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Filmmaking and Philosophizing against the Grain of Theory: Herzog and Wittgenstein

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So far, Werner Herzog has given about eight hundred interviews, through various media spanning print, radio, film, television, and the Internet. One of their leitmotifs is his portrayal of himself as an *anti-intellectualist*, an *anti-theorist*, and an *anti-philosopher*. This is a bit startling, since he is known to be proficient in several modern languages, apparently reads Ancient Greek and Latin, and advocates for literature and poetry relentlessly. One may rejoin that the interviews are meant to be taken just as his films: as blurring the line between documenting and fictionalizing. But that would only make the former all the more intriguing. Besides, I do not want to dismiss the filmmaker's self-portrait simply because it could be partly fictional. I would rather allow myself to add some further brushstrokes to it.

To that end, this text resorts to an established philosopher, who may have actually welcomed Herzog's anti-intellectualist and anti-theoretical posture: Ludwig Wittgenstein. They both attempt to do justice—the former cinematically, the latter philosophically—to what is sometimes called the “human condition,” its quirks and fancies included. And they are both concerned with the trouble we experience in putting up with what there is, with what there may be at hand or before our eyes.¹ The point I would like to make here is that the obstinacy of Herzog's protagonists to achieve something *come what may*, and the dogmatism of Wittgenstein's interlocutors to conceive of something *in just one way*, are two sides of the same coin. This coin is the unbounded attachment to a theory:

one's exclusive manner of acting upon, or looking at, the world around oneself. The following can thus be taken as a portrayal of some cinematic practices and some philosophical views simply belonging together.

FROM HERZOG TOWARD WITTGENSTEIN

Among the filmmaker's statements against intellectualism, one is particularly noteworthy. First, because he reiterates it in many interviews, and second, because although the reiterations are up to three decades apart (e.g., from 1973 to 2002), they are virtually verbatim:

I am not an intellectual. I do not belong to the ranks of intellectuals who have a philosophy or a social structure in mind and then make a film about it. Nor do I think that I succumbed to literary or philosophical influences. I can say, for the most part, that I am illiterate. I haven't read much and am therefore utterly clueless. In my case, making a film has much more to do with real life, with living things, than it has with philosophy. All my films were made without any reflective contemplation, or hardly any. Reflection always came after the film.²

Whence this striving for self-exclusion from the ranks of intellectuals? On the account in question, intellectualist filmmaking boils down to a bare application of a prefabricated philosophy. The making of a film could indeed be triggered and driven by conceptions of social structures, such as mechanisms of exclusion. But then the film would end up simply sieving, through those conceptions, the "real life" invoked previously. Not that such structures cannot be taken to be real in any sense. It is only that behind or beside them there is always further life, real enough at least to make a camera linger over it.

In *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974), what may be called the "social exclusion" of a wild child is also the stage setting of a man's late enculturation—sometimes humiliating, sometimes dignifying. And this so-called passage "from nature to culture" is complicated by this man's very passage from life, while reporting visions of the Sahara, which he neither visited nor studied. Such bursts of life and death can indeed inform conceptions of social structures. Yet the latter, we are told, are to come *after* the film, by way of reflection or contemplation. This is one sense in which the filmmaker would be quite clueless.³

Above and elsewhere, Herzog further pleads for a related sense of illiterate directing. Time and again, he claims to have learned the requisite technicalities of cinema in his early youth from a few pages of a textbook. He disowns any "intellectual theory as to how 'the narrative' should work," and holds that no research into "opera theory" was involved in his coming to direct about twenty opera shows for the biggest opera houses around the world.⁴ His recently established *Rogue Film School* introduces itself more radically: "it is for those who have travelled

on foot, who have worked as bouncers in sex clubs or as wardens in a lunatic asylum."⁵

The director makes such statements against intellectualism and theory regarding not only the making of film, but also the latter's reception. In defense of his *Ballad of the Little Soldier* (1984), a documentary on children sent to war in Nicaragua, he argues that the "intellectuals were simply unable to understand that politically dogmatic cinema is not something I practice. [. . .] It does not matter what political content there is when you have a nine-year-old fighting in a war."⁶ Another example: his *Echoes from a Somber Empire* (1990), a documentary on Bokassa (an apparently insane despot of the Central African Republic) closes with the scene of a monkey smoking in a cage, an addiction she acquired thanks to the zoo guardians. One of Herzog's interviewers proposes a reading in conspicuously Nietzschean terms: "This human, all too human, ape makes one think of men behind bars, the men imprisoned by Bokassa, and perhaps even Bokassa himself." Herzog replies immediately: "No, no! That is a Western sickness, always seeing metaphorical connections in everything! Things are clearer for me. They're simpler. An ape is an ape. A cigarette is a cigarette. And Bokassa is Bokassa."⁷

Now, if Herzog's posture against intellectualism in the making and viewing of film was meant to hint at the feebleness of philosophizing about cinema and other things, then that posture may be feeble itself. Wittgenstein, for one, would readily embrace what could well be a dictum for philosophizing in his vein: "An ape is an ape. A cigarette is a cigarette." Indeed, echoing this phrase, he intended to use as a motto for his *Philosophical Investigations* an excerpt from Bishop Butler: "Everything is what it is, and not another thing."⁸

Herzog's phrase, no less than Butler's, captures a central concern of Wittgenstein's later philosophy with the dangers of assimilating one thing to another. Metaphors and analogies are modalities of doing just that. Of course, assimilation is legitimate and prolific, insofar as it brings to light, regarding one or several of the assimilated things, aspects which could otherwise remain in the dark. But it may be dangerous and confusing, in that it unavoidably adumbrates other aspects which could be significant nevertheless.⁹

In our case, to assimilate the monkey smoking in the cage to suffering prisoners would be to mold the scene within the confines of a reading at hand. It would be to focus on a sense of being behind bars, to focus on the trees, as it were, and miss the forest of significance that charges the scene. As a spectator, I may venture to read the scene as an epitome of a decayed culture or civilization. Or as an expression of hopelessness, perhaps even the meaninglessness, of what humans can do. In doing so, however, I would be persistently pressed by the filmmaker to go back, again and again, to the contents of the scene: a monkey, a cigarette, a cage. I could thus realize that I have overlooked the gaze of the monkey,

or the “gaze” of the camera into that gaze. In the end, if I wanted to ascribe an authorial intent to the scene, it should be the minimalist intention that the scene affects me and stays with me, while outperforming and outlasting any of my readings of it.

We should remind ourselves that the difficulty, more generally, of advancing the thesis that a film’s *reading* does justice to the film’s *viewing* has long been addressed by philosophers from various traditions. In the 1940s, the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty hinted at the intellectual artifacts contained by readings as opposed to viewings of movies, on the basis that, originally, “a film is not thought, it is perceived.”¹⁰ By the same token, in the 1970s, the American postanalytic philosopher Stanley Cavell traced the difficulty back to “the fact that in speaking of a moment or sequence from a film we, as we might put it, cannot *quote* the thing we are speaking of.”¹¹

Back to our filmmaker and our philosopher. The first step in bringing Herzog closer to Wittgenstein is propped up by the former’s willingness to approach the latter. In a recent interview, the director says: “I think it was Wittgenstein who talked about being inside a house and seeing a figure outside strangely flailing about. From inside you cannot see what storms are raging out there, so you find the figure funny.”¹² That is a paraphrase of Wittgenstein’s response to the bewilderment of his sister Hermine at his decision to become, after the publication of the *Tractatus*, an elementary-school teacher. To her, his commitment evoked the employment of a precision instrument for the job of opening crates.¹³ The eventual turn in the philosopher’s career may, however, be motivated by the acknowledgment of a need: to try the intellect’s sharpness on the world’s vicissitudes, even if it should end up with dents and cracks. What is more, Wittgenstein also acted as a gardener in a monastery around the same time. He was thus doing, in his own way, something along the lines of what Herzog expects from a filmmaker: to work as a bouncer in a sex club, or as a warden in a lunatic asylum.

The scenario which Herzog ascribes to Wittgenstein does not merely indicate their agreement on what to expect from the life of a virtuoso. Their appeal to the scenario is indicative of their shared concern with the hazards of intellectual contemplation, and ultimately of theory. This becomes clearer against the background of the historiographic allusion at stake. For the one inside the house, who looks through the window and has trouble making sense of what goes on outside, is the contemplative protagonist of one of Descartes’s meditations. The protagonist could only hypothesize, as if on basis of theory, that the coats and hats seen through the window are, after all, animated by real people.¹⁴

Herzog dismisses an intellectualist-contemplative approach to filmmaking and film viewing. What would it be to *make* films, as it were, from behind the window? To lock oneself within a conception of a social structure, to shoot what best confirms it and let pass whatever discon-

firms it. What would it be to *view* films in a similar fashion (through a *tinted* windowpane, for argument's sake)? To suffer from the purported Western sickness of seeing metaphorical connections in everything. In our case, it could be to succumb to the restless doubt whether, once on screen, an ape remains an ape—or she is turned into something else by some kind of cinematic magic.

The counterfactual dialogue between Herzog and Wittgenstein begins to highlight a convergence in their spirits between filmmaking and philosophizing. They expose the perils of self-seclusion within a theory, of submission to one's own inclination to always take something for something else, and of something else standing alone. And they agree upon the need for a filmmaker and a philosopher to step out of that house. The difficulty in taking such a step is, nevertheless, proportional to the resistance of one's will to not take it instead, a position we are about to see maintained by Wittgenstein.

FROM WITTGENSTEIN TOWARD HERZOG

Wittgenstein takes issue with theory more explicitly in his later period. He opposes not only philosophical transplants of *scientific theories*, but also philosophy which is made to look like science. The latter is one of his understandings of metaphysics, either modern and straightforward or recent and incognito. He also opposes *philosophical theories* about the workings of language, of experienced reality, of interpersonal communication, and so forth.

Here, instead of following those intricate avenues, I would rather sketch the ethos which guides Wittgenstein's following of them. One issue of philosophizing with theories is that it is prone to dogmatism. A theory in the relevant sense is just one among the many ways to approach things which, nonetheless, mostly ends up being meant or taken as a privileged approach, and often as the only one available. However, just like the assimilation of x to y , a theory about x can only highlight some aspects of it, while unavoidably adumbrating others. That need not be a problem, if one remains aware of the clarificatory possibilities and limitations of a theory. But the *desideratum* of maintaining an awareness can be expressed far more easily than it can be fulfilled. For one's attachment to a theory does not rise and fall with the assessment of its clarificatory potential. That attachment, which may be part and parcel of intellectualism, is not purely intellectual, but also affective and volitional.

Significantly in this respect, the *Big Typescript*, a collection of remarks which paves the way toward the *Philosophical Investigations*, contains a little section titled "Difficulty of Philosophy Not the Intellectual Difficulty of the Sciences, but the Difficulty of a Change of Attitude. Resistance of the Will Must Be Overcome." One passage reads:

As I have often said, philosophy does not lead me to any renunciation, since I do not abstain from saying something, but rather abandon a certain combination of words as senseless. In another sense, however, philosophy does require a resignation, but one of feeling, not of intellect. And maybe that is what makes it so difficult for many. It can be difficult not to use an expression, just as it is difficult to hold back tears, or an outburst of rage.¹⁵

We just obtained two senses in which philosophers may have to let go. In one way, they could acknowledge that a thesis or theory (philosophical or otherwise), despite its possible prominence, was technically senseless. Take Wittgenstein's reservation toward the Hegelian-inspired phrase: "The Real, though it is an *in itself*, must also be able to become a *for myself*."¹⁶ If this turned out to be senseless, then one's letting go of it would not amount to a "renunciation." For no one was, in the first place, in the possession of anything close to a piece of knowledge whatsoever. Nor would it be an "abstinence" from saying something—sensically—but merely an "abandonment" of a string of signs devoid of sense.

In another way, philosophers may need to "resign" by dropping a thesis or theory, which could make good sense, and yet proved its limitations. The more difficult it is to drop that thesis or theory, the clearer it would be that the attachment to them was not intellectually disinterested, but affectively laden. This attachment was less a recognition of clarificatory potential, and more a bond of affective attraction. Whence the urge to keep using a certain thesis or theory, despite their proven clarificatory limitations, which can be as overwhelming as the urge to cry or to shout. (If this should substantiate it any further, Wittgenstein's passage can be read not only as a philosophical *fiction*, but also as *documenting* the outcome of an interchange between his mentors Russell and Frege: the latter actually burst into tears when the former proved that his take on *set theory* contained a paradox.)

A way to relax the attachment to such and such a theory would be to counteract the resistance of one's will to look at things otherwise than through those glasses. Another passage from the same section reads:

What makes a subject difficult to understand—if it is significant, important—is not that it would take some special instruction about abstruse things to understand it. Rather it is the antithesis between understanding the subject and what most people *want* to see. Because of this the very things that are most obvious can become the most difficult to understand. What has to be overcome is not a difficulty of the intellect, but of the will.¹⁷

It should feel safer now to hold that Herzog would salute this view. At least if we also held to the notion that philosophical and cinematic treatments of a subject do converge, insofar as they exclude beclouding it with theories at hand. The view is reminiscent of the Herzogian plea for a non-

specialist instruction, on the part of filmmakers, in the technicalities of cinema. A satirical version of the plea is: "I'm delighted to see that people who try to make films and take an academic approach to it fail."¹⁸ The view also accommodates the Herzogian insistence that the understanding of most cinema, on the part of the audience, has taken and still takes little instruction. A programmatic variant of the insistence is: "Film should be looked at straight on, it is not the art of scholars but of illiterates."¹⁹

Herzog may further welcome the above contrast between understanding a subject and that which people want to see. The latter was the very thing he struggled with: the tendency of some to see in his scenes various takes on social structures, or to read those scenes altogether as politically dogmatic cinema. He thereby seems to suggest that, because of the readiness to see through the lens of the theorist, the very things that are most obvious can become the most difficult to understand. Indeed, in a Wittgensteinian vein, he remarks:

There is so often a tendency to compare and contrast one film with another just because the stories they tell appear to be similar, but in fact are completely different. This is mainly because many of the critics have such intellectual backgrounds and they are very much accustomed to making such comparisons, categorizations and evaluations. But it is not helpful at all.²⁰

What remains to be unveiled is how the unaware filmmaker actually puts to work the philosopher's view that one's attachment to such and such a theory—to an exclusive manner of approaching the world around oneself—is ultimately an issue of willing, of one's resistance to seeing or acting otherwise.

HALFWAY BETWEEN AGUIRRE AND FITZCARRALDO

A task of philosophers, for Wittgenstein, is to leave everything as it is, and instead account for the vagaries of what there is. Philosophizing is not a dream of changing the world in order to make it more appealing to oneself, or to others nearby, as one thinks fit. That burden is nevertheless ascribed by Herzog to some of his protagonists while not, however, endorsing their revolt at the world without reservation. For at least two of his emblematic characters, Aguirre and Fitzcarraldo, are bound—that is, narratively destined—to fail essentially. But their failures are so majestic that they affect us and stay with us, thus complicating our possible identifications with the destinies of these characters.

Like many of Wittgenstein's interlocutors, Aguirre and Fitzcarraldo agonize over the inadequacy of their whims in the face of various states of the world. Unlike those interlocutors, the latter set out on Herculean journeys, hoping to adjust the world around them to their own will and

thus counteracting Wittgenstein's stoic advice. In doing so, Aguirre and Fitzcarraldo belong to a more general Herzogian profile: the *conquistador* of the useless.

CONQUEST OF THE USELESS I: DELIRIUM

Aguirre, the Wrath of God (1972) is the story of a Spanish soldier from the sixteenth century, who takes control over an expedition in South America in search of El Dorado, the mythical land of gold. Throughout their journey, the expedition faces the hostility of the jungle and attacks from locals, who remain a nearly invisible force. I would now like to isolate some pivotal expressions of the protagonist's determination to lead, by any conceivable means, the expedition to an end.

Early on, he scrutinizes the river that the crew is to sail: "No one can get down that river alive." A comrade murmurs: "I tell you, we can do it. From here it will be easier." The former retorts: "No. We're all going to go under." What seems a proof of vigilance turns out to be a self-fulfilled prophecy. For Aguirre will orchestrate the wounding, and then the hanging, of his superior in charge, in order to remove any constraint upon his whim from someone else's will. At one point, a subordinate gives a whispering voice to the feeling, widespread by then, that the crew is now being led to perdition, and somewhat on purpose: "I'd rather join the Indians than stay with this madman." Aguirre hears the whisper and gives the readily followed order: "That man is a head taller than me. That may change."

From then on, the protagonist's manifestations mark a descent into madness, and an absorption of everyone around into that stone-hearted fate. He glorifies his disobedience to the Spanish crown: "I am the great traitor. There can be no greater! Whoever even thinks about deserting will be cut into 198 pieces. [. . .] Whoever eats one grain too many, or drinks one drop of water too many, will be locked up for 155 years." The purpose of the expedition is not the discovery of El Dorado anymore—if it ever was. Completely composed, Aguirre watches the decimation of his crew by indigenes, and adds, as if to hearten the half-alive: "If we turn back now, others will come. And they will succeed. And we'll remain a failure! Even if this land only consists of trees and water, we will conquer it! [. . .] My men measure wealth in gold. There is more. There is power and fame." Almost by necessity, these lines lead to his last ones, a bare soliloquy if we exclude the hundreds of tiny monkeys that suddenly invade the raft which is rapidly going adrift: "We'll stage history as others stage plays. I, the Wrath of God, will marry my own daughter, and with her I will found the purest dynasty the earth has ever seen. Together we shall rule this entire continent. We will endure." And then, in full

seriousness and gazing into the camera, he launches the bitter call: "Who else is with me?"

For the remaining witnesses of the expedition—mostly the film audience—it turns out that its actual outcome is not much more than sheer delirium. Although extreme, the case remains elucidatory for Wittgenstein's take on the resistant will to neither see something, nor to act somehow differently than one does. Aguirre, to be sure, is not blinded by a narrowly construed theory. He is nevertheless enchanted by his resoluteness to regard the world, and everyone around him, in just one way: as insignificant means to his purpose. So insignificant, in fact, that his resolve ends up making more sense for him than the state of the world in which we find him.

The remaining crew of the raft, hovering between life and death, have come to share the delirium. A black crew member, initially employed as a kind of devil to scare away the "Indians," starts seeing things which are not supposed to be there: "I see a ship with sails in a tall tree, and from the sterns hangs a canoe." The same character then ceases to see things which *are* supposed to be there: "That is no forest [while looking at a forest]. That is no arrow [while looking at an arrow piercing his leg]." The scene brings again into question Herzog's dictum, which exposes the supposed inability of intellectualist readings of film to put up with the allegedly obvious: "An ape is an ape. A cigarette is a cigarette." Yet the scene goes one step further. While it *visually affirms* a forest and an arrow for what they are, that status is *aurally denied* them by the character suggesting: "This forest is not a forest. This arrow is not an arrow."

Prima facie, it is as if the director says one thing and does quite another. When discussing the reception of some of his scenes, he is at pains to qualify their contents as naked facts. Still, if they are closely seen and listened to, those scenes make us wonder whether, once on film, an ape or an arrow does not somehow turn into something else indeed. There is, however, a way to understand Herzog's dictum and this last scene as both containing a grain of truth, although in different senses. The dictum acts as an interpretative desideratum: we are to recurrently return to the scene, in order to minimize the possibility of our beclouding of it with readings at hand. At the same time, the scene acts as an acknowledgment that the "forest" we are presented with is, after all, an *image* of a forest, if only because we cannot literally take a walk through it right now.

CONQUEST OF THE USELESS II: DREAMS

Fitzcarraldo (1982) is set in the same Amazonian basin, again starring the "monumental, epochal" Klaus Kinski, as Herzog heard him characterize himself in their youth.²¹ It is another titanic story, this time of an aspiring rubber baron from the early twentieth century, who out of adoration for

the tenor Caruso yearns for an opera house in the middle of the jungle. The plan to finance the fulfillment of the dream is no less mesmerizing than dreaming while sleeping or awake. In order to enter an area that is rich in rubber but barely accessible, he plans for the transportation of a three-hundred-ton steamship over a mountain.

Just like Aguirre, Fitzcarraldo's determination to achieve his purpose is insurmountable. But the latter does not subject the ones around him to his resolve. He is in need of money to buy a steamship in the first place. And the encouragement from his lover (supposedly all the more encouraging, as it comes from the mouth of Claudia Cardinale) also works to persuade the sponsor they finally meet: "It's only the dreamers who ever move mountains!" Thus, by the time an official of territorial acquisition asks "Do you really know what you're doing?" Fitzcarraldo answers: "We're gonna do what nobody's ever done." This simply means, as he suggests to an established rubber baron who is ironically distrustful of the whole plan: "I shall move a mountain."

Aguirre's delirium and Fitzcarraldo's dream are nourished by the same modality of willing unassailably. The moral of the first case, if any, would be straightforward: the unassailable will is tantamount to the unreasonableness of wanting to achieve something no matter, constituting a prelude for delirium. The second case is rather puzzling. At one point in the film, a missionary acknowledges the hopelessness of converting Amazonian "Indians": "We can't seem to cure them of the idea that our everyday life is only an illusion, behind which lies the reality of dreams." But the protagonist, who forecasts the live voice of Caruso filling the Amazonian basin, takes the part of the "Indians": "Actually I am very interested in these ideas. I specialize in opera myself."

Let us add some extra pieces to the puzzle. Fitzcarraldo seems particularly close to Herzog's heart. Not only does the character inherit a love for the opera from the director, but some of his lines are actually the latter's diary entries during the making of the movie.²² Furthermore, Fitzcarraldo's dream of transporting the steamship over the mountain was Herzog's heaviest burden in finishing his job. The dream and the job were fulfilled, *both in the film narrative and on the film set*, with the aid of hundreds of locals. The character's conquest is, nonetheless, belittled by yet another fulfillment of a dreamed job, this time belonging to the indigenes: after helping with its transport over the mountain, in the movie they surrender the steamship to the devastating rapids of the river. They do so in order to appease the river gods, who would otherwise remain angry at such hubris.

Herzog's closer identification with Fitzcarraldo may give a reason for the latter's ability, which Aguirre lacks, to turn his unfortunate defeat into a redemptive victory. Fitzcarraldo arranges the selling of the spoiled steamship in order to finance at least one operatic performance. He still gets the chance to smoke a cigar while listening live to Caruso and his

orchestra, though not in the envisaged opera house, but on the steamship itself, whose wobbly return is glorious nevertheless.²³

This sublimation of defeat into victory is further indicative of the kinship between the director's persona and that of his character. When pressed to say how, or indeed whether, he can keep going with one of the most grueling film productions of all time, Herzog constantly replied just as Fitzcarraldo could have. The provocation "How can you continue? Do you have the strength, or the will, or the enthusiasm?" would only invite the answer: "How can you ask this question? If I abandon this project, I would be a man without dreams. And I don't want to live like that."²⁴

MADNESS AND NONSENSE

Many utterances of Herzog's protagonists parallel many of Wittgenstein's interlocutors, insofar as they seem to be candidates for nonsense. Recall Aguirre's line: "Whoever eats one grain too many, or drinks one drop of water too many, will be locked up for 155 years." Compare it with Fitzcarraldo's: "I shall move a mountain." Such utterances, however, do not exhibit logical impossibilities. For we can well imagine conditions under which these utterances are somehow feasible. Someone found guilty by Aguirre may indeed be imprisoned in a cell, which is to remain locked by force of law, for no less than 155 years. That could magnify the punishment psychologically, if not factually. And someone may indeed succeed in moving a mountain from one place to another, but not at once and not alone with their bare hands. Executive directors of mining companies, at least, tend to find the idea of moving a mountain not so remote from common sense.

So the issue is not that we cannot conceive of situations in which these Herzogian lines would seem sound. It is that, in the film-situations in which they are delivered, they do not *prima facie* look so. They do not, that is, simply work as inhibitors or promoters of action, as warnings proper ("Don't do that!") or as genuine promises ("I'll do that!"). Still, in virtue of their fringing on nonsense, they have a powerful effect upon their audience, *in* and *of* the film. Aguirre's commitments instill unspeakable terror in his subordinates, while Fitzcarraldo's instill, perhaps, a bit of awe in some of us.²⁵

Such quasi-nonsensical utterances are quite common among Herzog's protagonists. Their character type is the incurable dreamer who entertains, with unshakeable certainty, the most peculiar of dreams: the one fringing on madness. This type also hosts some of Wittgenstein's interlocutors, particularly from his very late work *On Certainty*. More bluntly than before, nonsense-like utterances are addressed there not only as candidates for unintelligibility, but also as possible symptoms of "madness," "insanity," or "craziness." For instance:

If someone supposed that *all* our calculations were uncertain and that we could rely on none of them (justifying himself by saying that mistakes are always possible) perhaps we would say he was crazy. But can we say he is in error? Does he not just react differently? We rely on calculations, he doesn't; we are sure, he isn't.²⁶

While this is not the place to entertain the technicalities of Wittgenstein's very late notion of certainty, it may be worthwhile to notice just one thing. Some utterances are not to be simply dismissed as samples of nonsense or unintelligibility by way of a mechanical test. Namely, by simply checking whether such and such an utterance has a negation which can be validated or not in conceivable situations. On that basis, one would handle the previous case by insisting that there is no room for uncertainty where there is none for certainty. The last quote, however, calls for more: a further exploration of the assumptions and the implications of one's stance within one's life.

In its last stage, Wittgenstein's philosophizing thus came to advocate even more radically for patient understanding. That, I take it, is also a plea for his readers to not be too hasty either in drawing conclusions in terms of nonsense, unintelligibility, or gobbledygook regarding expressions, or in projecting diagnoses like madness, insanity, or craziness upon others. This, if I am not mistaken, is also the ethos of Herzog's filmmaking: to show that what seems reasonable may not be so (as in *Aguirre*), while what appears to not make sense may make some (as in *Fitzcarraldo*).²⁷

ENDNOTES

1. So instead of asking how much truth or fiction there is in Herzog's self-portrait (as do e.g., Eric Ames, "The Case of Herzog: Re-Opened," and Brigitte Peucker, "Herzog and Auteurism: Performing Identity," both in *A Companion to Werner Herzog*, Brad Prager (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), I am rather interested in the senses in which his postures (even if fabricated and rehearsed) against intellectualism, theory, and philosophy may nonetheless have a philosophical import.

2. Werner Herzog, *Werner Herzog: Interviews*, Eric Ames (ed.) (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 18 (1973 interview); cf. Herzog, *Herzog on Herzog*, P. Cronin (ed.) (London: Faber and Faber 2002), 70 (2002 interview).

3. In spite of Herzog's self-ascribed "cluelessness," several scholars argue that some of his movies may still be taken to question certain trends of society, as well as certain traits of the cinematic audience. For instance, starting from a comparison between Herzog's film *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* and Peter Handke's play *Kaspar*, Brad Prager ("Offending the Public: Handke, Herzog, Hypnosis," *Telos* 159 (2012): 93-104) finds that they both employ a peculiar strategy to "offend the public." Herzog would thereby aim at challenging our self-complacency with the fact that we share a language or a culture, as well as at making us wonder whether cinema has not turned us into somnambulist consumers of movies.

4. Herzog, *Herzog on Herzog*, 102 and 254 respectively.

5. Werner Herzog, "Werner Herzog's Rogue Film School," (2009) accessed April 1, 2019. <http://www.roguefilmschool.com>.

6. Herzog, *Herzog on Herzog*, 192-93.

7. Herzog, *Werner Herzog: Interviews*, 107.
8. Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Vintage Books 1991), 451.
9. Of course, there are more ways of succumbing to over-theorizing intellectualism than giving into the inclination to always assimilate one thing to another. For example, Noël Carroll ("Herzog, Presence, Paradox," *Interpreting the Moving Image* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 285) identifies an anti-theoretical stance which Herzog would share with directors like Stan Brakhage and Terrence Malick in that "the philosophical commitments of these filmmakers can be captured by the title experiential anti-eliminativism," where eliminativism is defined as "the kind of reductionism that denies the existence of whatever escapes its conceptual scheme or fails to be translatable into the basic terms of its framework." Wittgenstein too arguably shares this anti-theoretical stance.
10. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Le cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie," *Sens et non-sens* (Paris: Nagel, 1948), 104.
11. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film (Enlarged Edition)* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), ix.
12. Herzog, *Herzog on Herzog*, 60.
13. Cf. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 170.
14. Cf. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by J. Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), Second Meditation.
15. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript TS 213: German-English Scholars' Edition*, edited and translated by C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 300.
16. Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Some Remarks on Logical Form," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 9 (1929): 162-71.
17. Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript TS 213*, 300.
18. Herzog, *Werner Herzog: Interviews*, 32.
19. Herzog, *Herzog on Herzog*, 70.
20. Herzog, *Herzog on Herzog*, 125.
21. See *My Best Fiend* (dir. Herzog 1999).
22. Cf. Werner Herzog, *Eroberung des Nutzlosen* (München: Carl Hanser, 2004).
23. Herzog is indeed more generous when it comes to Fitzcarraldo's, as opposed to Aguirre's, end. Perhaps it is also due to this provocative generosity that the former production has triggered far more allegations of environmental and human-rights abuse than the latter. For an overview of such allegations, spanning for over three decades, cf. Ames, "The Case of Herzog: Re-Opened."
24. See *The Burden of Dreams* (dir. Blank 1982).
25. Adequately, Carroll ("Herzog, Presence, Paradox," 288) takes such lines to reveal Herzog's "affection for visionary word salads," that is, for "word combinations that are wrong but which convey a very definite feeling, indeed a particularly arresting feeling." Carroll is not the first to highlight the central place of language in Herzog's filmmaking. Cf. "language, itself, is the main character in most of Herzog's films" (William Van Wert, "Last Words: Observations on a New Language," *The Films of Werner Herzog: Between Mirage and History*, Timothy Corrigan (ed.) (New York: Routledge Van Wert 1986), 55).
26. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Über Gewissheit / On Certainty*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by D. Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), §217.
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