

# Sublime-Irony on Werner Herzog's documentary films. An analysis on *The White Diamond* and *Grizzly Man*

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## ABSTRACT

This article explains the concept of Sublime-Irony as a key feature to interpret the non-fiction films of Werner Herzog. In the following pages, two of his documentary films are analyzed: *The White Diamond* (2004) and *Grizzly Man* (2005), with the purpose of arguing how this German filmmaker's aesthetic can be reconstructed using precisely this mixed figure of romantic origin.

KEYWORDS: Irony, sublime, non-fiction, documentary, Werner Herzog, romanticism

## RESUMEN

Este artículo explica el concepto de lo irónico-sublime como elemento clave para interpretar las películas de no-ficción de Werner Herzog. En las siguientes páginas, se analizan dos de sus películas documentales: *El diamante blanco* (*The White Diamond*, 2004) y *El hombre oso* (*Grizzly Man*, 2005), con el propósito de argumentar cómo la estética de este cineasta alemán se puede interpretar utilizando precisamente esta figura mixta de origen romántico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Lo irónico, lo sublime, no ficción, documental, Werner Herzog, romanticismo



*Fitzcarraldo* 1982, *The walker above the sea of clouds* 1818

**W**erner Herzog's films, specially his documentary production, are characteristic for searching an ecstatic truth (Prager, 2007) – related with the concept ecstasy but not with referential translucent–, and for using a tone that prioritize humor and curiosity above wisdom and demonstration. Ecstatic truth and the curious or naïve tone (Elssaeser, 1989) manifest in his films through the search or the usage of “pure images”, images found in the less explored places in the Earth and commented by Herzog, who states being constructing a new grammar, a new language that attends the needs of an overwhelmed and outworn civilization.

This characteristics, added to the filmmaker's liking for nature and landscapes suggest a possible filiation with romantic art. If romanticism was a period of change, breaking and reflection about previous art, it is not so weird that in a moment as the contemporary film is going through – or postmodern if preferred–, it is talked again about pretensions of breakage, besides a possible correspondence between the hybrid, authorial and crafted searching of that time with present one (Markus, 2011).

Looking back, we found some correlations between Werner Herzog's production and different manifestations of romantic art. Think, as an example, in the resemblances

between Caspar Friedrich's paintings with certain frames of Herzog's films just to show one of the most studied (Carrère, 1982) and in some way more evident—, or in the influence of Friedrich Hölderlin's poetry in some of Herzog's first scripts. But the most interesting finding of this possible filiation is found in two philosophical concepts developed in the romanticism period: irony and sublime.

Sublime is a particular kind of beauty, which it is found between the limits of pleasure and pain. For Kant (2007), sublime can be awakened by natural sensible objects conceptualized negatively, free of form, shapeless, boundless, abandoned, and chaotic. This category, which can be stirred by a walk in the Alpine cordillera, as well as the blinding sight of a storm, or the view of an indefinite extension which suggest bleakness and slow dead, so the Arabic desert, break the manacles, the non plus ultra of the sensible inherited thinking of Greeks, opening routs toward Mare Tenebraum (p. 18). Sublime is also ungraspable and immeasurable, and it is closely related with the notion of ecstasy.

The concept "ecstasy" is traditionally associated with something like stupor or a state of lack of expression — someone can get into ecstasy by passion, amazement or fear—. Herzog's images achieve that state because of their characteristics. In words of O'Toole (1979):

...his most powerful images are kept on screen for a long, long time: they stay with

you until you get to know them. They are kept on screen until it is established an antique and primary relation with them. Frequently, they are "motionless" and always are "simple": fog between mountains, agitated or swirled water in a river, snow falling, a lonely figure sitting in front of the landscape, a frozen pond in an abandoned forest. Forced (or rather invited) to contemplate those images, one begins to watch them for a longer time than it is usually needed to look at an image. One begins to watch them as if were the first time, and one leaves the land of silence and darkness that modern world —and many modern art— lead us with that proliferation of images that it is mistakenly taken as abundance. Watching a Herzog's movie is, in some way, like seeing after have been blind for a long time, and hearing after have been deaf (p. 38).

This feeling of watching or hearing as if were the first time is sublime par excellence, at the same time it is disturbing in as far as ungraspable, new, and produces an ecstatic effect.

Meanwhile, romantic irony it is not only a kind of humor, but a dialectic exercise in which falsehood oppose to truth to create a more powerful reflection, which its origins are in the Socratic Method, as Eco points out (2004):

Using lightness, even in the case of tough and committed contents, the ironic method allows simultaneously two opposed viewpoints or opinions, without choosing a previous preconception or judgment. Irony is, thus, a method —if not the method— in Philosophy. Besides, ironic attitude allows the subject a double movement of approaching and distancing in relation to the object: irony

is a kind of antidote which holds back the enthusiasm related with the contact of object and the nullification in the object itself, but refrains also the fall into skepticism related with the distancing of the object (p.318).

Irony is the restraint that allows the artist to stay naïve and to doubt about everything that is before his eyes, and it is in that doubting where unimaginable situations are revealed.

Herzog's non-fiction movies are overwhelmed with ironic moments and also with sublime scenes, but the most interesting is that this effect appears, the most of the time, at the same time, that is why we believe it is pertinent to talk about a mixed figure, form the Sublime-Irony. This concept is key when interpreting Herzog's movies because synthesize his aesthetic proposal in some sense.

Sublime-Irony intermixes a particular kind of humor and beauty, just like truth/falsehood opposition is a hybrid figure of romantic origin, implemented in a postmodern context.

The following is an analysis, to argue what has been said, of two non-fiction movies, *The White Diamond* and *Grizzly Man*, using this figure as tool. We believe that Sublime-Irony gives an account of the subjects and the forms of this German filmmaker.

## The stories

*The White Diamond* and *Grizzly Man* are

non-fiction movies<sup>1</sup> directed by Werner Herzog in 2004 and 2005 respectively. These are two documentary proposals of heterodox nature.

The main difference among these films and the movies we can see in T.V. channels as National Geographic and Discovery Channel is the role of nature within the story. In Herzog's films, nature is not precisely the study objective, but its use carries a series of pretensions of different order. Herzog does not care about the flora and fauna of the places he moves in to film. In his production, landscapes and animals are significant only when they become a metaphor of a different kind of nature: human. Thus, in *The White Diamond* and *Grizzly Man*, the role of nature is much more poetic rather than scientific.

*The White Diamond* is presented as a work in progress. It tells the story of Dr. Graham Dorrington, an aeronautic engineer that works in a prototype of silent aircraft which enable the filming of the treetops in the jungle. What supports this project is his desire to heal an old wound. Ten years ago, he

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<sup>1</sup> We say non-fiction joining the work of Antonio Weinrichter developed in *Desvíos de lo real* (2004), in which he explains that non-fiction is "a negative category which designates an "incognito land", the extensive Zone uncartographed between conventional documentary, fiction and experimental. In its negativity resides its great richness: non-fiction=no definition. The liberty to mix formats, to unmounts established discourses, to make a synthesis of fiction, information and reflection. To inhabit and populate that no one's land, the auroral Zone between tale and discourse, between History and singular and subjective biography". A land in which the real not only has descriptive implications, but reflexive ones also, and thus, it turns to be more pertinent when studying a type of filming like Herzog's production.

had already designed an aircraft with similar characteristics by order of his friend and filmmaker Dieter Plage. He wanted to film the treetops in Sumatra. However, the aircraft broke down, taking the life of the filmmaker.

Dorrington decides to give it another try, now with the help of another filmmaker, Werner Herzog will take the place of Dieter Plage. Scientist and filmmaker will march into the Guyana jungle to film the treetops using the new helium aircraft called, after and during the filming as White Diamond.

The enterprise will not be easy; adaptation to weather is needed, living in the jungle with all its challenges, overcoming the possible mistakes in the mounting of the aircraft –which may be fatal–, dealing with the other members of the expedition which are not completely convinced of the project. All this added to the cathartic process that is required to confront previous mistakes and guilt.

A new character appears in the story to offer his confidence to Dr. Dorrington, and to bring a fresh and funny tone to the tale. Mark Anthony Yhap is a native-born of the zone who, with the simplicity of his “rastafari” life-style, is astonished with the idea of flying –and with the whole idea of the movie. He would be who supports Dorrington when everything seems to be lost, and the first to celebrate the accomplishment of the pilot when the aircraft finally rise to shoot, in silence, the treetops. The award he will receive as exchange of his faith is to fly in the White Diamond. That is how native-born, scientist

and filmmaker will share the experience of overflying the jungle and gaze a side of nature never seen before.

On the other hand, *Grizzly Man* presents the story of Timothy Treadwell, a man who decided to reinvent himself, leaving behind a life of alcohol and drugs to become the protector of the grizzly bears. During thirteen summers he traveled to Alaska to live with them, and in the last five summers he took with him a camera to record their habitat, bringing about a hundred hours of video recordings. In the video, besides the wild world, he was able to capture another one, his inner world. Parallel to the expeditions, Treadwell was invited to schools and T.V. shows to talk about the life of the bears. He was also member of some environmental groups that validated his work, so he became a public figure. Finally, he was eaten by a bear –as well as his girlfriend Amie- in what became his last expedition.

Herzog displays in this film the life and dead of this controversial character. He does it through the opinions of Timothy’s friends and family, bears specialists, the rescue team and Timothy himself, who asserts, as filmmaker and image-hunter, being in front of a “documentary about human ecstasy and the darkest inner confusion” (*Grizzly Man*).

### **The arguments (*Inventio*)**

Sublime-Irony is part of the arguments of both movies, because they carry a tragic past,

previous to the story that is being told – Dieter Plage’s death in *The White Diamond* and Timothy Treadwell’s death in *Grizzly Man*. In both movies, there is an exploration to an unknown nook of nature – the jungle in the former, Bears’ habitat in the latter. This trip has a double purpose: confronting the wildness and inner nature of mankind.

Also, we can see in both arguments how characters use this trip as catharsis, - Dorrington to heal his guilt and Treadwell to find himself. The previous tragedy, the trip or the exploration, and the catharsis have a kind of humor and beauty which allow us to recognize the Sublime-Irony in this starting point of the movies.

### **The characters**

Also, the selection of the characters allows us to think in the figure of Sublime-Irony, because in both films we find three types of characters as a constant –in the rest of his production too.

In first place the fanatics, beings at limit, characterized for seeking a unique and crazy objective –Dr. Dorrington and Timothy Treadwell. In second place the innocents, beings at the border of craziness and barely within the limits of civilization, but for some reason forced to confront them. They are characterized for perceiving things in a different way, more natural –Mark Anthony

Yaph or Amie Huguenard<sup>2</sup>. And finally the filmmaker, a creator as crazy as the fanatics (Dieter Plage and Herzog), whose obsession for filming leads him to take very risky decisions.

These three types of characters have a lot in common with the characters of the romantic period. Craziness, risk, and innocence turned them into tireless travelers dragged to live ironic and sublime experiences.

### **The structure (*dispositio*)**

The structure of the two films corresponds with Sublime-Irony. The visual part of both stories is where the idea of sublime is more developed: in the landscape portraits, the travelling usage and the air shooting, and almost all natural scenes.

The ironic side is more related with the soundtrack: the comments, the dialogs, and the music, opposed to the visual part, combining humor and beauty.

The mounting is ironic in general, because many scenes contradict the discourse to

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, all Herzog’s filmography is divided equally, think as example in the fiction movies starred by Klaus Kinski (*Aguirre, The Wrath of God, Woyzeck, Fitzcarraldo* o *Cobra Verde* in opposition with Bruno’s (*The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser: Every Man for Himself and God against All*, and *Stroszek*) the former is example of fanatic characters –explorers, adventures, conquers and crazy people– the latter of innocents that confront to a world more complex, which many times are overwhelmed by it, and other times it is simply incomprehensible for them.

show its falsehood, and sometimes to make clear who has control of the movie.

In *Grizzly Man*, we see how Traedwell constantly complains about bears' biggest enemy: furtive hunters. And immediately after, a specialist in bears tells us that the reserve does not have that kind of problems.

In *The White Diamond*, when the aircraft is finally put together and it is ready to the first proof, Dorrington and Herzog argue about who should be in the first flight. Dorrington states that it is way too risky to fly with someone else before knowing if it really works, he should fly alone. Herzog says that Dorrington's position is stupidity and he will fly with Dorrington since the first testing. There is a cut, and then we see the filmmaker wearing a harness to get into the aircraft. The scene is not only funny, but interesting from the documentary perspective, because is an example of the filmmaker's control and his character –that has become into his personal mark. In Herzog's movies, he has always the last word. If the movie is not there, there is nothing at all. White °Diamond's flight may mean a lot to Dr. Dorrington, but will not be possible without a camera in the front. It is a Sublime-Irony scene because of the confrontation and the outcome.

### **The motives (*elocutio*)**

In both movies we find four formal resources or visual reasons (Balló, 2000), and they help us to identify the Sublime-Irony on

this level of the discourse: absence, landscapes and animals, confession, and ecstasy.

### **Absence**

In a documentary film, the absence of images or sounds shows, among other things, in hands of who is control. And it makes evident that it is an unusual non-fiction film, which does not use images as documents or proofs, but as something else. We are not referring to the discarded material, but to another kind of registered images and sounds, and it is decided not to show in the movie. Herzog omits proofs –visual and sonorous– in the films that we are analyzing, and he does it explicitly, leaving clear his level of control and showing, among other things, how fragile a documentary mechanism can be to approaching truth. Let us remember that this German filmmaker pretends to approach to a different kind of truth, not the truth of a traditional documentary. With his images, Herzog tries to achieve an “ecstatic truth”, a moment of revelation. This kind of truth is found in poetry. In Herzog's non-fiction movies, absence, emptiness, or silence is transformed into a metaphor of romantic inspiration, in which Sublime-Irony gives shape to this kind of documentary subjectivity.

In *The White Diamond* a member of the recording team descends to Kaieteur Falls taking with him a camera. With the camera he films what it is behind the waterfalls, an inaccessible space for human beings, only

owned by birds and regarded as a sacred place. Nonetheless, Herzog decides not to show those images. What does the absence of the cave's images represent?

Narratively, this absence is justified with the request of one native-born to hide the shooting, arguing that those images only belong to the birds, and making them public would be going against the essence of the place, place of encounter of legends and myths. However, Herzog is an image hunter, and he never stopped shooting –or showing– something. So, it is a little suspicious that he gives up to his shooting only because a native-born Rastafarian requested him to do so.

The fact of not seeing this material makes the whole story re-signify. From this moment on, a big emptiness is perceived, the feeling that something is unfinished. This effect is what potentiates the end of the story because, after all, even after the White Diamond flew –and with its help seeing and register an unreachable side of the jungle– there still are natural areas which resist to human will –as the cave that it is behind the waterfall. Herzog makes use of the absence of those images to set the idea of infinite, unfinished: nature remains still completely unconquerable –a thought completely sublime and particularly ironic, on the part that corresponds to the minuscule feat of Dr. Dorrington.

In *Grizzly Man* it happens something similar. Herzog decides to omit another document or evidence. On this occasion, it is the tape in which the sound of Treadwell's

death was recorded. The judge, Franc Fallico, explains the existence of this tape. He says to have found it as part of the belongings of Timothy and Amie, and he tells how it can be heard on it Treadwell's screaming and asking to his girlfriend to go away, to run, and to save her life: it is the recording of his death. On the next scene, we see Herzog himself sitting at Jewell's living room –Timothy's widow on Herzog's words– with headphones. When he finishes listening to the sonorous testimony, he asks Jewell to destroy the tape, to never hear it. Obviously, the spectator does not hear a thing, how should be interpreted this gesture?

It is hard to answer this question; Herzog usually is not discreet or conservative with the material. His images are often of risky content. On the same movie, he includes other images probably just as impressive, as the human remains found by the guards in the park. Also, he could have edited the six-minute tape and show only a fraction of the recording, but he did not, he chooses to tell us about it, that he have heard it, and that he will not let us listen to it. In some sense he suggests us to imagine the recording, being this exercise, maybe, even more sinister than the very proof.

The emptiness left by not hearing the tape, bestows a more dramatic burden to Treadwell's story because silence potentiates the situation. Again, the interesting thing is that the usual way to represent things in a documentary would be to present the viewer



Animals in *The White Diamond*

all the elements to let her know deeply, in this case the character, but the German filmmaker prefers to restrict information, privileging that way the intensity of the tale.

#### *Landscape and animals*

Landscape, in these films, works to understand in a better way the characters; it is in words of the director “a metaphor of human soul”. In *Grizzly Man*, he makes it clear when he walks along the bear’s sanctuary and finds in it similarities with the inner of Timothy “we explore the glacier in the country of his bear’s sanctuary. This giant complexity of ice and abysses separated Treadwell of exterior world. And more than that, on my

view, this chaotic landscape is a metaphor of his soul...”. The frozen mountains, filled with cracks and labyrinthian roads, will serve as allegory in the way of understanding the world of a character just as chaotic and confused. The beauty of the landscapes becomes into sublime beauty, a reflection of human passions and a particular kind of truth.

Continuing with this Sublime-Ironic spirit, the landscape in *The White Diamond* will also help to bring out feelings: in this case, the guilt and confusion of Dr. Dorrington. In the images of the jungle and the river, this character reminds the memory of the last expedition, the sylvan landscape is the scenario where the ghost of Dieter Plage still prowls. The jungle works as metaphor of the way of

understanding the world of the habitants of the place. An example, which has a sublime beauty, is the plain detail –made artificially, that is why ironic– in which it can be seen the reflect of the waterfall in a drop of water. A metaphor of the simplicity, but also of the inner beauty of characters like Mark Anthony Yhap –let us remember that the image was evoked by the Rastafarian.

On the other hand, animals are a synthesis of the pure images that Herzog tries to find in the recondite places that he delves into it to film. Herzog himself states it when he describes the scene of the foxes entering the picture, acting for Timothy's camera. "Now the scene seems to come to an end, but as filmmaker, sometimes, things fall out from nowhere, things that you never imagine, you never dream about. Something happens, as the inexplicable magic of the movies". Probably, that is his feeling about his own images; as the elusive toad that he films in *The White Diamond*. The animal seems to have stage fright, meanwhile the camera looks after him, and he runs away until he hides himself inside a tree's trunk. Humor is brought by a random and natural scene, and by the human behavior of an animal.

This scene, which culminates with the toad inside the tree, has a surrealist spirit. All animals are little beings that are presented to us gigantic and in pieces, that is, in close-ups that show only a part of them. A travelling which prioritize the portrait of textures, pieces and unique colors, becomes this scene into

abstract art extracted from the jungle itself. Images of an anxious beauty which reminds us the films of Jean Painlevé.

### *Confession*

In the exercise of confession, the most intimate secrets are revealed and forgiveness is tried to achieve, a state of peace. In this act sublime participates because, besides being a type of beauty, it is a type of truth, a feeling that entails redemption. On the other hand, confession is thought as a private act, which provokes irony when it becomes public. Sublime-Irony manifest in the practice of confession as a motive, because it carries a personal quest –spiritual if preferred–, but also because it is realized in front of a camera, with all the hilarity this representation might bring.

In *The White Diamond*, Herzog puts the camera in front of Dr. Dorrington in a strategic place to let him tell the story of Dieter Plage's death, the river. This localization propitiates the flashback, trees surround the scene, and they protect the character isolating him from the camp and any possible distraction, while the river propitiates the necessary calm to let the memories flow. Just like with others of his survivors –Dieter Dengler or Julianne Koepcke as examples-. Herzog designs an ambient to activate memory. In this case, Guyana forest is not the same place in which Dorrington's friend died years before, but it is a space that is very similar and because of its

similarities allows this journey to the past.

It is interesting to point the development of Dorrington's comments about Plage's death along the whole movie. When they are in the last flying proof of the aircraft in London, the engineer comes down and says he's been thinking in "the past", but is not capable of giving more details. The next moment in which the topic of Dieter's death is brought by Dorrington is when he finishes putting together the camp in the jungle. After assembling together all the pieces there is a silence, the camera stays still, and it is in that emptiness, in which he talks again about remembering Dieter, uttering words unconnectedly but once again without going into details. It is not until the river scenes that he really explains Plage's accident and his feeling of guilt. This place is needed, propitious to memory, to Dr. Dorrington's confession and explaining with more clarity his feelings.

The topic of the camera as confessional is explicitly treated on *Grizzly Man*, when Herzog ponders about Timothy's position being on lens "Besides his attitude, the camera was his only companion, it was the tool that he had to explore the jungle that surrounded him, but little by little became in something else, he began to examine his most deeply self, his demons, his euphoria. The lens of the camera became a kind of confessional". In front of the camera, Timothy wondered about his faith, his behavior with women and his addiction.

There is a scene in which Timothy is

walking with the camera talking about his bad luck with women. He mentions all his qualities and how he considers himself a good match. It is a hilarious and curious scene; the camera became a companion, a good fellow whom you can talk with about anything. The fact that Herzog chose those fragments from the hours of material recorded by Timothy strengthen the idea that the nature the German filmmaker is interested in is very different than the one about bears and their way of life.

On camera, Timothy also ponders about his mission, especially about what led him as a "warrior-protector" of bears. He is proud of leaving behind an addiction, a life of alcohol and excesses, and turning the tide. This is also one of the favorite themes in Herzog's productions, how men hold and stand to a project, never minding how crazy it might be. It is not a psychological reflection but an anthropological one. What capture the attention of the German filmmaker are again the limits of man, not his psyche –even when obviously it is present.

### *Ecstasy*

The idea of ecstasy is extracted from Herzog's discourse. He states, when asked about his films, –specially his documentaries–, that he pretends to achieve an ecstatic truth. Also he talks about ecstasy to refer to some images and particularly the effect produced by them –when talked about the famous Stei-

ner's jump, Aguirre's beginning or the images recorded by Treadwell himself, as examples. He achieves this ecstasy feeling mainly through two means: music and deceleration –frequently employed at the same time. The use of music and decelerated becomes a gesture that transforms poetic reality, evoking again a particular type of humor and beauty, a sample of the conjunction between irony and sublimity, rarely frequent in the documentary field.

As Català (2009) explains, music is useful to understanding reality: as always, it is necessary to draw on music to deeply understand the phenomenology of real, because in music it is found the last truth of mankind, and in mankind resides the horizon of truth. Music is something objective, external. From this external condition, it moves our spirit, that thing that we consider intimately ours: the emotions on which our subjectivity is grounded, no matter how rational it pretends to be (p. 196). The magic of Herzog's films is on this development of musicality, as a way to transform the real and step it into another level.

The flight of White Diamond is clearly a moment of ecstasy. Its images are crystal-images (Deleuze, 1987), in the sense of being constructed from reflexes in which, besides the achievement of flying above of the canopy, the burden of a tragic past is released. The sensation of suspension, of hypnosis, it is only achieved by the sounds from Ernst Reijseger's composition, the aircraft acquires its own life through the composition, the sounds allow the aircraft to play with its own reflection, to hide and slide, as if were a dancer interpreting a choreography. The real is transformed in poetry thanks to music and the slow-motion movement.

Also, Herzog's decision of mounting this scene with music is interesting when thinking on his documentary films, because others filmmakers would decide, following the verisimilitude logic of the tale, to present it in silence: Is it not the purpose of Dorrington's prototype to fly in silence through the jungle? Why to use music then?

The same happens with slow-motion, if the most important thing were to see how the aircraft raises up and get the shots of the



The flight of White Diamond

treetops in the jungle, Why the deceleration? Music and deceleration are the means to stylize the movie, Sublime-Irony shapes because of the ecstasy effect that they produce, and they deploy time and go directly to emotions, prioritizing another kind of truth.

In *Grizzly Man* the fight between two bears can be considered as the climax and the moment of ecstasy in the movie. It is where animals' ferocity is translucent, where the danger of living with them is dimensioned.

In this scene the music is built with two cellos and a guitar. One cello follows the movements of the first animal and another the second one. When the fight comes to the most aligid moment, the sounds of the two instruments intermix, combining one with the other, creating a unique piece loaded precisely of confusion and ferocity, chaos and aggression. In words of Prager (2007):

In the case of *Grizzly Man*, you have the impression that the guitar, unexpectedly, comes to substitute Treadwell, meanwhile the cello, which it is effectively used as a part of the sequence of the fight between the bears, represents the dangerous world of these animals. Although the guitar and the cello work jointly, there is no happy reconciliation between them, men and nature, and any try to violate the bears' space is rewarded with a warning of how irreconcilable these two worlds are. Music becomes crucial in the moments when Treadwell crosses the "invisible frontier" which separates human beings from bears, as the scene in which he tries to touch

a bear that approaches when he is swimming. The cello player Danielle DeGruttola improvises a piece called "Bear Swim" and Herzog explains her that it should be seen as a harmony between man and nature, but it does not exist. Instructing her to work with those elements in dark and threatening scenes, Herzog suggests once again that we will not be disappointed by Mother Earth" (p. 92).

Music is the entrusted of drawing the limits that Treadwell constantly ignored; the Sublime-Irony effect is breathed through the music pieces conferred to emphasize differences and dangers.

## Conclusions

Sublime-Irony is thus, the figure that allows us to understand the characteristics of most of Herzog's non-fiction films. In it is synthesized the desire of looking for "pure images", of finding or creating an ecstatic truth, and doing it from the first person tale, in a critical way and with a particular humor. We could think that we are in front of a new grammar in which reality has a much more expressive and poetic function. That is why *The White Diamond* and *Grizzly Man* are two proposals about nature documentary, taken to another level. These are two movies in which humor, beauty, irony, and sublimity are combined to portrait human nature and its limits.

The analysis of these films allowed us to approach a compelling filmography from a perspective of the treatment of the real. The



Bears fight (*Grizzly Man*)

real not only as a recording but as a reflexive motive. It seems that contemporary documentary films return to their subjective and artistic origins, recognizing in the real an instrument not only of historical, social or political character, but also as philosophical.

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## Filmography

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