldn't on the face of it seem essential to the story of Dengler's role in the Vietnam War. Nor would it seem necessary for the film to include a photograph of Dengler's grandfather, of whom it's said that he was the only man in his hometown not to join the Nazi Party.

Or is it *precisely these* inclusions that are essential? Of course Herzog's documentary was made for a German TV audience for whom Dengler's origin is of compelling interest, and there's the matter of Herzog's personal identification, as well. Dengler's is the story of a German who made good—actually became a hero—in the United States, just as Herzog has recently made good in Hollywood. Dengler claims that he was able to survive Vietnam for reasons that are specifically tied to his German background: in his voice-over he claims that his grandfather's resistance to the Nazis enabled his own refusal to sign a Viet Cong document condemning the United States. And the extreme hardships Dengler survived in postwar Germany as an apprentice to a brutal master are recuperated for him in Vietnam, where they helped him hold out against starvation and the jungle. Indeed, Germans are presented primarily as victims in *Little Dieter*, and the intertwining of World War II destruction from Dengler's German perspective with Dengler's wartime experiences in Vietnam from his American perspective is yet another way in which Herzog's film thrives on ambiguities. If strains of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* in conjunction with the Vietnam War are used to cement a connection between the Nazis and the United States, then the music is surely mock-heroic, indicative of misguided heroism.⁸ Might the film be suggesting that “redemption” be conferred on Germans—and on Americans as well? There's a sense in which *Little Dieter* equates Germans with Americans via the body of Dengler, a German national become U.S. citizen—and then exonerates both from guilt. Although Herzog is by no means an historical filmmaker, historical events provide the fabric of this film, and there is a sense in which the film contributes, like Günter Grass' *Crab Walk (Im Krebsgang, 2002)* to the recent discourse surrounding German suffering during World War II. Thus the conflation of temporalities in *Little Dieter* takes on a deeply ideological significance.

But insofar as Dengler's desire to fly is a reaction formation to a traumatic event in early childhood, Herzog's film complexly concerns the *preservation* of the subject in the face of death. And if *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* presents Dengler as a dreamer who is punished before being redeemed, isn't this Herzog's narrative of himself, of the man who dared to make a film predicated on pulling a ship over a mountain,

oblivious to the pain and suffering of others, who's punished (by the press), then finally redeemed by the reception of *Fitzcarraldo*? Interestingly, the DVD version of *Little Dieter* appends a postscript to the film's final credits. It's a curious choice of placement, and no doubt this footage is missed by some viewers. It's now 2001, a title tells us, and we're about to witness Dengler's funeral. He is buried with full military honors, and the mood is somber as the camera records the action. There is no dialogue; there are no voice-overs. This absence of the personal calls to mind Horak's comment concerning the absence of the personal friendship Herzog actually had with Eisner from the text Herzog wrote about his pilgrimage to her (1986: 29). Is there, then, in fact a decorum that shields the most private aspects of the lives of others from aesthetic intervention? If Herzog appears to have withdrawn his directorial persona almost entirely from this footage, what is the reason for this retreat? Perhaps it's a sign of respect for the solemnity of the occasion. Perhaps by withdrawing his persona from the film Herzog suggests that every man's death is his own. Or does his reticence derive from the postscript's subject—the rites that re-incorporate the real of the corpse into culture? When at the end of the ceremony that is the end of the film, a squadron of F14s flies through the air, the film camera follows these planes until they nearly disappear behind the delicate tracery of branches against the sky. The footage concludes, in other words, with the image of the plane as bird that for Herzog signals imagination, and in which authorial identity resides. Herzog re-enters the text.⁹

With *Grizzly Man* (2005), the interpenetration of authorial persona and filmed subject is even more pronounced. We notice it first at the level of the footage: Herzog's "documentary" about Timothy Treadwell relies heavily on found footage, archival footage shot by Treadwell himself. Interspersed with Treadwell's tapes are Herzog's interviews of Treadwell's significant others—his friends, his parents, and those who facilitated his "work" in what Treadwell refers to as the "Sanctuary" and "Grizzly Maze" of Alaska. Once again there are points of similarity between Herzog and his subject, including the theatricality of their voice-overs over "documentary" footage—the hushed tones, for instance, designed to promote suspense or awe. And, like many another Herzog hero, Treadwell rebels against nature and society: "How dare you challenge me?" Treadwell angrily demands of the Park Service, echoing Aguirre in a minor key. (Irony is at work here, at least for Herzog, who chose to include this bit of footage.) More centrally, Herzog speaks of Treadwell's attempt to seek "a primordial encounter" with nature, one that has something in common with religious experience. Also like Herzog at so many moments in his filmmaking, Treadwell finds himself on what he calls "the precipice of great bodily harm and death," an existential position that confers value on those who live it.

While filming is confessional for Treadwell, a "search for himself," artifice is centrally important. His self-fashioning is identity creating; like Herzog, Treadwell changed his last name to one more suitable for his intended career as an actor. Pointing out that Treadwell's footage features him as the central character of his

own film, Herzog reads “ecstasy and an inner turmoil” in Treadwell’s story. And there are other points of convergence: in *Grizzly Man*, Herzog refers repeatedly to the theatricality of Treadwell’s enterprise, as when his voice-over speaks of the actor in Treadwell as “taking over from the filmmaker,” or when he suggests that the “mythical character” into which Treadwell was turning himself “led to fabrication.” Is Herzog speaking self-consciously here? If so, what of the observation that Treadwell “seems to hesitate in leaving the frame of his film”? Herzog’s remark is posited on an (imaginary) identification of the subject with his footage: at one level Treadwell’s reluctance to leave the frame implies anxiety about relinquishing the sense of identity the camera confers. Especially—but not exclusively—in retrospect, this reluctance implies that Treadwell correlates the temporality of the running camera with the temporality that governs all of our lives. Since it is Herzog’s voice-over that hints at these issues, does Herzog covertly acknowledge not only the interpenetration of filmmaker and filmic subject in his own films, but also the (imaginary) co-extensiveness of the authorial subject with his films?

Theatricality permeates *Grizzly Man*; Treadwell has a fully mediatized identity. In Treadwell’s footage, we don’t simply encounter it in Herzog’s stage-whisper voice-overs. It’s also apparent in Treadwell’s televisual turns, the signing on and off by means of which he simulates live broadcasts. Treadwell’s dream was to be a TV celebrity: his parents suggest that his downward spiral began when he wasn’t given the Woody Harrelson role in *Cheers*. Granted, it is Treadwell’s drive to *be* a grizzly—his psychotic drive—that sets the stage for genuine horror. But his life with the grizzlies, while recording an “authentic,” if psychotic, drive to “become animal,”¹⁰ must also be seen as an acting out that takes theatrical forms. His self-staging of experience is overt: the “sign” of an evil presence inscribed on a rock (a happy face—surely there’s self-irony here), and the little piles of stones he “discovers” after the arrival of hunters are beyond question borrowings from *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). When Treadwell suggests that the scene is “Freddy Kruger creepy,” it’s clear that he’s making a detour from his action film into the horror genre. The same holds for Herzog: staging and theatricality are everywhere apparent in *Grizzly Man*. The coroner, Dr. Franc Fallico, who claims to have sifted through Treadwell’s remains, hams it up in his interviews: wide-eyed, he moves towards the camera for an extreme close up, and his vivid description of body parts produces the affects typical of horror. TV advertising competes with the horror genre as Dr. Fallico mentions that Treadwell’s watch, found attached to his severed hand, “is still running.” In marking the passage of time indicated by titles, *Grizzly Man* refers again to *The Blair Witch Project* and to one of the techniques by which the latter film “makes real.” By way of such stagy and ironic turns in Herzog’s film, the Internet hoax that promoted *Blair Witch* as a record of “real events” is made to resonate here.

Performance strategies take center stage in Herzog’s filmed conversations with Jewel Palovak, Treadwell’s erstwhile lover and friend. Her clumsily flubbed lines

are not inadvertent—she doesn't stumble over her words because she's moved by memories of Treadwell. Rather, Jewel's role is multiply connected to theatricality. When warned by Herzog that she should "never ever" listen to the tape of Treadwell's death (the lens cap was closed, preventing an image from being recorded), Jewel's body language reveals that she's familiar with it already, but she plays along with Herzog's staged horror: she will, she promises Herzog, "never ever" listen to it. With respect to Herzog's own performance, this exchange is surely an example of "the actor taking over from the filmmaker." Bad faith is at work here: while Herzog urges Jewel not to listen to the sounds of Treadwell's and Amie's demise—and deliberately omits them from his film—he includes Fallico's overly detailed verbal description of their deaths as extrapolated from forensic evidence.

Another scripted anecdote is equally telling. Jewel's story of her first meeting with Treadwell isn't really about that event: instead, she describes working in a restaurant that features Renaissance-style feasts (Treadwell also worked there), a kind of dinner theater that serves up living history. Jewel's role as waitress also obliged her to act, since while waiting on table she was costumed and made to stay in character. When one family pressured her to "do it up big," as Jewel tells it, she angrily poured extra lighter fluid around the Sterno burner over which she was to heat soup, causing a blaze that terrified all. (An act of arson is committed by the rebellious Stroszek in Herzog's *Signs of Life*.) For Herzog, the implication of Jewel's story, in which the real in the form of a dangerous fire emerges out of staged history, is that "culinary art" (Brecht's term) is undone and the unscripted reaction of the spectators is "authentic."

There are other such "borderline" situations in the film, situations in which the juxtaposition of the real with the simulated produces ironic undertones. Like *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*, *Grizzly Man* includes a mannequin of a native Alaskan in authentic garb on display in the Alutiiq Museum. As in *Little Dieter*, this scene plays on the juxtaposition of "authenticity"—it is genuine native clothing—and the artifice of the figure. When the museum director—playing himself—shows Herzog around, one of his exhibits is a taxidermy grizzly who supposedly lost a paw to greedy tourists. But a substitute paw has been attached to the stuffed bear—by means of an ace bandage (Figure 1.2). It's only one of the humorous touches by which the film covers over its more serious project. The museum's version of the grizzly bear—a "real" stuffed bear—resonates with Treadwell's childhood toy, the teddy bear that still accompanies him into grizzly country.¹¹ Filmed living grizzlies, a stuffed "real" grizzly, a stuffed toy bear, a man who would be a grizzly: Herzog's film once again lays out a spectrum of ontological registers, of degrees of simulation that would appear to question the concept of authenticity. If for Herzog authenticity is grounded in the importance invested in death, then the film's darkest irony concerns the unnecessary death of Treadwell and his partner. It's not the fact of their death per se, but rather the manner of their death that's at issue. Echoing similar lines from *Signs of Life* and from *La*



Figure 1.2 A bear that has had its paw taken by tourists in *Grizzly Man* (2005). Directed by Werner Herzog, produced by Erik Nelson for Lions Gate Films and Discovery Docs.

Soufrière, Herzog's voice-over claims that there was "a certain absurdity in their end." No doubt there's self-irony in these words.

Nevertheless, as always in Herzog films, authenticity is what's centrally at stake. There are handheld effects in Treadwell's footage, sequences in which water splashing up on the camera lens recalls those ubiquitous signature shots in Herzog films. And there are the Bazinian moments when Treadwell's footage captures what Herzog calls "an inexplicable image of the cinema." These are moments of "serendipity," as Herzog terms them, moments when "reality" suddenly wanders into the frame—in the form, for instance, of a fox cub at play, stealing Treadwell's baseball cap. Here the camera truly captures "life as it is"—but in the form of a narrative, a drama. Footage such as this provides Herzog with an occasion to rail against "the studios," which, as he says in the film, can't even dream of "such glorious effects." As this remark makes clear, for Herzog unstaged "real life" in film can simultaneously be "an effect." But there's another kind of image that Herzog privileges in Treadwell's footage, those brief glimpses of "empty moments that have a strange, secret beauty." Such non-narrative moments—featuring grasses, for instance (*Kaspar Hauser*), or poppies waving in the breeze (*Woyzeck*, 1979)—are central to Herzog's own filmmaking. These sequences are distinguished from those that feature the playful fox by virtue of their non-narrative "secret beauty" that aligns them with Romantic hieroglyphs, images of nature whose import is mystical. They have this in common with Peter Zeitlinger's aerial shots of the icy blue glacier in *Grizzly Man*, images that recall Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Sea of Ice* (1823–5): the paradox for *Grizzly Man* is that the scene from nature is also a scene from art. While Zeitlinger's images of the Alaskan glacier are clearly of a real landscape, what characterizes them—and makes them signify for Herzog—is that they are finally unsusceptible to analysis. This is because the glacier is another landscape of death; icy blue, it brings to mind the jellyfish aquarium of *Little Dieter*.

Authenticity is veiled in mysticism, yes, but it also resides in “the real” of the body. *Grizzly Man* includes grizzly images of body parts, as well as verbal references to them: Sam Egli, the helicopter pilot, claims to have filled four garbage bags with Treadwell and Amie’s “blood and guts.” A cub’s paw, a dead baby fox—Zeitlinger’s camera records them all, while Willy the pilot tells us that he realized Treadwell and Amie had died when he spotted a human ribcage on the ground below. Even in its most reduced state, as a trace of the body, the real functions as a guarantor of authenticity, such as when *Grizzly Man* records the scattering of Treadwell’s ashes across a former campsite. What’s left of Treadwell is beyond subjectivity: the ashes as material trace of the body merge with the natural world that produced it. Dust is returned to dust; the boundary between the human and its environment has collapsed. Illustrative of this concern in Herzog’s film is the sequence in Treadwell’s footage that unfolds around “Wendy’s poop.” Touching the bear’s recently deposited excrement, Treadwell is overwhelmed by the sensation that it is still warm, that what had just been inside the bear, part of her body, is now outside it. For Treadwell, “it’s her life; it’s her,” but what Herzog may find compelling about Treadwell’s anecdote is the sense that the permeability of inside and outside has its analogue in the fragile boundary between subject and object, one that his films deliberately blur.

Self-parody

If the artifice and ironies of Herzog films should seem too subtle or elusive, a look at *Incident at Loch Ness*, directed by Zak Penn and co-written by Penn and Herzog is in order. It stages them magisterially. A *mise-en-abyme* “documentary,” it’s overtly played for humor, and it too takes a turn towards the horror genre along the way. In deference to the “camera at water level” trope in Herzog, a pre-credit sequence features a life-jacketed body floating in the water, shot from this position. As the film’s narrative tells it, *Incident at Loch Ness* is a (digital) John Bailey documentary, a film about the making of a (celluloid) Herzog film with a self-parodic title, *The Enigma of Loch Ness*. Complete with interviews during and after the shoot, Bailey’s film has the working title *Herzog in Wonderland* before events take this film in another direction: it’s important to point out that this turn, too, is a fiction. The film—is it Bailey’s or Penn’s?—begins with a dinner party given at Herzog’s home in Los Angeles—fictively located at the corner of Lookout Mountain and Wonderland Avenue. Members of Herzog’s production team and crew are treated to a dinner prepared by Herzog whose menu is slated to include yucca which, Herzog tells the camera, is “slightly toxic” if not properly cooked. Memorabilia from various shoots decorates Herzog’s stucco house, including an arrow from *Fitzcarraldo* with a “very serious poison” on its tip, and the gun with which Herzog threatened Klaus Kinski. Among photos on the wall

is one of Lotte Eisner, “my mentor,” as Herzog still refers to her, alongside “manipulated” photos of Nessie, the Loch Ness monster. There’s a shot of a page from Herzog’s miniaturized diary of the *Fitzcarraldo* shoot, *Conquest of the Useless*, and Herzog confesses sheepishly to his reputation for shooting films in dangerous places. Bailey’s film includes short clips from *Aguirre*, *Fitzcarraldo*, *Burden of Dreams*, *My Best Fiend*, and *La Soufrière*. The film begins, in other words, with a collection of Herzogiana, theatrically annotated by the filmmaker himself. Herzog plays Herzog; the tone is tongue-in-cheek, self-parodic.

In later interviews with Bailey, Herzog recites his famous distinction between fact and truth; truth is “like poetry” and preferably “ecstatic,” and suggests that, as a culture, “we need the very dark monsters.” All this is vintage Herzog. In the meantime, Bailey and his crew shoot Herzog at the drug store, buying razor blades—“a banality” that one shouldn’t record on film, comments Herzog. The film presents Bailey, of whom we catch only the occasional glimpse, as the “real” documentary filmmaker; Herzog as the (mostly) independent filmmaker that he is; and Zak Penn as a Hollywood producer par excellence. When Herzog calls for a “real” crypto-biologist for the film, Penn agrees to provide one, but it’s later revealed that the man is really an actor. (*Fata Morgana* and *Encounters at the End of the World* also feature “pseudo-scientists;” people working at the borders of science and the imagination are a long-standing interest of Herzog’s.)

Discovering Penn’s subterfuge, Herzog wonders aloud: “who is real and who is not?” (He is not serious.) The line between “truth” and “fiction” is multiply blurred as Penn reminds Herzog that Herzog has often insisted that “cinema is lies.” Although Penn wants the director of photography to shoot some Scottish local color—a shepherd on a hillside, for example—he settles for a shot of a fighter plane flying overhead; it’s more of a Herzog shot (recall *Little Dieter*) than a comment about contemporary Scotland. Penn provides the production with an inflatable Nessie, a children’s toy, but Herzog refuses to include it in his film, both evoking and mocking his own insistence on a real ship for *Fitzcarraldo*. When Herzog discovers that Penn has asked the crew to shoot footage of the inflatable Nessie, Herzog calls the film “a hoax.” Representing Hollywood, Penn wants to imitate “an authentic expedition” by giving cast and crew jumpsuits complete with the production’s logo; the sonar operator that Herzog wanted for the production turns out to be an actress in a tiny bikini. Time and again Penn’s, Bailey’s, and Herzog’s artistic differences are played up for the sake of humor, as when Bailey’s intrusive camera pushes through a nearly closed door in order to eavesdrop on a private conversation. Sometimes performance seems too much in evidence: there are moments when Herzog barely prevents himself from smiling as he speaks his lines, and the actor who plays the “crypto-biologist” isn’t very adept at improvisation.

The film’s fiction is that Herzog is making one film, Penn is making another, and Bailey is making a third. Then suddenly, just as their disagreements come to a head, a large shape appears in the water. The whole production is stopped, even



Figure 1.3 Zak Penn draws a gun on Werner Herzog in *Incident at Loch Ness* (2004). Directed by Zak Penn, produced by Zak Penn and Werner Herzog.

Herzog doesn't want to keep the camera rolling—all everyone wants to do is look into the water. (Is this an allusion to the young Mozart in *Kaspar Hauser*?) On Day Three, some members of the crew leave the production in disgust (*Fitzcarraldo*; *Rescue Dawn*), and Penn draws a gun (Herzog and Kinski) to force Herzog to continue (Figure 1.3). In a later interview with Bailey Herzog declares that “whatever film I had planned had turned into something like a horror film.” (Indeed, this film, too, includes titles that mark ever more specific units of time, recalling *The Shining* [1980] and *The Blair Witch Project*.) But now it's implied that the “real” Nessie is on the scene, ramming into the boat with tremendous force. When the frightened Penn and the crypto-biologist make off in a lifeboat, Herzog vows to strangle Penn with his bare hands when he catches him. Then Herzog grabs a camera and ducks “beneath the surface” (*Signs of Life*) of the water to capture an image of the monster, although he doesn't succeed. At this point in the film its spectator is still in a state of confusion, wondering what's an effect and what isn't, and who has staged what. Penn turns up alive (his is the life-jacketed body in the pre-credit sequence), but it's discovered that both the crypto-biologist and the production manager have actually died (in the fiction that's the film), recalling the scandals surrounding the production of *Fitzcarraldo*. At the end of the film Penn, the Hollywood man, admits that truth is more exciting than fiction. Hamming it up, he wonders who—aside from the two dead people—suffered as much as he, the film's producer, did. Herzog explains to Bailey that the two deaths are “tragedies” and that, as a result, “the truth did not seem ecstatic—it seemed vulgar and pointless” (echoes from *La Soufrière* and *Grizzly Man*).

Penn's and Herzog's remarks concerning the (filmic) deaths of the crypto-biologist and the production manager are clearly marked as self-parodic. But a false note enters the film with the mention of death, even if it's been clear from the start that everyone involved in the film is having fun, that the film was

never intended to be serious: at one level, the film is a game played by a group of friends who happen to be in the trade. Yet during the dinner party that opens the film, Penn explains that he's financing Herzog's production (of the film that was never made, *The Enigma of Loch Ness*) in order to expand Herzog's audience to include fans of Hollywood cinema. (Recall that Penn orders the shooting of Hollywood-style footage that he plans to cut into the film, no doubt a reference to the shooting of *Rescue Dawn*.) Encased in the fiction that governs the film as a whole, this explanation, too, is a fiction. Or is it? More importantly, what might Herzog's motive for involving himself in such a self-parodic production be?

Mocking Herzog's most cherished principles of filmmaking, the film spoofs not only Herzog's themes, but also the postures that define him as an auteur. If it is postulated on a movement from what Erving Goffman terms "belief in a part" to cynicism, this need not be permanent (2007: 59). Is Herzog's willingness to participate in fact commercially driven, or does the oscillation of registers—the different degrees of fictionality that constitute *Incident at Loch Ness*—serve a more important function? Isn't this film the most baroque vehicle for containing himself within representation in which Herzog has participated so far? If the movement between reality and fiction is consciously and overtly stylized by the film, need this signify that Herzog's investment in this oscillation is less intense because more self-conscious? *A jeu d'esprit* the film may be, yet it nevertheless enables Herzog to move back and forth with bravura between its multiple registers of reality and fiction. Interestingly, *Incident at Loch Ness*' lengthy credit sequence is interspersed with outtakes from the film that suggest yet another conflation of real people—the actors—with the fiction in which they participate. Ever performing himself as auteur *and* as subject, for Herzog there may be no difference.

Notes

- 1 For a discussion of Herzog and the sublime, see Peucker (1984) and (1995: 88–94).
- 2 See Peucker (1986).
- 3 See Peucker (2007).
- 4 This theme informs many Herzog films, among them his first feature, *Signs of Life* (1968), and—most notably, perhaps—*Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972).
- 5 Planes represented as birds are typical of Herzog's work: see also *The Flying Doctors of East Africa* (1969) and *Fata Morgana*.
- 6 See Bill Nichols (2008), which includes a reading of *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*.
- 7 I'm indebted to Jesse Maiman for pointing out the interest of this cut.
- 8 The same musical passages are used in *Lessons in Darkness* and *Nosferatu*, and they are most obviously mock-heroic in *La Soufrière*.
- 9 *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* is of particular interest among Herzog's documentaries because it's the only one that was made into a feature film, thus representing the Dieter Dengler material in yet another register. With *Rescue Dawn*'s claim to be based

on a true story, as a title maintains, this fiction film—more like a Hollywood film than any other film of Herzog's—lends yet another dimension to the re-working of the "authentic" material that is present in *Little Dieter*. As in other Herzog productions, there were huge difficulties during the shooting, and members of the crew, unpaid and struggling in the Thai jungle, left the production in disgust. While making the film, Herzog himself lost thirty pounds, ate maggots, and bit into snakes—Herzog's physical investment set an example for others to do the same. As yet another gesture in the direction of melding performance with the real, the deprivation to which Herzog subjected himself—to his mind, at least—promoted participation in the image. But the typical Herzog non-narrative images—shots of animals, for instance—are very few and fleeting. Some footage for the film was even shot without Herzog's awareness, footage that could be used to make the film resemble Hollywood films more closely.

- 10 See Jeong and Andrew (2008: 4).
- 11 It's not difficult to see Treadwell's interest in bears as a form of arrested development, at the very least. His mother notes that as a child he shared her interest in animals; a sign with images of bunnies in her garden advertises "garden tours." Treadwell's anxiety about being gay is suggested by an image of a sign in Herzog's footage that reads "Nick's Pansy Farm," but it flashes by so quickly as to be nearly subliminal.

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