

Perspectivism in Nietzsche and Herzog: The Documentary Film as a Perspectival Truth Practice

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In the opening shots of Werner Herzog's film *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1997), we see Dieter Dengler enter a tattoo parlour where he discusses the vision he saw, in a state of near starvation, of the four horsemen of the apocalypse driven by angels.² 'Death', he says, 'did not want him'. The film continues with Dengler driving through the mountain roads towards his home in the San Francisco Bay area. We hear the softly spoken, German accented voice of Werner Herzog:

Men are often haunted by things that happen to them in life, especially in war and other periods of intensity. Sometimes you see these men walking the streets or driving in their cars. Their lives seem to be normal, but they are not.

Herzog's words are followed by an almost imperceptible transition in the film's voiceover from Herzog's voice to Dengler's. Dengler also speaks with a German accent that has been softened by years spent in America:

When I am driving my car I often hear the voices of my dead friends. Sometimes my friend Duane Martin calls me and tells me that his feet are cold, because of this even on a warm sunny day I keep my convertible top up. I was shot down over Laos in 1966 in the early phase of the Vietnam War. I never wanted to go to war. I only got into this because I had one burning desire and that was to learn to fly.

Thus, from the start of this documentary film the presence of perspective announces itself. The blurring of the literal and figurative voices of two German émigrés, children of World War II, makes clear the identification of the filmmaker with his subject. This is not a film which strives for an ideal of objectivity. Herzog actively asserts his own perspective and *inhabits*, rather than merely observing or recording, Dengler's perspective. It is also highly stylised and directed. Does Dengler really keep his convertible top down at all times, as though he still needed to care for and comfort his dead friend? Or is this declaration an exaggeration or even an invention? If the latter, is this Dengler's own invention or a stylistic direction from Herzog, the other voice we hear in the presentation of Dengler's story?

Little Dieter asserts the presence of perspective, sometimes making use of factual inaccuracies to tell the story. Herzog's work challenges the boundaries between fiction and documentary, but as we can see through a

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² Hereafter referred to as *Little Dieter*.

comparison with *Rescue Dawn* (2006), his non-documentary film based on the same story, *Little Dieter* still operates within audience expectations of documentary, and can therefore disturb these expectations. By utilising interpretation from different perspectives to tell the truth, Herzog's film does not simply question the boundaries between different artistic forms, it also challenges the dichotomy between truth and fiction. In doing so, it demonstrates that incorporating the modesty that interpretation is all we can know need not imply an impoverishment of understanding or an abandonment of a project of truth.

The presence of interpretation, according to different perspectives, in a documentary film in which we expect the 'truth' about the subject matter provides an opportunity to understand what truth means in the context of perspectivism: the view that there is no objective standard of truth free from any perspective against which we can measure the veracity of an account.³ In this article, I use the art forms of autobiography and documentary to show how Nietzsche's perspectivism, while disallowing any appeal to an objective measure of truth, can still allow us to talk of, and pursue a project of truth. I explore the possibility of a perspectival practice of truth through Herzog's films – particularly *Little Dieter* – comparing this film to Nietzsche's philosophical autobiography *Ecce Homo* in order to examine how interpretations can be truthful.⁴

I start by briefly setting out how Nietzsche approaches the question of truth and the nature of his perspectivism in order to set up the problem of how we can have a truth practice which accepts that perspectives cannot be transcended. I go on to argue that documentary, as a medium which

³ That the film can serve in an exploration of this view of truth does not depend on it being Herzog's own view of truth (see note 15).

⁴ Brad Prager has also observed that the relationship between Herzog's films and truth has resonances with Nietzsche's philosophy. He does not, however, offer a detailed exploration of what a Nietzschean understanding of truth involves. Prager suggests that Herzog's approach to truth is Nietzschean in that 'he seems to feel truth is something found less in the world than in the work of art' (2007, 8). In relation to Nietzsche this phrasing is problematic because it seems to imply the work of art possesses something the world does not. Rather for Nietzsche, certainly in his middle and late period, the point is more that the creative interpretation manifest in the work of art also constitutes the character of the world. The world is in fact like the work of art, being constituted by constantly interpreting perspectives. Prager continues with reference to a comment Deleuze makes regarding Orson Welles: 'the "true world" does not exist, and, and if it did, would be inaccessible, impossible to describe, and, if it could be described, would be useless, superfluous.' (205, 133) Prager suggests that Deleuze's comments on Welles can apply to Herzog's rejection of the 'accountants' truth' or banal truth as contrasted to 'ecstatic' or poetic truth. Deleuze's comment is in fact a clear reference to Nietzsche's discussion of the *wahre Welt*, the real or true world, in *Twilight of the Idols*, in which he narrates how it has come to be 'useless' and 'superfluous' (TI How the True World at Last Became a Fable). What Prager misses in this reference is the denial of any gap between the world of appearance and any ideal or higher truth. If this quote does indeed apply to Herzog's films, then it is not in so far as they explore a poetic truth that is to be distinguished from, or seen as above or beyond the world of appearance. My aim is to explore, regardless of Herzog's own position on truth, his films in relation to a reading of Nietzsche's mature perspectivism, which does not posit a contrast between appearance and a more fundamental truth.

involves the presence of perspective yet carries expectations of truthfulness, can help us explore the possibility of a perspectival truth practice. I then explore the example of Herzog's film *Little Dieter* as an exemplification of perspectival truthfulness. By comparing it to Nietzsche's autobiography *Ecce Homo*, we can see how active engagement of different perspectives, as opposed to the attempt to transcend perspectives, can be understood as truthful.

The Problem of Truth in Nietzsche

The nature and value of truth are problematised by Nietzsche throughout his writing career.⁵ We see in his early unpublished essay *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* a critical engagement with our assumptions about the origins of our drive to truth, which develops throughout his work. In his later work, considering our dedication to the pursuit of truth, Nietzsche asks 'What in us really wills the truth?' (BGE 1).⁶

Ultimately, however, Nietzsche attests to the importance of truth, declaring in *Ecce Homo*:

How much truth can a spirit *bear*, how much truth can a spirit *dare*? That became for me more and more the real measure of value. Error (-belief in the ideal-) is not blindness, error is *cowardice* ... Every acquisition, every step forward in knowledge is the *result* of courage, of severity towards oneself, of cleanliness with respect to oneself (EH Foreword 3).

Here, error is the belief in the ascetic ideal, which is belief in an absolute and transcendent truth, whether this is articulated as the Platonic Forms, God, the thing-in-itself, or the 'true' or 'real' world [*wahre Welt*]. Hence, what a courageous step forward in knowledge involves is itself problematic, as it cannot be understood in terms of access to a transcendent truth.

Nietzsche accepts Kant's contention that the human mind plays an active role in determining our experience and that this human contribution cannot be removed to reveal the object as it really is (Kant 1929, 24). Rather, our part in experience is an inherent aspect of what it is to experience

⁵ The wealth of literature on this topic is too vast to summarise and assess here. Rather, I aim to set out Nietzsche's key statements on truth and my own reading of how to connect these statements. Broadly I agree with thinkers such as Maudemarie Clark and John Richardson that Nietzsche does not abandon a commitment to truth (Clark 1990, Richardson 1996). I aim to combine epistemological considerations with Randall Havas's observation that Nietzsche's own interest in truth was not fundamentally epistemological (Havas, 1995). Rather, Nietzsche offers an evaluative critique of the problem of truth. I am interested in how different methods and ways of pursuing or 'practising' truth can respond both to the evaluative problems that Nietzsche raises concerning truth, and to the epistemological problems implicit in his perspectivism.

⁶ When referencing Nietzsche's writings I use standard abbreviations as follows: *Human, all too Human* (HH), *Daybreak* (D), *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE), *On the Genealogy of Morality* (GM), *Twilight of the Idols* (TI), *Ecce Homo* (EH), *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA). Translations used are listed in the bibliography.

objects at all. Nietzsche's statement in *Human all too Human* that 'We behold all things through the human head and cannot cut off this head' is one of many from this period that demonstrates his engagement with Kantian epistemology (HH I: 9).⁷ Nietzsche's position is, therefore, that we have no access to the object free from the contribution of our own intellect: 'there is absolutely no escape, no backway or bypath into the *real* [*wirkliche*] world!' (D 117). Nietzsche's genealogical project shows that the pretence of having access to such a realm, or thing-in-itself, can be demonstrated to involve all too human projections. This ideal of a transcendent truth can no longer operate in the way that it has for us, either as an ideal to worship and pursue or as a standard against which interpretations can be measured for their veracity.

Neither Nietzsche's rejection of the idea that we can access truth as the thing-in-itself, nor his awareness that the drive to truth has origins in social necessity and the need for survival, imply abandoning a project of truth. These critical insights into the nature of truth do, however, require re-configuring our project of truth. His writings raise different questions about truth from the epistemological ones of how and to what extent we can have access to the truth. Nietzsche takes as his starting point that we cannot have access to the truth if this is conceived of as an in-itself stripped of all perspective. He therefore asks why and how we came to view truth in these terms. He raises the question of whether truth has value, and answers negatively in relation to the transcendent ideal of truth that has been bound up with the ascetic ideal. Whether the pursuit of truth might still be valuable, what this would involve, and what effect the incorporation of challenging truths would have on us, are genuine questions for him, explored in his writings. Nietzsche is interested in what a practice of truth that recognises that we cannot 'cut off our head' to find a route into the true world would consist in, and what effect it will have on its practitioners. His answer, or perhaps rather attempts at an answer, is framed in terms of his Perspectivism: 'There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival 'knowing' (GM III: 12).⁸ Nietzsche's notion of perspective is not spatial, but rather refers to an active process of interpretation and re-interpretation.

Nietzsche traces the problematic assumption of a perspective free object of truth to a Platonic conception of Eternal Forms, which sets up the idea of a 'real' or 'true' world [*wahre Welt*] in opposition to the world of

⁷ The only Kant which we know for sure that Nietzsche read is *The Critique of Judgement* (Brobjer 2008, 36). Nietzsche would also, however, have encountered Kantian concepts through his reading of various thinkers who engaged with Kant's ideas. The well-documented influence of Schopenhauer is one obvious site of Nietzsche's encounter with a Kantian inspired philosophy. Nietzsche's absorption of the neo-Kantian Friedrich Lange, whose *Geschichte des Materialismus* he encountered on its publication in 1866, has been well documented by George Stack (Stack 1983). The following year Nietzsche is known to have read the work of Kuno Fischer, another neo-Kantian (Brobjer 2008, 39).

⁸ For a detailed assessment of the meaning of Nietzsche's metaphor of Perspective see Christoph Cox's *Nietzsche Naturalism and Interpretation* (Cox, 1999).

appearances (TI How the True World Finally Became a Fable). What Nietzsche shares with Plato, however, is an understanding of truth as a practice, which affects those who practice it. Truth is an activity that individuals have to undertake. Nietzsche offers an alternative method or practice of truth to the attempt to reach an in itself free from any perspective. He would have us listen to our drives, not try to isolate ourselves from them, and inhabit more perspectives, not try to strip them away. We must 'look into the world through as *many* eyes as possible' (KSA volume 9, 494-495). Any truth that we now have will have to be a more modest truth, aimed not at a true world, eternal form, or thing-in-itself, but rather at understanding the operation of perspectives.

While Nietzsche claims that truth is always the interpretation of perspectives, it is not the case that all interpretations are equal. For Nietzsche, some interpretations are more truthful than others. The problem is, if we cannot measure truthfulness against a standard free of any interpretation, what is involved in being truthful? Documentary film presents us with an opportunity to explore what is involved in perspectival truth.

Perspective in Documentary

In line with Carl Plantinga I am interested in the characteristics associated with documentary rather than any strict definition (2005, 116). In the classification, funding, marketing, distribution and audience approach to films a distinction is made between fiction and documentary. That a film is *presented* to us as a documentary matters. This presentation can be made through its external marketing and labelling or through the internal stylistic features of a film: 'our knowledge of the conventional use of such styles supports the assertion of nonfiction or may draw us to assume the work is nonfiction in the absence of an extratextual statement' (Cowie 2011, 25). The importance of this presentation is in the expectation that documentaries have a different relationship to the world than that of fiction films.⁹ I am not here interested in putting forward or debating a definition of documentary film, but in exploring how particular films can contribute to a truth project that acknowledges the presence of interpreting perspectives. For my purposes what matters is the general expectation that a documentary offers a truthful account of its subject, or as Bill Nichols puts it, an 'impression of authenticity' (2010, xiii). As Nichols argues, unlike fiction films documentary does not (at least primarily) explore issues through the deliberate construction of an imaginary world (2010, 8). Rather, it in some sense tries to show us the world. It therefore carries different expectations of what is involved in being truthful. Nichols suggests that while

⁹ For the debate about what this relationship consists in see Plantinga 2005, Currie 1999 and Carroll 1997.

documentaries involve a degree of invention the expectation is that a documentary film is not primarily the product of the filmmaker's invention in the way a fiction film is (2010, 12).

As Nichols stresses, these expectations contribute to the power of documentary:

When [the effect of apparent] movement is the movement of social actors (people) not performing for the camera and not playing a role in a fiction film, it appears to attest to the authenticity of the film. Coupled with more specific documentary conventions – such as voice over commentary, location shooting, the use of non-actors engaged in their daily lives as people, and the exploration of social issues like global warming or social justice – the sense of an authentic representation of the world we share can be powerful indeed (2010, xiii).

The strength of this sense of authenticity involves our beliefs about the medium of film. We take photographs, film sequences made up of photographic images, and sound recordings, to in some sense provide a trace of what was photographed, filmed or recorded. These elements of a film are thus taken as evidence of the way something was at the time of filming. A film cannot be reduced to these elements, but to the extent that what was filmed contributes causally to the final film, this provides a connection to what was filmed. As discussed by theorists such as André Bazin and Stanley Cavell (1971, 1979), this has a powerful psychological effect:

we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction (Bazin 1971, 13–14).

Given that documentaries often film the actual people they concern, rather than actors, and the actual places, rather than sets, and sometimes the actual events, rather than reconstructions, the belief that the film involves a transference of reality allows the film to be taken as evidence that the subject matter was the way it appears to us in the film and as part of the overall evidence that the film is offering us a truthful account of the way things were.

A documentary, however, is not reducible to the documentary evidence it incorporates. It does not simply present the world to us. As a work that is produced by a filmmaker, or filmmakers, it always involves a 'way of interpreting the world' (Nichols 2010, 35). Stella Bruzzi develops this to consider the active nature of documentary. It is not just that a film is always from the perspective of its maker(s) but that 'documentaries are inevitably the result of the intrusion of the filmmaker onto the situation

being filmed' (2008, 11). Hence, the truth in documentary film 'emerges through the encounter between filmmakers, subjects and spectators' (2008, 11). Even in a film without voiceover commentary, subtitles, interviews with the protagonists, reconstructions or even post-production music, such as Frederick Wiseman's *Titicut Follies* (1967), the presence of the camera and any film crew has an effect on what the camera is witness to, and the filmmaker's vision is expressed in the choice of subject and how it is filmed and edited. Wiseman himself recently commented that the process of editing his films shared much with novel writing: 'You're involved in the same issues, even though the form is different. You're involved in issues of characterisation, passage of time, creation of metaphor, abstraction' (Macnab 2011). Thus, while an audience has expectations that a documentary will be truthful, they do not have the naive belief that it gives them unmediated access to reality.

Given that documentaries involve perspective, already well argued by Nichols and by Bruzzi, but also involve a powerful audience expectation that they offer a truthful rendering of their subject matter, they provide an important resource for exploring what it means to be truthful through inhabiting rather than transcending perspectives. Where there are expectations that truth involves the transcendence of perspective, demonstrating that perspective is revealing of, rather than an obstacle to, truth exposes and challenges this view.

As Nichols argues, documentaries vary greatly. His account of different modes of documentary is useful here even if we do not accept them as an exhaustive classification of all documentary films.¹⁰ Those, which he labels as belonging primarily to the 'performative mode' are particularly helpful in understanding how we can employ perspective in a truth practice. Such films question the possibility and desirability of objectivity and address the question: 'is knowledge better described as concrete and embodied, based on personal experience [...]?' (2010, 202). Following Bruzzi's concerns that Nichol's use of 'performative' misses the significance of this term, and her elaboration of an alternative understanding (2008, 186), I will call such documentaries 'explicitly perspectival'.

Werner Herzog's film *Little Dieter* is particularly helpful in the attempt to understand what perspectival truthfulness involves. Firstly, as I shall argue below, it is an explicitly perspectival film, which thus gives us an opportunity to view truthfulness as the exploration and honest presentation of perspectives. Secondly, it makes use of autobiographical aspects, which further develops this perspectival character. Finally, in comparison with *Rescue Dawn*, *Little Dieter* allows us to see how a documentary film can engage a range of perspectives in the audience. Thus,

¹⁰ Nichols suggests that documentary is either in the expository, observational, participatory, or reflexive mode (1991, 32-75), later adding the modes poetic and performative (2010, 31).

Herzog's film allows us to take up Nietzsche's challenge that we should look through as many eyes as possible, as it both employs the perspective of the filmmaker and resonates with the different perspectives within the audience.

Little Dieter as a Perspectival Documentary

Little Dieter concerns the story of German émigré Dieter Dengler and his capture and escape in the Vietnamese war. Dengler was born in 1938 and grew up in the Black Forest region of Germany. As he recounts it in the film, he felt the need to become a pilot after seeing an allied plane fly low over the house. He claims the plane came so close that he was able to look the pilot in the face. Dengler served an apprenticeship to a blacksmith and church clockmaker, before leaving for America aged 18. After a stint in the American Air Force, during which he never got to fly, he went to college and then joined the Navy, finally becoming a pilot. In 1966, on the first day of missions, he was shot down over Laos. Captured by Pathet Lao guerrillas, he was led through the jungle, escaping once, only to be recaptured and tortured, before reaching a prison camp. Several months later Dengler escaped from the camp accompanied by a fellow prisoner, Duane Martin. Famished, covered in leeches and barefoot, the two survived in the jungle attempting to make their way to Thailand. Martin met his death in an encounter with some villagers shortly before Dengler succeeded in attracting the attention of a US plane and was rescued, returning to a hero's welcome.

Herzog presents the story in four chapters: The Man, His Dream, Punishment, and Redemption. The film is presented as a documentary and therefore the viewer's experience is mediated through their expectations of the medium. Hence, even if Herzog's use of fictions makes questionable the status of *Little Dieter* as documentary, the fact that it is presented as a documentary and has stylistic traits that an audience associates with documentary still frames our expectations, and thus our experience of the film. In particular, it leads us to expect that it tell the truth about its subject matter. As a filmmaker Herzog challenges the distinction between fiction films and documentaries. Those of his fictional films that were filmed in the jungle serve to document the jungle itself and the challenge of filming there. His documentaries on the other hand are directed and scripted, sometimes deviating from the facts in order to tell a story. *Little Dieter*, however, while clearly opposed to a fly on the wall approach to documentary filmmaking, still bears hall-marks of the documentary form. For instance, it features archive footage of post-war Germany and then of the Vietnam war, including American bombings, aircraft carrier take offs, and a farcical jungle survival video. It also uses footage of a young Dengler himself at a press-conference. Much of the documentary is Dengler himself speaking to the camera on locations in Germany, America and Laos. In some of these

sequences Herzog interjects with questions, manifesting his presence as an interviewer.

Herzog's subsequent film *Rescue Dawn*, which chronicles the same events as *Little Dieter*, to some extent also carries expectations of truthfulness given it is the telling of a true story: that the family of one of Dengler's fellow prisoners complained about the portrayal of his character provides evidence of such expectations. It also makes some use of archive footage, including the same training video. The form, and the concurrent expectations of the two films, however, are very different. We know *Rescue Dawn* is a scripted, acted film, one which uses dramatic devices, such as the dialogue between protagonists, both to convey information and to heighten tension and encourage affective identification. We do not have the same expectations that it will be accurate, and as audience members we allow that in order to tell Dengler's story fictional devices will be used.

Little Dieter has a different look and feel from *Rescue Dawn*; the hand-held camera movements, the narration through voiceover and the use of photographs and drawings all encourage us to treat it as a documentary and as such we expect the film to tell as the truth about Dengler. What, though, does this entail?

Though offered to the audience as a documentary, there is no pretence in this film that it is entirely objective or free from interpretation and perspective. It is an explicitly perspectival documentary. With its dramatic reconstructions of Dengler being led through the jungle, it is *directed* in a way that we are aware of in watching it. There is also a sense with some sections that it is scripted. Dengler's pauses at the end of his monologues, the moment's delay at the end of these scenes, announce the film process. It seems as though he is waiting for Herzog to yell cut. Dengler, however, is not just responding to questions. Rather he is presenting a finally honed narrative: the story of his life, in which it is clear that there is a perspective involved.

Further it is evident to the viewer that Dengler's is not the only perspective. As I have already discussed, the voiceover switches between Dengler and Herzog, both speaking with the accents of German émigrés. As Nichols emphasises, the voice of a documentary film involves far more than any actual voiceover narration:

It is a voice that issues from the entirety of each film's audio-visual presence: the selection of shots, the framing of subjects, the juxtaposition of scene, the mixing of sounds, the use of titles and inter-titles – from all the techniques by which a filmmaker speaks from a distinct perspective on a given subject and seeks to persuade viewers to adopt this perspective as their own (2010, 4-5).

This is a voice that Herzog never tries to hide. This is clear from the strong presence of his actual speaking voice and the highly interpretative nature of

his commentary, but also from the use of inter-titles dividing the film into acts, and the selection of the various locations in which Dieter is placed and obviously directed.

Herzog signals the inevitable presence of his perspective in his interpretation of Dieter's story through a variety of such techniques. More than this, however, Herzog brings himself into the narrative, identifying with Dengler's childhood experiences. Hence *Little Dieter* does not just express Herzog's perspective on Dengler but explores the nature of Herzog's own perspective. When Dengler says, 'I knew hunger when I was a child', this could also be Herzog speaking. Then Herzog narrates that Dengler 'saw things around him that just made no earthly sense at all', things that Herzog would have seen too growing up at the same time in post-war Germany. This affinity is something Herzog later acknowledges when talking about his own childhood, for *Herzog on Herzog*, he says 'we were constantly hungry and looking for food, and this is one reason why I felt such a connection to Dieter Dengler many years later' (Cronin 2002, 7). Speaking of his relationship with Dengler, Herzog says, 'Like me, Dieter had to take charge of his life from a very early age, and because as children we both knew what real hunger was, we had an immediate rapport' (Cronin 2002, 265).

Hence, this film both serves to tell the remarkable story of Dengler's life and contributes to the telling of Herzog's life. Herzog is his films.¹¹ Just as Nietzsche says at the start of *Ecce Homo* that he tells himself his life, Herzog is telling himself his own life in the process of his filmmaking. Herzog is known for creating a mystery around himself and the production of his films. There is rumour, speculation, his own tall tales, which blur with events that are no less remarkable than fiction. The false story that he directed Claus Kinski at gunpoint in order to complete *Aguirre Wrath of God* (1972) is just as strange as dragging a steam boat across a mountain before letting it be smashed against rocks in a rapid in the making of *Fitzcarraldo* (1982). The toil and danger in the making of his films is part of the creation of the myth of Herzog in a way which blurs with the inventions of the films themselves.¹² In the same way, the remarkable actions of a man who ate his own shoe elide with his self-inventions in interviews. As Timothy Corrigan notes, his biography is 'a construction of legends' (1986, 5). *Of Walking in Ice*, for example, presented as a journal of Herzog's pilgrimage on foot to Paris, in response to the dangerous illness of Lotte Eisner, cannot be read as an objective report of the journey (Horak 1986, 36). To understand Herzog is to understand the process of mythmaking.

¹¹ *Was ich bin, sind meine Filme* is the title of a documentary interview with Herzog (Corrigan 1986, 5).

¹² This is discussed by Thomas Austin in his article "'... To Leave the Confinements of His Humanness": authorial voice, death and constructions of nature in Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man*' (Austin, 2008).

Thus, the involvement of mythmaking in Herzog's films offers us insight into Herzog.

Hence, in *Little Dieter*, the partial merging of the figure of Herzog, growing up in the ruins of post-war Germany to become an adventurer and traveller, and Dengler the German émigré who had to fly, tells us who Herzog is both because it contributes to the construction of his identity through connecting him to Dengler's epic adventure and because it illustrates this process of self-construction which he is constantly undertaking. Given, as Michel Renov notes, the 'constructed and incomplete character of all self-depiction' has long been noted (Renov 2008, 40), this autobiographical character of *Little Dieter* operates to highlight further the presence of perspective. It also operates to deepen the way in which perspective is understood. Perspective is not just signalled, but in so far as an autobiographical investigation is undertaken, how and why Herzog interprets Dieter's story the way he does is explored.

Rescue Dawn

Looking beyond the film itself, the existence of *Rescue Dawn* and *Little Dieter* as two films concerning the same true story by the same director further serves to question the nature of truth in general and its expression in cinema in particular. Is it the case that *Little Dieter* is more truthful? In *Little Dieter* we see Dengler himself and Dengler tells his own story, but, as I have been discussing, he does so in a way that is presented for cinema. In *Rescue Dawn* this process is taken further, with Christian Bale in the place of Dengler, but does this make *Rescue Dawn* less expressive of the truth of Dengler's story? Perhaps, rather, both films reveal different aspects of the story. Not only can a film express a variety of perspectives, a film can resonate with a variety of perspectives within the viewer. Bale's emancipated form struggling through the jungle scenery, which is shot in a way that expresses its closeness, entangling the protagonist, affects us in a way that Dengler returning to the jungle healthy and able to comment on and distance himself from his experiences cannot. As Herzog says of Dengler's enactment, he 'knows it is only a film'. Dengler as played by Bale in *Rescue Dawn* knows no such thing; he is scared, hungry and hallucinating. In turn, *Little Dieter* is able to do things *Rescue Dawn* is not; the background on Dengler it gives us, the archive footage of his return, and our encounter with the latter day survivor give us context *Rescue Dawn* could not encompass. Herzog's self-identification with him also widens the context and thus the meaning of the narrative.

Thus, the two films are truthful about the same story by employing different perspectives on the side of the makers of the film and the audience. As Cowie argues we come to documentary film with particular desires, including a desire to know: 'documentary films involve us as desiring, as well as knowing, spectators, engaging us in the pleasures of looking' (2011,

8). Film engages different desires from other forms of knowing, and documentary engages different desires, which are different perspectives within us, from fiction films.

Without the comparison to *Little Dieter*, *Rescue Dawn* does not work in the same way as the documentary version to draw our attention to perspective. This operates in *Little Dieter* because it partakes in the typical style of documentary yet subverts our expectations of documentary as an impartial account. When placed in comparison to *Little Dieter*, however, *Rescue Dawn* continues this project. By employing different perspectives it expands our understanding of Dengler and his story. Reflection on this demonstrates that it is in taking on more perspectives or seeing through more eyes, not in trying to strip away perspectives, that we experience the truth of Dengler's story.

Not the Accountant's Truth

That *Little Dieter* subverts expectations of truthfulness is further supported by Herzog's subsequent comments. On the making of *Little Dieter* he says of Dengler that 'he had to become an actor playing himself. Everything in the film is authentic Dieter, but to intensify him it is all re-orchestrated, scripted, and rehearsed' (Cronin 2002, 265).

In particular, at the beginning of the film, when Dengler shows the film crew into his house he opens and closes the door several times, and describes this as a habit he has: an incident and statement directed entirely by Herzog. Herzog believed claiming he had this habit expressed something about Dengler's story, signifying his appreciation of the freedom to open doors (which he had mentioned to Herzog). This stylisation was, Herzog says, inspired by the many pictures on Dengler's wall of open doors (Cronin 2002, 266). Having Dengler open and shut the door thus signified what Dengler had revealed to him about his relationship with doors. It also expresses the general sense in which Dengler, and other men who have been through war and trauma, are marked by their past experience in deep ways which are sometimes expressed in trivial habits. Does it add anything to distort the facts of the matter in this way? Arguably it works with the medium by showing something about Dengler, and surviving confinement, in a visual way.

This inaccuracy can be viewed as truthful in a similar way to the inaccuracies in Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*. *Ecce Homo* is not a conventional autobiography, and is not *merely* an autobiography but it is in part a self-presentation of Nietzsche, and – as declared in its opening paragraph – intended to say something about the life of its author. As such it succeeds in deepening our understanding of the man, as well as his work, and in telling

us something about his life, which was the life of a philosopher.¹³ Factual inaccuracies in Nietzsche's self presentation are meaningful expressions of what he takes to be the fundamental truth of his life: his rejection of the ascetic ideal.¹⁴

One example is Nietzsche's claim to Polish nobility. He declares 'I am a pure blooded Polish nobleman, in whom there is no drop of bad blood, least of all German' (EH Why I am so Wise: 3). As Hollingdale points out, Max Oehler and his researchers in Weimar have traced Nietzsche's ancestry, establishing it to be entirely German (1999). Even if the myth of his father's Polish descent were true, however, the claim that he has not a drop of German blood is obviously an invention on Nietzsche's part given his mother's undisputed German origins. The significance of this fiction is Nietzsche distinguishing himself from contemporary German culture which he associates with 'cowardice in the face of reality, which is also cowardice in the face of truth, from the falseness which has become instinct with them, from "idealism"' (EH The Wagner Case: 2). In defining himself as having no kinship with Germans, Nietzsche is, therefore, defining himself as having no kinship with idealism.

Nietzsche is not trying to deceptively present his account as objective. The perspectival character of Nietzsche's self-presentation in *Ecce Homo* is evident throughout. Nietzsche signals clearly to the reader that this account has no pretence to objectivity, understood in the sense of impartiality, or in the presentation of facts, free from interpretation and evaluation. The chapter titles, 'Why I am so Wise', 'Why I am so Clever', 'Why I write such Good Books', and the evaluative tone struck throughout, advertise this loudly to the reader.

The same can be said of Herzog's films because, as discussed above, they make no attempt to hide their perspectival character and their use of various artistic techniques to present a particular viewpoint. We cannot measure the truthfulness of *Little Dieter* against any perspective-free fact of the matter. This does not mean, as Cowie suggests, that truth is simply that which comes to be accepted as true (2011, 26). Nietzsche provides an

¹³ Richard Hollingdale questions approaching *Ecce Homo* as autobiography because of its lack of narrative and because 'it is not in the least objective' (1979, 7). He is right to note that if we want an overarching account of Nietzsche's life, his background, education and occupation it is not a useful source. There is, however, a narrative present, one that is charted through Nietzsche's writing. It is an account of and comment on his philosophical works. The comments, however, are not merely theoretical summaries and criticisms. Clearly present is also an assessment of the significances of these works as stages in a process or journey and of factors such as Nietzsche's health in the production of these works. It is not simply a review of his writings but a consideration of what kind of life made these writings possible. That it be objective seems an unnatural demand of any autobiography, which will always be the partial presentation and assessment of its author and thus its failure to be objective is no grounds to dismiss its status as an autobiography.

¹⁴ This relates Alexander to Nehamas's discussion of Nietzsche's self-stylisation (1985). I wish to claim further that it functions as part of a truth practice by exploring and acknowledging the activity of perspectives.

account of what has come to be established as true, which explores the different perspectives behind these ‘truths’.¹⁵ There is thus a distinction to be made between the dishonest attempt to set up our communal beliefs as objective truths and an honest truth practice that explores the process in which we arrive at these beliefs. As a film that admits to and attempts to understand perspective *Little Dieter* can thus be viewed as more truthful or honest than one that tries to cover over perspective. As Bruzzi suggests, in not trying to mask the interpretative process such films can be viewed as more honest than those presented as objective (2008, 186).

The rehearsed character of *Little Dieter* is also something that Herzog justifies as necessary for the successful presentation of the story. In order to tell the story and reveal what was most important, within the restriction of the film’s length, Herzog had Dengler condense his long anecdotes down to what he considered most significant. For this reason it was filmed with multiple takes and direction by Herzog.

This selection and direction is further recognition of the presence of perspective. This is clearly a process which intrigues Herzog. His narration and editing of the footage in *Grizzly Man* (2005) is another example of his fascination with mythmaking and self-presentation. In *Grizzly Man*, the story of Timothy Treadwell, who lived with, filmed and ultimately died when attacked by, grizzly bears, is brought to us through interviews, Treadwell’s own footage and Herzog’s narration. Herzog addresses Treadwell as a filmmaker. He shows us the multiple takes, the setting up of action shots, the costume element of Treadwell’s filming. Herzog considers how Treadwell makes himself into the star of his films, building up a story in which he is a hero and fabricating a persona. Treadwell’s self-creation involves selection and fictionalisation in his own documentary. Herzog observes the absence of his girlfriend in the last two summers of filming. Her absence gives the impression that Treadwell is alone, sustaining his own mythology, when ‘in fact’ Herzog says, the ‘truth is’ that Amy accompanied him for much of the last two summers.

Herzog’s own perspective in both *Grizzly Man* and *Little Dieter* is inescapable. Herzog, who has said he is not interested in ‘the truth of accountants,’ pursues truth as significance not factual accuracy (2002, 301).¹⁶ To do this within documentary, which is a form that sometimes pretends to be objective and sets itself in opposition to fiction, more starkly

¹⁵ On this point I am in agreement with Nehamas (1985), 54 – 55.

¹⁶ In his ‘Minnesota Declaration’ of 1999 Herzog writes: ‘There are deeper strata of truth in cinema, and there is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization’ (2002, 301). This suggests that for Herzog the banal ‘truth of accountants’ is ignored in a quest for a greater aesthetic truth. Regardless of whether Herzog believes this ‘mysterious’ truth to be something essential or absolute, in tension with Nietzsche’s perspectivism, we can still view the presence of fictions in his films in the light of the operation of fictions in Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* and Nietzsche’s insights into truth.

highlights that there is no practice of truth that can escape perspective. It also shows, however, that if the truth in a documentary may appear exactly where facts are taken leave of, then fictional works can form part of the practice of truth as the exploration and navigation of particular perspectives and the recognition of the inescapability of perspective. Whatever Herzog's intentions and own view of truth, his films show how the inevitable presence of perspective does not mean we have to abandon truth. Rather, if all truth is perspectival, as Nietzsche claims, then the demonstration of the presence of perspectives and the exploration of perspectives is precisely that in which truth consists. Fictions, or explicit perspectival interpretations, can offer us true insight into their subject matter without the need to posit any transcendent ideal that exists apart from the activity of interpretation. Rather, this interpretation shows us something about the nature of interpretation, and the perspective that is doing the interpretation. Thus, *Grizzly Man* deepens our understanding of both Herzog and Timothy Treadwell where it deviates from the 'facts', inviting us to explore their perspectives by showing us how they create and interpret. In doing this, and in engaging a variety of perspectives in the viewer Herzog's documentary's can be seen to take up the task Nietzsche sets us: 'Task: to see things as they are! Means: to be able to see from out of a hundred eyes, as many people! It was a false path, to stress the impersonal' (KSA volume 9, 466).

Thus, in creating artworks and creatively responding to them we express both the truth of our own perspective and the truth that all truth is perspectival. The artwork is one way to explore, express, and thus better understand perspectives and the perspectival nature of life. Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* and Herzog's *Little Dieter* demonstrate how art can be truthful without being factual. The artwork, and active engagements with artworks, is one way to practice truth.

How can this contribute to an account of truth that does not rely on a perspective-free standard? If there is no possibility of accessing a perspective-free standard of truth then the method of pursuing truth must alter accordingly. What it means to incorporate the truth is to accept that an absolute resting point, a final audit of the world is not possible. A certain modesty has to be taken on in which we do not pretend to offer a definitive version of events. For Nietzsche, to do justice to the world, or approach a new kind of objectivity, is to see through as many eyes as possible. This involves learning to occupy different perspectives and attuning oneself to the many different perspectives of our multiple drives. Engaging in art is one means of learning this skill. Artworks that employ and demonstrate different perspectives are examples of this truth activity.

The fact that we cannot arrive at a perspective-free account does not mean that we have only arbitrary interpretations. We can investigate the processes of interpretation through interpretations. We can learn about the operation of perspectives through inhabiting perspectives. This is to

investigate the way in which we are always already creatively involved in the world, in a way that pays attention to, explains and makes sense of this involvement. By exploring a multiplicity of perspectives we come to reject those which are narrow, and which obscure their perspectival nature in the attempt to elide other perspectives. The art of interpretation, in artworks and in knowledge processes, therefore, can still concern truth. The *best* interpretation may turn out to be the healthiest, or the most aesthetically pleasing, Nietzsche does not assume that truth is always best. The most truthful interpretation, however, is that which best explains and makes sense of the world to us: that which clarifies and deepens our understanding of our own perspectival experiences. The most truthful interpretation is therefore arrived at by exploring our perspectival experiences, something which Herzog does in his films and Nietzsche does in his writing.

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