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 FILM-PHILOSOPHY
 

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*Antiphysis:*Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man***Benjamin Noys**

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The moon is dull. Mother Nature doesn't call, doesn't speak to you, although a glacier eventually farts. And don't you listen to the Song of Life.

Werner Herzog<sup>1</sup>

At the heart of the cinema of Werner Herzog lies the vision of discordant and chaotic nature – the vision of anti-nature. Throughout his work we can trace a constant fascination with the violence of nature and its indifference, or even hostility, to human desires and ambitions. For example, in his early film *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1970) we have the recurrent image of a crippled chicken continually pecked by its companions.<sup>2</sup> Here the violence of nature provides a sly prelude to the anarchic carnival violence of the dwarfs' revolt against their oppressive institution. This fascination is particularly evident in his documentary filmmaking, although Herzog himself deconstructs this generic category. In the 'Minnesota Declaration' (1999)<sup>3</sup> on 'truth and fact in documentary cinema' he radically distinguishes between 'fact', linked to norms and the limits of *Cinéma Vérité*, and 'truth' as ecstatic illumination, which 'can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization' (in Cronin (ed.) 2002, 301). In particular he identifies nature as the site of this ecstatic illumination – in which we find 'Lessons of Darkness' – but only through the lack of any 'voice' of nature. While Herzog constantly films nature he films it as hell or as utterly alien. This is not a nature simply corrupted by humanity but a nature inherently 'corrupt' in

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<sup>1</sup> In Cronin (ed.) 2002, 301.

<sup>2</sup> Herzog confesses to a fear of the stupidity of chickens, which he finds in the ease with which they be hypnotised by drawing a line with chalk in front of their beak; the trick is shown in *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974). As he remarks '[t]hey are the most horrifying, cannibalistic and nightmarish creatures in this world' (in Cronin (ed.) 2002, 99).

<sup>3</sup> On the context for the declaration see Herzog in Basoli (1999, 34-5).

itself; Herzog's vision of nature is a kind of anti-vitalism, a horror at the promiscuous vitality of nature.

Such a vision is evident in Herzog's documentary *Grizzly Man* (2005), in which it is articulated by explicitly raising the question of how a filmmaker should capture images of nature. The film is structured as an inquiry into the fate of the 'grizzly man' – Timothy Treadwell, an amateur bear expert and filmmaker who lived amongst these creatures in the Alaskan wilderness for ten years. Herzog engages in a kind of cinematic 'duel' with what he regards as Treadwell's sentimentalised view of nature. Alongside the film I place the later work of Lacan, in which nature is theorised as '*antiphysis*' (anti-nature) or counter-nature. In the 1970s Lacan elaborated a strikingly similar conception of nature to Herzog's, as 'internally plagued by "rottenness" [*pourriture*], by a decay or defect out of which culture (as *antiphysis*) bubbles forth [*boulliner*]' (in Johnston 2006, 36).<sup>4</sup> This is not a simple matter of imposing Lacan's work as the key to Herzog's. Herzog vehemently objects to any thematic, academic or critical reading of his films, arguing that '[f]ilm should be looked at straight on, it is not the art of scholars but of illiterates.' (in Cronin (ed.) 2002, 70). This anti-intellectualism may well be problematic but it does raise a warning to any critic tempted to impose a psychoanalytic master-code. Instead I choose a more modest approach in identifying a convergence between Lacan and Herzog in their thinking of nature, and also in a certain political scepticism that resonates between them concerning the post-1968 revolutionary movements. In very different forms and styles they both indicate how the deadlock of a mute and corrupt nature also links to a political deadlock around the naturalism of desire and revolution in the 1970s. If 'mother nature doesn't call' then we have to re-formulate any politics of nature, which is, if anything, a more pressing concern today.

In October 2003 Treadwell and his companion Amie Huguenard were brutally attacked and killed by a wild grizzly bear. It is a macabre fact that Treadwell's camera was running at the time of the attack but the lens cap had been left on, leaving an audio recording of the deaths (which Herzog listens to in one of the most disturbing scenes in the film). Treadwell had collected over one hundred hours of footage over five years at the

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<sup>4</sup>My reading of Lacan here is heavily indebted to Johnston's excellent article on the convergence between Lacan's thinking and that of Schelling. Whilst not signalling complete agreement with this reading I do extract from it Johnston's identification of the fractured sense of nature particularly evident in Lacan's work of the 1970s.

time of his death. As Herzog states in the film's Production Notes, when he and his editor Joe Bini came to view this material, much of it never seen:

We could not believe it. It couldn't have been our wildest fantasy to find something like this, ... We had to stop and walk out of the building. Both of us had quit smoking, and yet we had to smoke a cigarette to take what was coming next. It was one of the great experiences I've ever had with film footage. It was so beautiful.

Herzog's film makes use of his selection from this material, alongside interviews with Treadwell's friends and family, as well as other more critical parties. Particularly important in structuring Herzog's film is his own commentary, which makes explicit his interpretation of both Treadwell's life and actions, as well as the images that we see.

These elements are organised together to structure the film as a de-mythologisation of Treadwell, casting him as a self-conscious styler of his own image, a failed actor who had transformed himself into a new role as the protector of the bears. Herzog makes clear his belief that the bears did not require Treadwell's protection and that other motives were at work – such as Treadwell's desire to escape the world of human civilisation and to enter into a 'primal bond' with the bears. Of course we have no true access to Treadwell's point of view, except the chosen statements Herzog has placed on screen. This is therefore an uneven contest and we can view the film as one of antagonism and rivalry between the two filmmakers, one living and one dead, over the conception of nature and their own obsessions. David Thomson's comment on why Herzog is not the ideal documentarian seems particularly apposite: 'You feel he has his mind made up about so many things – and so you do not always want to trust what you are seeing' (2003, 397). Previously Herzog has defended the protagonists of his films as neither marginal nor eccentric, but as belonging to the same 'family' of desperate and solitary rebels against a mad society (in Cronin (ed.) 2002, 68-9). In the case of Treadwell Herzog appears to lack this sympathetic identification. Instead, the structure of rivalry recalls something of Herzog's relationship with his alter-ego the actor Klaus Kinski – 'my best fiend' to recall the title of Herzog's film on the subject. Coincidentally that relationship was also characterised by conflict over nature.

In Les Blank's documentary *Burden of Dreams* (1982), filmed on the set of *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), Herzog makes a lengthy statement (here somewhat abridged) stating his absolute disagreement with Kinski on the nature of the jungle:<sup>5</sup>

Of course we are challenging nature itself, and it hits back, it just hits back, that's all. And that's grandiose about it and we have to accept that it's much stronger than we are. Kinski always says it's full of erotic elements. I don't see it so much as erotic, I see it more full of obscenity ... And nature here is vile and base. I wouldn't see anything erotical here. I would see fornication and asphyxiation and choking and fighting for survival and growing and just rotting away. Of course there is a lot of misery, but it is the same misery that is all around us. The trees here are in misery, and the birds are in misery. I don't think they sing, they just screech in pain .... Taking a close look at what's around us, there is some sort of a harmony. There is the harmony of overwhelming and collective murder .... There is no harmony in the universe. We have to get acquainted to this idea that there is no real harmony as we have conceived it. But when I say this I say this full of admiration for the jungle. It is not that I hate it. I love it, I love it very much. But I love it against my better judgement. (in Cronin (ed.) 2002, n2 163-4).

Herzog links the disharmony of nature to a refusal of the erotic relation, which would promise reconciliation between the human subject and nature. Again this converges with Lacan's suggestion that the lack of the sexual relation is not simply a discordance for human nature but rather the ruination of any conception of totality and harmony (see Johnston 2006, 36).

This disharmony itself emerges partly out of the violent disagreement with Kinski. In the same fashion Herzog's disagreement with Treadwell also stages this emergence of a discordant nature. Herzog's film deploys two strategic devices to locate and stage his rivalry with Treadwell. First, he accounts for Treadwell's fate as the result of a transgression of an 'invisible' boundary between humans and nature; this view is supported by both an expert in bear behaviour and a representative of the indigenous people. They both suggest that Treadwell's relation to the bears was a pathological one that refused to recognise the very difference between human and bear. Second, Herzog positions Treadwell as a filmmaker naïf, talented but whose vision, as Herzog says, 'lay dormant' in his footage. In both cases Herzog can demonstrate his superiority, first in terms of his

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<sup>5</sup> Despite Kinski's praise of the jungle Herzog states that Kinski's ideas of nature were insipid and certainly did not include mosquitoes or rain (in Cronin (ed.) 2002, 89).

recognition of the inviolable boundaries of nature and second in terms of his ability as a filmmaker to draw out what remains latent in Treadwell's material.

This second manoeuvre is evident in the way in which Herzog comments on some of the footage. One scene shows Treadwell practising his presentation, in the style of a wildlife documentary, and then moving out of shot. As he was alone operating the camera it remains running until he returns, showing a scene of grasses and trees moving in the wind. Herzog argues that Treadwell 'probably did not realise that seemingly empty moments had a strange secret beauty' and that 'sometimes images themselves develop their own life, their own mysterious stardom'. The images he shows are strongly reminiscent of a scene near the beginning of Herzog's own film *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974), which shows a field of rye being moved by the wind. As Herzog explains in the director's commentary to that film these images are attempts to represent 'what is the world when you take a very fresh look at it', reflecting the view of Kaspar whose childhood was spent enclosed in a dungeon. In *Grizzly Man* the framing is peculiarly ambiguous. On the one hand Herzog praises Treadwell for creating images no studio director could have and for moving 'beyond the wildlife documentary'; on the other hand, Treadwell's revelation of what Herzog calls the 'inexplicable magic of cinema' is entirely dependent on Herzog's editing. Not only that but Herzog claims the superior vision – into the ecstatic truth and away from the quotidian fact – by implicitly and explicitly suggesting that Treadwell is unaware of what he has done. Only Herzog can see, and show, the truth of these images. In this way the film contains the threat of Treadwell as a rival filmmaker and subsumes his obsessions and stylisations to Herzog's.

For Herzog Treadwell cannot face 'the harsh reality of wild nature'. When he finds one of the foxes that he has adopted that has been killed by wolves Herzog comments that Treadwell holds the 'sentimentalised view that everything out there was good and the universe in balance and harmony.' At the start of the film, however, Treadwell's commentary does suggest he recognises the violence of nature and the bears in particular. He states that when facing a bear challenge he must change from a 'kind warrior' into a 'samurai'. Therefore we might well suspect the film as an entirely accurate guide to Treadwell's view. Certainly we see evidence of his sentimentalisation of the bears (naming one Mr Chocolate), and his desire to step into the 'bear world' or even, as one of his letters

suggests, to 'mutate' into a bear.<sup>6</sup> The film though is a more accurate demonstration of Herzog's conception of nature, summarised in opposition to Treadwell in this comment (echoing his earlier remarks on the jungle): 'I believe the common denominator of the universe is not harmony but chaos, hostility, and murder.'

The clarification of Herzog's view is clearest when he reflects on the gaze of the bear. This comes in the last video Treadwell filmed, which Herzog reports he gained access to late in making this documentary. In the footage we catch a first and only glimpse on film of Treadwell's companion Amie Huguenard, caught between his camera position and a bear. Over close-up footage of the bear's face Herzog states:

And what haunts me is that in all the faces of all the bears that Treadwell ever filmed I discover no kinship, no understanding, no mercy. I see only the overwhelming indifference of nature. To me there is no such thing as a secret world of the bears and this blank stare speaks only of a half-bored interest in food. But for Timothy Treadwell this bear was a friend, a saviour.

Of course considering Treadwell's and Huguenard's fate it is not difficult to find oneself agreeing with Herzog's evaluation of the gaze of the bear as it is returned to the viewer. There is, however, a sort of tension running through Herzog's presentation of nature in this commentary, and in his other statements and images. On the one hand we are still placed within the sense of the active hostility of nature ('no mercy', 'a half-bored interest in food') but, on the other hand, we have 'the overwhelming indifference of nature'.

In contrast the concluding commentary by Herzog seems to return us a rather conventional constructivist or humanist view of nature as a signifier produced by the act of human perception and meaning creation. In the face of Treadwell's death Herzog argues:

What remains is his footage. And while we watch the animals in their joys of being, in their grace and ferociousness, a thought becomes more and more clear. That it is not so much a look at wild nature as it is an insight into ourselves, our nature. And that, for me, beyond his mission, gives meaning to his life and death.

Here then nature simply offers itself as a mirror to our own nature and gives us *meaning*; but the question remains about the nature of this mirroring. Rather than concede to the

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<sup>6</sup> This recalls Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming-animal' / 'animal-becomings' (1988, 232-309).

authority of Herzog as filmmaker I wish to argue that the precarious emergence of nature in this film lies *between* the two (competing) views of Herzog and Treadwell. As they compete to impose meaning on nature at the same time we witness the emergence of nature without meaning – as something closer to Herzog’s vision of indifference. This vision doesn’t simply come about in the purity of ecstatic truth but through the structure of mimetic rivalry and doubling.

It would be quite possible to embark on a Girardian analysis of this structure in which nature is reduced to the ‘object’ for the competing desires of Treadwell and Herzog. The risk here is that nature drops out of the frame altogether, and we remain within a fundamentally humanist and constructivist viewpoint from which all we can have are various human-imposed interpretations of nature. Instead I want to suggest, via Lacanian psychoanalysis, that nature ‘itself’ emerges as what Adrian Johnston calls ‘the barred Real’ – ‘the fractured field of material being’ (2006, 36). If we should hope to escape the inconsistency of the Symbolic order, the order of language, law, and kinship, then we find no refuge in nature *qua* barred Real. Rather than nature as the site of meaning we find nature as the site of non-meaning, of a fractured materiality that blocks any smooth translation back into language or images. Such a conception allows us to trace the effects of a nature irreducible to human practice, which seems self-evident except to the most rabid social constructivist, and, at the same time, to trace the inconsistent fracturing of nature itself. That is to say, nature does not coincide with itself in a mute presence but is always fractured – without a voice or song. Also this fracturing of nature has a political effect. As Herzog’s documentary demonstrates the politics of nature are often represented through forms of sentimentalisation. While not completely dismissing Treadwell’s work in spreading an ecological message it is noticeable in the footage Herzog uses how its appeal to children depends on a Manichean narrative of ‘bad’ hunters versus ‘good’ bears, simplifying more complex issues of the human relation to bears (including Treadwell’s own). Implicitly we can also see the traces of the ideology that children, and those who are child-like such as Treadwell, are somehow closer to nature.

Of course we could say that Herzog’s and Lacan’s vision of nature is also highly politically dubious. It could be seen as licensing a cynicism towards ecological conservation in suggesting the intrinsic violence of nature, which then be seen as something requiring human ‘taming’. Also, it could be seen as collapsing the inherently corruptible state of nature as permission for any human action or ‘interference’ in nature.

This political ambiguity is not helped, for those on the Left, by the scepticism of both Lacan and Herzog towards the various radical political movements emerging from the struggles of the 1960s. In the notorious 'impromptu' at the left (*gauchiste*) university of Vincennes in 1969 Lacan remarked of the student radicals that '[t]he regime puts them on display; it says: "Watch them fuck ..."' (1990, 128). What Lacan points out is that, in his opinion, the radical politics of Cultural Revolution practised by the students is simply a perverse politics of display that serves as a licensed form of carnival for the regime rather than truly threatening it. The display of revolution, particularly in its libidinalised forms, is reduced to an interlocking structure of fantasy between the regime and the rebels. In remarkably similar fashion Herzog noted the response to *Even Dwarfs Started Small* amongst radical leftists who accused him of fascism 'because it showed a ridiculous failed revolt with dwarfs' (in Cronin (ed.) 2002, 55). As Herzog concedes they were right that he was 'ridiculing the world revolution ... rather than proclaiming it' (in Cronin (ed.) 2002, 55). In both cases we can see a sensitivity to the problem of the 'revolution' as spectacle – itself a central concern of those currents on the left who drew inspiration from the work of the Situationists.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever the true political opinions of both Lacan and Herzog, which were certainly at least highly sceptical and critical of the left, we can see how both draw attention to the limits of this 'revolutionary' moment – prescient in terms of the rapid recuperation by capitalism of radical ideas, especially those concerning sexuality.<sup>8</sup> It becomes almost impossible to decide whether they are anti-revolutionaries or the most demanding of revolutionaries. Their scepticism concerning the image draws attention to the problematic negotiation of the currents of May 68 with media recuperation – itself the subject of reflection in the move into collective filmmaking experiments by Jean-Luc Godard (a constant object of critique for the Situationists) and Chris Marker, as well as the cinematic practice of Guy Debord. Alongside the questioning of the image Lacan and Herzog also query a putatively 'revolutionary' naturalism that saw a smooth transfer between a 'natural' human desire for liberation and politics – giving nature the 'voice' of

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<sup>7</sup> For position of the Situationists see Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1983 [1967]), Raoul Vangeim's, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1983 [1967]), and the collection edited by Ken Knabb (1981) and his website *Bureau of Public Secrets* (<http://www.bopsecrets.org/>). My article 'Destroy Cinema! / Destroy Capital!: Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1973)' (2007) provides discussion of these issues around Debord's film practice.

<sup>8</sup> On the recuperative strategies of contemporary capitalism see Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005).



liberation. The final scene of *Even Dwarfs Started Small* shows one of the dwarfs laughing in a strange and excessive fashion in the face of a kneeling dromedary. As Herzog points out this laughter would have continued for weeks and signifies the joy (the *jouissance*?) of this 'failed' revolution (in Cronin (ed.) 2002, 55-6). Here, I would tentatively suggest, we can see a certain revolutionary joy in the face of the enigma of nature, rather than the supposed continuity of desire between nature and the human. In the same way Lacan's elaborations of the fractures of nature itself can also be regarded as key to his vehement dismissal of what he regarded as the naturalism of 'sexo-leftism' (implicitly targeting Deleuze and Guattari).

When the revolution puts itself on display it does so, as Lacan indicated, in the form of a promise of full and complete *jouissance*, and this 'fullness' can be imaged in the figure of the 'natural' man or woman. As Lorenzo Chiesa (2006) has argued this is a fantasy of *jouissance*, which is actually only ever *jouis-sans* – a *jouissance* structured by absence. It is also this that is the structural fantasy of capitalist consumerism – the fantasy that a particular product will supply us with the complete experience of *jouissance* which we lack ('Coke is it!'). Of course then capitalism turns this lack towards accumulation because no such product can ever be 'it', and so we move on to the next promise of *jouissance*. Whatever its radical intentions the revolutionary impulse finds itself subject to a capitalist cunning of reason in which radical intentions become subsumed (or recuperated to use the 1960s term) within a capitalist structure of fantasy. This is not simply to say such intentions are completely exhausted, or to deny their utopian promise, but it is to indicate how such promises of full *jouissance* fall foul of the effect of alienation they were trying to evade. In a way the final scene of *Even Dwarfs Started Small* also plays with this promise of full *jouissance* held within this 'endless' laughter. What is disturbing is that this laughter imposes itself in an image of inertia. Rather than desire as radical rupture what we see is the very idiocy of *jouissance*, and so the idiocy of enjoyment that underlies the carnivalesque reversal of the dwarfs revolt. In the fracture of nature we find not a voice but a supplicant camel and a laughing dwarf, in which *jouissance* streams away from political or social organisation – whether for revolt or ideology.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In Georg Buchner's play 'Danton's Death' (1835) the character Danton proclaims, 'I can't see why people don't just stand still in the street and laugh in each other's face. We should all laugh. From our windows, from our graves, 'til heaven bursts open and the earth spins with laughter.' (Büchner 1987, 38). See also note 10 below.

We can regard Lacan and Herzog as suggesting that the fracturing and discordance of nature, the *lack* of any law of nature, is what opens it as the site of freedom. What this 'freedom' appears as is the abyssal effect of laughter, the inertia of *jouissance*, and not the constitution of a 'natural subject of freedom'. If nature were complete, whole, and harmonious then there would be no possibility for the subject, in its autonomy, to emerge from this closed space. Instead the subject and freedom are both the result of the excess and disturbance of nature qua 'barred Real'. This makes the Lacanian concept of the drive critical. If we regard the drive as the 'natural' ontological ground of the subject then we find a vortex, a closed circuit, that is not a whole but rather, as Lacan states, a 'montage' lacking finality (1979, 169). What Žižek (1997) calls 'the abyss of freedom' is found in the material ground of nature, as the discordant montage of the drive. This freedom provides no necessary orientation or law; it is barred, ontologically lacking Law. In this way then we pass from a meditation on nature, to ontology, and then back to the political question of freedom. To go back along this chain, to inquire into the possibility of freedom, is return back to the drive as discordance. While the drive is closed in its circuit (see Lacan 1979, 178) this immanence, at odds with itself, is the ground of freedom (Žižek 1997, 84-7). The repeated images of circling vehicles in Herzog, especially in *Fata Morgana* (1971) and *Even Dwarfs Started Small*, at once suggest the circuit of the drive in its 'idiocy' and the strange conjunction of the machine with the usual image of cyclical nature. Again, this is linked to political questions, although in forms that do not provide us with comforting political lessons. Herzog describes *Fata Morgana*, for example, as 'a science-fiction elegy of dead or demented colonialism'. The inertia of 'nature' is itself also, or at once, political.

These effects of inertia, these questions of the drive and politics, are raised at the moment of the failure of the Symbolic order, its deadlocks. This is somewhat similar to Heidegger's suggestion in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) that we are seized by the fundamental question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' at moments of despair, of rejoicing, and of boredom (1987, 1-2). The deadlocks of the Symbolic are, however, not resolved by the Real or nature, instead we find there a matching inconsistency. In this way we could say that Herzog is a political filmmaker precisely in his images of those deadlocks which his critics have often regarded as the height of apolitical withdrawal, or even incipient fascism. This is not, like Godard, a political filmmaking of activism but a politics of inactivity or inertia. As such, of course, it cannot help but be highly politically ambiguous.

To link back to the question of *Grizzly Man* we must consider the possibility of the image of these deadlocks qua the emergence of the drive as a 'montage lacking finality'. Lacan's image of the drive is one staged through the surrealist conjunction of elements brought together in 'impossible' configurations. While I am not trying to force a convergence simply through Lacan's deployment of the term 'montage' – which circulates between surrealist art and film – I do want to suggest that *Grizzly Man* stages a particularly problematic 'impossible' configuration of the image in the rivalry between Herzog and Treadwell. So, in the gaze of the bear we 'see' the conflictual attempt to appropriate this enigmatic gaze between two competing conceptions of nature, while the gaze 'itself' seems to exhaust these efforts at capture. This exhaustion is partly what makes *Grizzly Man*, in my opinion, a rather unsatisfactory film in terms of Herzog's canon. The very 'forcing' that Herzog inflicts on Treadwell's material suggests something of a lack of confidence on Herzog's part and a deadlock in articulating his vision of nature in its own terms (something to be found more in his film work of the early 1970s). The discordance of nature, which refuses a utopian naturalism, also comes to trouble Herzog's own filmmaking practice. To make a speculative suggestion, although Herzog was highly sceptical of the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s we might argue that even partly in opposition to them they provided a certain space of conviction for Herzog's filmmaking. In a more enervated political space, despite the protests around the Iraq war and the 'alterglobalisation' movement, Herzog's own film seems, at once, to both lack conviction and to over-compensate with a slightly false tone of conviction.

Perhaps this false tone could be seen as at work in the elevation of 'ecstatic truth' in The Minnesota Declaration. Although this declaration has a mocking and parodic style it structures itself through a mystical irrationalism. We could say that Herzog's filmmaking is a filmmaking of *crisis*, not least of ecological crisis – a theme of the 1970s ('the limits of growth') reinvigorated by the (real) anxieties concerning global climate change. In an article published in 1978 Étienne Balibar took issue with the rise of irrationalism as the ideological discourse of capitalism in crisis, which helps to reinforce the requirement for solutions congruent with capitalist accumulation. I am not trying to indict Herzog as a capitalist ideologue but draw attention to the ambiguity of his irrationalism, which at once contests any simple drawing of lessons from nature (including capitalist lessons), but whose 'lessons of darkness' are for that reason open to radically different interpretations. It is noticeable that of the Left of theory there has recently been a wide scale rediscovery, or

combative rehabilitation of rationalism (I'm thinking here particularly of the work of Alain Badiou). Following Balibar we might see this, in part, as the reaction against the capitalist deployment of irrationalist ideologies of crisis. Therefore Herzog's mysticism of the ecstatic truth of nature plays ambiguously; at once blocking a sentimentalised politics of nature but also ascribing a kind of permanent state of crisis to nature that resists any form of political intervention. Lacan's formulations are far more rationalist in their attempt to grasp the precise and formalisable status of nature rather than retreat into mysticism. The difficulty then lies in the articulation of such visions of nature in the contemporary context.

Sven Lütticken, reflecting on contemporary discourses of ecological crisis, writes that '[f]or today's liberals, the collapse of the existing order can solely be imagined in biological and ecological terms; social and political change can only take the form of minor adjustments.' (2007, 117) Here we see how a vision of the crisis of nature precisely refuses any sense of political crisis, whereas, I have suggested, these two are coordinated in the visions of nature of both Herzog and Lacan.<sup>10</sup> It is not that we have 'natural' catastrophes alongside a stable social order but rather the rupture of the social order reveals a catastrophic nature. This then is the 'abyss of freedom' rather than a 'quasi-natural fatality' (Lütticken 2007, 122) that conceives nature as beyond control or intervention. In fact Herzog's portraits of a corrupted nature firmly expose how that nature is bound up with human intervention as much as indifferent and resistant to it. Lütticken names this space 'the third nature of unnatural history' – contrasted with first nature (nature 'itself') and second nature (reified social structures) (2007, 128). It is a nature that is not 'purely' natural, a nature that is denatured or 'unnatural' as Lütticken puts it. What Lütticken suggests is that such a conception of nature no longer leaves it as inert fatality, the source of unavoidable catastrophe, but a resistant and also shaped space (and time) of nature as participating in politics. In a sense this 'third' nature intervenes to shake-up and alter the terms of the usual distinction between 'pure' nature and static social relations – in which a mirroring effect leaves intervention paralysed.

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<sup>10</sup> In the case of Herzog we might see this as a trace of the influence of Georg Büchner (1813-1837) on his work. This is not restricted to Herzog's film of *Woyzeck* (1979), Büchner's play left uncompleted at the time of his death in 1837. Büchner's vision of the hostility and indifference of nature permeates Herzog's work, such as in the quotation at the beginning of *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*. In his play 'Danton's Death' (1835) Büchner coordinated the trauma of the French revolution with the overturning of a benign image of nature. As the character of Danton states 'The world is chaos. It will give birth to a god called "Nothingness".' (Büchner 1987, 76)

This 'unnatural history' is the domain of Herzog's 'nature' filmmaking. The politics of nature in *Grizzly Man* is a politics of this 'unnatural history' that at once risks the dehistoricisation of this nature into mysticism and also puts it on screen as a site of intervention. If Mother Nature doesn't call then we are left with the lack of a signifier for this 'nature'. To begin to restore a politics of nature involves the restoration of a signifier, and what Herzog provides are the images that call for the re-inscription of the signifier of nature.

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