Aguirre, The Wrath of God: *History, Theater, and the Camera*

GREGORY A. WALLER

AT THE END of Werner Herzog's *Aguirre, The Wrath of God (Aguirre, Der Zorn Gottes)*,[1] when Don Lope de Aguirre declares that he will "produce history as others produce plays," he explicitly contrasts two types of activity that inform the entire film. Based on an actual sixteenth-century incident involving a Spanish expedition in search of Eldorado, *Aguirre* is a cinematic refashioning of historical chronicles, a "history" that features characters who view history from radically different perspectives and who in varying degrees participate in play-making. Aguirre himself, the focal point of the entire film, rises to power partly through his mastery of stagecraft and performance, yet theater is for him only a means, an activity that is tied to the social roles and institutions of the Old World; his true goal is to move beyond the stage and forge history by conquering the New World and shaping the future. Through the visual presentation of this quest for Eldorado and particularly through his carefully controlled use of the camera, Herzog not only examines Aguirre's sense of history and theater, but also makes us recognize the camera's role as participant in this expedition and explores the camera's relationship to the forging of history, to the producing of plays, and, finally, to the possibilities of creating cinema.

When Aguirre announces his true goals in the concluding segments of the film, his emphasis on building a "pure" master-race of conquerors immediately suggests an historical analogy with Hitler and German fascism. Yet *Aguirre* is concerned with history in a more direct sense because it involves specific events and

personages of the sixteenth century and not merely the detailed "recreation" of a certain historical milieu. The major Spanish characters in the film, Aguirre, Ursua, Guzman, Dona Inez, and Dona Flores, were all among the participants in an expedition that left Peru in 1560 in search of Eldorado. Neither in the film's credits nor in any of the interviews I have been able to locate, does Herzog directly acknowledge any specific historical or fictional sources for the film.[2] But since most descriptions of this expedition seem to rely on the same basic documents, like the *Memorias del Padre Madrano*, a firsthand account, and Father Pedro Simon's extended history of the adventures of Ursua and Aguirre (first published in 1623),[3] we can identify a "factual" narrative that at some key points parallels and at others diverges from Herzog's film: Commissioned by the Marques de Canete, the governor of Peru, Ursua organized an expedition of 300 men to journey down the Amazon in search of Eldorado. Dona Inez, a young mestiza with whom he was in love, accompanied him. While the group was camped downriver, Aguirre, a fifty year old professional soldier who had been in America since 1536, decided to use this expeditionary force to wrest Peru from the Spanish crown. Thus he plotted and killed Ursua, installing Fernando de Guzman as "Prince of Peru." Aguirre's plan was to sail to the Atlantic, conquer Panama, cross the isthmus, and invade Peru. When Guzman had second thoughts as they proceeded down the Amazon, he too was murdered, as were countless others in Aguirre's attempt to solidify his position as "caudillo"—"the strong man." In July, 1561, the rebels reached the Atlantic, conquered Margarita, an island off the coast of Venezuela, and prepared to invade the mainland. News of the rebellion reached Spanish authorities, who prepared a defense, and when Aguirre and 150 men landed in Venezuela, government officials offered wholesale pardons to Aguirre's men. After several uneventful skirmishes, Aguirre planned a retreat. However, all but one of his men finally accepted the offer of pardon, and in October, 1561, Aguirre was arrested, shot by two of his own men, and dismembered.

Set against this framework, the opening and closing sequences of *Aguirre* stand out as Herzog's most obvious narrative twists on the historical account. The film begins with prefatory titles, then an image of cloud-covered peaks followed by shots of the expedition's descent from mountaintop to jungle under the command of Gonzalo Pizarro (another important figure in sixteenth-century Peru, Gonzalo Pizarro was killed in 1548, before this expedition began)

and ends in the stagnant waters of the Amazon, far from the Atlantic. Both of these changes—as I will suggest more completely later—significantly alter the shape and ultimately the significance of this narrative. Herzog's Aguirre, for example, is not prevented by any larger social/political authority from achieving his goals, nor is he killed by his own men. He remains alive at the end of the film, his imagination and will intact, but his motion restricted to the meagre proportions of a stationary raft. A comparison of the film with various descriptions of the expedition also suggests that Herzog has introduced several key figures, including Okello (a black slave), Balthazar (another slave, formerly an Indian prince), and the native flutist—three representative examples of the non-European world whose presence helps to create the sense that *Aguirre* is a microcosm of New Spain in the sixteenth century. Guzman, Ursua, and Dona Inez, on the other hand, are based on actual participants in the expedition. Yet through their words and actions, these three characters also become embodiments of identifiable human "types." Guzman's gluttony and his fat, unwieldy body, for instance, are emphasized throughout the film. (He dies after his second trip to the outhouse that is attached to the raft.) But howevermuch all these characters call to mind typical participants in an historical tableau, Herzog's close-ups force us to acknowledge their ultimate complexity, for "faces in film," as Leo Braudy suggests, "are like faces in life; they can be familiar and mysterious at the same time."[4]

This combination of the "familiar" and the "mysterious" is even more pronounced with Aguirre and Dona Flores, the Wrath of God and the flower he shelters. With Aguirre and his daughter, Herzog seems to have imaginatively expanded upon details that might easily pass unnoticed in the historical accounts. Several such details in Walker Lowry's *Lope Aguirre*, for instance, take on added significance after one has seen *Aguirre:* Aguirre's limp, his simple but effective rhetorical ability, his insistence upon identifying himself as a "traitor," and, most interestingly, his flair for cruel and sensational violence, undertaken with what Lowry calls a "rancid sense of humor."[5] Surely one of the most interesting examples of Herzog's approach to the historical narrative, however, involves Flores, who appears in various accounts as an ambiguous but crucial figure in the expedition, for Aguirre's final act before his capture was to kill his mestiza daughter. Even in his relatively straightforward biography of Aguirre, Lowry stops to ponder the role of Flores, asking questions that have no real

answers until the final sequences of Herzog's film: "she is only a presence, a silent presence following the footsteps of her father . . . what impelled Aguirre to take her by the hand into war, death, and disaster?" "Nothing in the chronicles," Lowry concludes, "provides an answer to these questions."[6] In Herzog's film, Aguirre brings Dona Flores on the expedition and jealously shields her so that he can marry her and thus recreate his own image. But Aguirre is finally incapable of generating life and shaping the world to his vision, and his daughter dies in his arms, a victim of both Aguirre and the anonymous forces from within the jungle.

As these examples begin to suggest, *Aguirre* is a "history" rather than merely a "costume" drama in the same sense that Shakespeare's *Richard III* is a "history." Like Shakespeare, Herzog begins with chronicle accounts of events and personages, but then reshapes and embroiders upon these historical chronicles, at once providing answers and revealing more puzzling questions, not only turning "history" into "art" (a tenuous distinction in any case), but meditating upon the makers and the making of history. Thus several ways of understanding history are offered in the film, all of which at some point bear upon Aguirre's obsession with "forging history." Brother Gaspar de Carvajal, for example, considers this particular expedition as but one part of a larger historical process—the increasing and inevitable domination of the City of God (as exemplified by the Church and the Bible) over man and nature.[7] As much as Carvajal's heavy cassock and the silver cross that he loses during the film, his sword identifies him as a soldier in the army of Christ. However, his pragmatic alliance with "strong" secular political power, his personal ambitions, and even his increasing physical emaciation render Carvajal a more convincing sixteenth-century type and, more interestingly, cast doubts on his entire Augustinian view of history. When Carvajal makes a final futile gesture of rebellion as he lies dying, Aguirre mocks not only the monk, but also the very notion that the true conqueror is a propagator of the faith rather than an embodiment of God's "wrath": "Don't forget to pray," he tells Carvajal, "otherwise God could come to a bad end."[8]

While Carvajal often acts and regards himself as an agent of Christianity, fulfilling the role assigned to him in the divine comedy by bringing "light" to the "darkness" of the Amazon, his diary entries, presented in voice-over narration throughout the film, emphasize a factual and strictly chronological view of the expedi-

tion.[9] According to his diary, history is a matter of dates and verifiable facts: "Tenth of January. Armando escaped from prison. The man who went on guard at three o'clock was murdered." But the images of *Aguirre* almost always pose an ironic counterpoint to Carvajal's monotonal and simplistic narration. The spectacular world of nature and the complex world of human actions in the film cannot be summarized in factual shorthand. And on this expedition, time progresses less like a clock or calendar than like the river—cascading or circular or deathly still. With no sense of his own contradictions, Carvajal believes that history is at once the sum total of chronological facts *and* the working out of a providential Christian design. Both of these approaches to history—these ways of understanding the world—prove totally inadequate when Carvajal is forced to confront the jungle, the river, and Aguirre. His faith in the power of the written word—the sacred words of the Bible and the mundane entries in his diary—to explain and order the world is groundless. Carvajal's final voice-over commentary emphasizes this point: "Justo Gonzales drank my ink. He thought it was medicine. I can write no more, we are going round in circles." Thus the monk, in an ironic foreshadowing of Aguirre's final scenes, ends by denying the "reality" of the world and the evidence of his own senses.

A more explicitly "mythic" view of history is articulated by the native couple who emerge out of the jungle to board the Spaniards' raft.[10] Whereas Carvajal's European-Christian beliefs render him incapable of surviving and eventually even acknowledging the world he encounters, the natives are at least at home in the Amazon environment. Their attire is adapted from the jungle foliage, their canoe glides smoothly over the still water. The male native delivers his message to the uncomprehending Spaniards, and Balthazar translates after Aguirre demands to know what has been said:

> He says he's a jaguar. He knows from his ancestors that one day the sons of the sun would arrive from afar through great perils. The strangers would come with thunder made with tubes. They've awaited the sons of the sun for a long time, for here on this river God never finished his creation.

The visual and dramatic emphasis in this particular scene lies in the medium and head-and-shoulder shots of the two natives as

they face the camera and in the reactions of the voyagers: Guzman's almost comic obsession with the native's gold necklace, Aguirre's inquiring stare, Carvajal's attempt to "enlighten" these "savages," and Okello's understated recognition of the irony involved when the monk invokes the "word of God." All—except perhaps for Aguirre—fail to realize, however, that they have indeed entered an environment where "God never finished his creation." For when the expedition descends from cloudy mountain tops on a rocky path into the jungle, distinctions between land and water begin to blur; men and equipage struggle so as not to sink into the swampy jungle. As they progress down the murky brown river, the environment becomes increasingly "unfinished"—trees and jungle foliage seem to grow directly out of the river, which unpredictably rises and falls, mocking the very notion of a "shoreline." At the end, even the air hangs stagnant and heavy in almost a continuum with the water, and the raft is overrun by monkeys.

According to the natives' beliefs, history involves but two epochal events, the original unfinished creation and the second coming which, apparently, will complete creation. Tragically, the native is slaughtered by Carvajal in the name of Christianity and becomes yet another victim (like Okello and Balthazar) of European colonialism; ironically, however, the expedition satisfies at least one term of his myth, for the Spaniards have truly "arrived from afar through great perils."[11] More importantly, this myth is realized in the person of Aguirre; he is the blonde Aryan who is most literally the "son of the sun." More than any of the other Europeans, Aguirre is associated with the cannon throughout the film, creating "thunder made with tubes" as an extension of his will and desire for power. If, for Guzman and Carvajal, the native represents tangible proof that Eldorado truly exists, for Aguirre, the Indian myth might well verify his sense of himself as a "chosen" figure—the Wrath of God.

Yet history for Aguirre is no more the time between the beginning and the completion of creation than it is a chronological ordering of facts or an heroic Christian romance. History is the province and product of "great" men, of conquerors and heroes who can reshape the world and create the future. Thus Aguirre has no real interest in Eldorado, and the promise of gold is for him only a means through which to manipulate the other Spaniards: "My men measure riches in gold, but it's more. It's power and fame." The way to achieve "power and fame," the way to *make* history, is

by conquest and "great treachery." As Dona Inez finds out, social, political, and religious institutions are ultimately meaningless—mere play-making in Aguirre's terms—thus the only frame of reference he truly acknowledges is a world of "great" men. In his proclamation, for example, Aguirre directly addresses Philip II of Spain, whom he declares "obliterated." And Cortez, the conqueror of Mexico, is continually in Aguirre's mind, first as a model and finally as the ultimate target in his dreams of "great treachery." It is appropriate, therefore, that in Herzog's version of this sixteenth-century adventure, Gonzalo Pizarro is included as a foil to Aguirre, for the "real" Gonzalo Pizarro had also rebelled against the Spanish crown, at one point controlling New Spain from Panama to Chile before he was beheaded.

For Herzog's Pizarro and much more completely for Guzman, history is directly tied to society and social institutions—law, public proclamations, "democratic" elections, "open" trials, and a hierarchical class structure. Consider the tableau of the Spaniards' camp when Pizarro delivers his lengthy description of the expedition: the world is static, rigidly organized by class and race with Pizarro as the focal point, the center of the composition. In gaining absolute control over this expedition, Aguirre exploits this faith in society almost as much as he manipulates the Spaniards' basic fear and greed. He "presides" over the election and then the enthronement of Guzman as the "Emperor of Eldorado." And as Kraft Wetzel notes in a brief survey of Herzog's career, most of the scenes involving Guzman are farcical "parodies of European colonialism."[12] The new Emperor weeps in recognition of his responsibilities and with solemn self-satisfaction plays the role of a monarch, pardoning Ursua, feasting while the common soldiers starve, and taking "possession" of all the land within sight of the raft. Yet for Aguirre, a throne is "but a plank covered with velvet," and the men, including Guzman, are like the baby sloth that he holds securely in his hand early in the film, an animal that "sleeps its whole life away." Aguirre is the king-maker, the playwright-director, and the raft becomes a stage upon which he constructs a society that mimics and perpetuates the assumptions and models of the Old World. He builds a canopied shelter, for example, that separates the aristocracy and the Church from the common soldiers and non-European slaves. However, this society and the institutions and social roles upon which it is based are for Aguirre only means, hollow conventions that belong to the world of theater rather than the domain of "true" history.[13]

Within the confines of the Spaniards' campsite (bounded by river and jungle) and the even more restricted area of the raft, Aguirre's Machiavellian *realpolitik* succeeds; he can produce a play which leaves him as the undisputed leader of an expedition that is now reduced to several haggard survivors adrift on the Amazon. In *Aguirre,* at least, this achievement marks the limit of one who seeks to produce plays, for the domain of theater is man, more specifically man only insofar as he belongs to or requires or believes in human society.[14] Thus Aguirre has no control over Dona Inez, who chooses to leave the expedition and enter the jungle alone. The fact that Aguirre seems oblivious to the death of his crew in the final sequences of the film suggests the power of his obsession, but more interestingly, it emphasizes how little he values playmaking and human society. His desire is not merely to control the present and rule the raft, but to create the future and govern the world by the force of his will and imagination. He declares: "When I, Aguirre, want the birds to drop dead from the trees, then the birds will drop dead from the trees. I am the Wrath of God. The earth I walk upon sees me and quakes."

Yet Aguirre's affirmation of his own power cannot be separated from the visual context Herzog provides for this speech. Unlike Hitler in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will,* for example, whose words echo out onto a world that unmistakably reflects the triumph of *his* will, Aguirre grasps a burned treetrunk in a deserted cannibal village and delivers this speech to a handful of terrified and reluctant soldiers, while birds sing and the jungle lurks in the background unperturbed.[15] Furthermore, the specific set-up of the camera and the relationship of the camera to the action in large measure define our response to Aguirre's statement of his own status. In a head-and-shoulder shot, Aguirre stands alone in the frame, facing the stationary camera. His eyes dart over the men but come to rest directly on the camera as he announces that he is the Wrath of God. An almost identical set-up appears later, during Aguirre's final monologue on the raft, and this particular type of head-and-shoulder shot occurs throughout the film, not just with Aguirre but with almost all of the principal characters. Regardless of whether or not the characters presented in these shots are addressing other members of the expedition, the subjects of the camera's lingering, stationary gaze seem to be offering soliloquies—personal explanations, moments of self-definition and self-revelation that appear like fissures in the narrative progress of the film.[16] The male native, for example, is filmed in such a manner

when he relates his myth of the second coming, and Balthazar stands alone in a shallow-focus head-and-shoulder shot when he describes the fate of himself and his people at the hands of the Spaniards. Although Aguirre, like Pizarro early in the film, peers directly into the camera when he appears in this type of shot, Balthazar keeps his head bowed. Only when he brushes aside his hair do we see his eyes and the manacles on his wrists. But this too is part of Balthazar's soliloquy, for he declares that "now I am in chains, like my people, and must bow my head."

The female native who visits the raft, however, does not bow her head, for she stands silent and motionless, staring straightforward at the camera rather than at the men who surround her. Unlike the traditional stage soliloquy, self-revelation in *Aguirre* need not involve language. Facial expression alone more than suffices for the female native and the Indian flutist, whose eyes meet the camera's stare after he has finished his performance and lowered his instrument. Both of these head-and-shoulder shots affirm the kind of dignity Balthazar can only recall. After Ursua has been wounded and deposed, he too expresses dignity through his silence. He watches the action but averts his eyes from the camera, not—like Balthazar—in recognition of his defeat, but because he has become militantly passive, withholding and thus protecting the integrity of his self and his values. For Ursua, to acknowledge the camera would be comparable to acknowledging Aguirre and the society Aguirre has created.

Gesture and action as well as expression and speech can also become modes of soliloquy in the type of head-and-shoulder shots I have been discussing. Carvajal, for example, early in the film sits with a glazed stare, mechanically brushing aside small insects that buzz around his head. Unlike many of the other characters, Carvajal does not seem to realize that this shot is his moment of confession, yet "reality" intrudes on his would-be otherworldliness here, much as it does throughout the film. Likewise, the essential characteristics of Guzman are revealed in two head-and-shoulder shots: when he weeps after being enthroned and later when he gluttonously eats a large piece of fruit during his final feast. The most unintentional soliloquy, however, and surely one of the most disturbing of all these head-and-shoulder shots in the film, appears twice during the sequence at the first Indian village. Hung on a post, the skull and upper torso of a black-haired skeleton clothed in half-decayed (and presumably half-eaten) flesh directly faces the camera, which pauses motionless, transfixed by a

stare that leads beyond eyeless sockets to the heart of darkness and the same lush green forest that stands behind Aguirre when he proclaims for the first time that he is the Wrath of God.

In all these shots, the camera performs several functions that Carvajal tries to assume during the film: it is diarist, narrator, and judge. (The correspondence is most pointed during the trial of Ursua, when Okello, Dona Inez, and the other speakers appear individually in head-and-shoulder shots as they present their testimony to Carvajal.) Above all, however, the camera acts as a witness, passively recording each soliloquy in turn, and it is often called upon to bear witness to the most intimate confessions. Because it assumes this role, the camera has a definite place *within* the society Aguirre constructs. Thus at several points the camera even becomes a sort of royal photographer, when it offers a close-up of Pizarro signing his document, for example, and when the entire group of men turn to look at the camera after Guzman's enthronement, so that this "historic" moment can be dutifully recorded for posterity.

But in the course of the entire film, the camera is not always a passive, immobile witness. The first image of *Aguirre* after the introductory credits is a panoramic extreme-long-shot of the mountain tops with banks of clouds almost completely filling the frame. The camera remains distant and stationary, until in the ensuing shots it slowly zooms in towards the expedition and then tilts down the mountain side, roughly paralleling the descent of the Spanish entourage.[17] This marked movement that diminishes the distance between the camera and the human action and even begins to involve it in the actual descent of the expedition ends with the camera assuming a stationary point-of-view as soldiers and Indian slaves approach and pass directly before it in the foreground. None of the subsequent shots depicting the expedition working its way down the rocky paths even approximate the first extreme-long-shot of the mountain tops, for the camera has already become a part of the expedition. Moving by in the extreme foreground, men and equipage proceed before the camera, which occasionally pans to follow momentarily the descent or to focus on Guzman, Aguirre, or other members of Pizarro's force.

The camera maintains this relationship when the expedition enters an even more treacherous terrain, the dense maze-like jungle. Again in the extreme foreground, soldiers and Indians carry two sedan chairs and pull the cannon past the camera. Pans and brief hand-held tracking shots follow the action of Aguirre and

the rest of the men, but the camera basically continues in its role of passive observer. There is no doubt, however, that it is now completely a part of the expedition. Like the men, the camera struggles with the rain-forest environment; it sways and jerks about as leaves brush against the lens, which also becomes spotted with the muddy water of the swampy jungle.

From this point until the elaborate final shot of *Aguirre*, the camera's particular role may change, but it remains a part of the expedition, almost inextricably bound up with Aguirre's rise to power and his dreams of conquest. The only instances when the camera returns somewhat to the distanced perspective of the opening shots of the film occur when the raft is shown in long-shots from the shore, as it almost imperceptibly drifts downstream or slowly circles or as the men fire their guns and cannon in a hopelessly futile response to the death-wielding silence of the jungle. Fewer than ten such shots appear in the film, yet these occasional shots of the raft, which might reflect the point-of-view of the natives or of Armando and Dona Inez, who finally choose to be silent and escape into the jungle, ironically remind us of the enormous distance between the Spaniards' grand presumptions and the expedition's actual status in this world.

With the exception of these important shots, the camera remains within the expedition, on the raft or with the men when they venture ashore. It bobs with water-spotted lens as the raft proceeds through the rapids, then scans the jungle like all the members of the crew when silence sets in and the raft makes its meagre progress downriver. For the most part, the camera operates as a passive witness/observer; most markedly in the group of head-and-shoulder shots I discussed earlier. But at several key points, the camera becomes a much more active participant in the expedition. When Armando leads a small group to rescue the men who are caught up in a whirlpool, for instance, the camera accompanies him. And as one of Armando's soldiers runs terrified through the jungle, the camera follows in jerky hand-held movement. Other obvious examples of extended hand-held movement that characterize the active role of the camera in the expedition occur in the two Indian villages. In these scenes, the camera no longer follows any single character but ranges throughout the villages like one of the soldiers who has been too long confined by the boredom, tension, and physical limitations of life on the raft. Paradoxically, as the camera acquires greater mobility by participating in rather than passively witnessing the action, it becomes more and more

implicated in the expedition. Two scenes in particular demonstrate this point. When Ursua is taken away to be hanged in the jungle, the camera again leaves the raft, for it is perched on the back of the canoe that carries Ursua and his executioners through the still backwater toward reasonably solid ground. And then the camera proceeds, in hand-held movement, to the spot in the jungle where the hanging takes place. However, in the second Indian village, when Dona Inez chooses to enter the jungle rather than continue to live under Aguirre's command, she brushes past the camera, leaving it behind as she moves into the dense foliage. Carvajal, Okello, and several other men pause to watch her movement, and so too does the camera, which stops at the edge of the jungle and makes no attempt to follow Dona Inez's escape from the expedition.

Thus whether the camera is passive and stationary, recording a history of sorts by bearing witness, or mobile and participatory, moving through this environment like the soldiers under Aguirre's command, it remains above all part of this expedition. And only in the context of the various roles the camera assumes in the course of *Aguirre*, can we begin to analyze the elaborate camera movement that ends the film. In the concluding sequence, Flores, Carvajal, and the few remaining soldiers lie dead or dying, while Aguirre paces with a crippled gait over the raft, which is now overrun by hundreds of small monkeys who are quick to leap into the river when Aguirre approaches. The camera, once again hand-held, also traverses the raft, generally keeping Aguirre in view. During this movement Aguirre's final monologue begins in voice-over narration:

> We shall control all of New Spain and will produce history as others produce plays. I, the Wrath of God, will marry my own daughter. With her I will found the purest dynasty the earth has ever seen. Together we shall rule the whole of this continent.

Grabbing a squirming monkey, Aguirre then addresses it aloud: "We'll endure. I am the Wrath of God." The camera approaches, Aguirre throws the monkey aside, glances from right to left, and demands to know "who else is with me?" As if in reply, Herzog cuts to a brief image of the sky—hazy white light with the faintest hint of blue around the edges of the frame, accompanied by a loud choral-sounding theme used often in the film. This sound/image

combination calls to mind countless traditional representations of the divine, yet as a response to Aguirre's final question it remains puzzling. Carvajal, the male native, and Aguirre all profess faith in some type of God, but if this shot actually depicts the divine, God's light is blinding rather than illuminating. If offers no solace or support for either the self-proclaimed Wrath or the Christian missionary, and it forebodes no second coming to complete this "unfinished creation." Perhaps this image is only an ironic interjection before the camera provides the real answer to Aguirre's question, for the white light quickly gives way to the final shot of the film, which begins several hundred yards downriver with the camera already moving smoothly and rapidly above the water toward the raft. Since the water below and in front of the camera remains almost perfectly calm, the camera gives the impression of being airborne as it executes one and a half circles around the stationary raft, always keeping Aguirre centered in the frame until the image fades to black.

In one respect this final movement is a creative act that is both exhilarating and liberating. The camera is at last free from the confines of the raft and the expedition; in striking contrast to the increasing stasis of the raft and the river, the camera glides rapidly, without the difficulty and erratic motion so obvious in earlier hand-held camera maneuvers. Thus the final shot of *Aguirre* would seem to suggest an alternative to both Aguirre's obsessive desire to forge history and the Old World society which is revealed to be a matter of mere play-making. Even with its new freedom of movement, however, the camera does not take the route of Dona Inez; it does not escape from the quest for Eldorado and explore the New World. Instead the camera returns to Aguirre, who stands in the center of the raft, alone on his stage, yet still challenging a world that remains completely unmalleable. The camera's final circular motion around Aguirre is directly tied to several key images earlier in the film, images which show the expedition at the mercy of this environment: the raft hopelessly caught up in a whirlpool, for example, and the overhead shot of the dead men on this raft lying like spokes in a wheel.[18] In a review of *Aguirre* for *Sight and Sound*, Tony Rayns suggests that the camera's circular motion "circumscribes Aguirre's fantasy."[19] But it is at least equally true that Aguirre "circumscribes" the possibilities of the camera. Even at its moment of potential freedom, the camera remains inescapably bound up "with" Aguirre; his will is triumphant. Trapped in obsessive circling like a planet around the sun, the camera's

movement is ended only by virtue of a fade-out. If, as Balthazar declares, there is "no way out of this jungle" for the expedition, for the camera there is finally no possibility of moving into the jungle.

University of Kentucky

Notes

[1]Written and directed by Herzog, *Aguirre* was shot in Peru in 1972 and released in Germany in the same year, yet it did not "open" in New York City until 1977. It is currently available for rental from New Yorker Films. Herzog's screenplay for *Aguirre* is included in *Drehbuecher II* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1977).

[2]See, for example, David L. Overbey, "Every Man for Himself," *Sight and Sound* 44, No. 2 (1975), 73–5; Jonathan Cott, "Signs of Life: Werner Herzog," *Rolling Stone* 226 (18 Nov. 1976), 48–56; Gideon Bachmann, "The Man on the Volcano: A Portrait of Werner Herzog," *Film Quarterly* 31 (Fall 1977), 2–10; Lawrence O'Toole, "The Great Ecstasy of Filmmaker Herzog," *Film Comment* 15 (Nov.–Dec. 1979), 34–48; *Images at the Horizon: A Workshop with Werner Herzog* (Chicago: Facets Multimedia, 1979); Noureddine Ghali, "Werner Herzog: Comme un rêve puissant," *Jeune Cinéma* 81 (Sept.–Oct. 1974), 12–16; Horst Wiedemann, "Hypnose als Mittel der Stilisierung: Ein Interview mit Werner Herzog," *Medium*6 (Dec. 1976), 27–8; Kraft Wetzel, "Interview: Werner Herzog," in *Herzog, Kluge, Straub* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1976), 113–30. *Herzog, Kluge, Straub* includes a bibliography that cites several other French and German interviews with Herzog.

[3]Simon's *Historial de la Expedicion de Pedro de Ursua al Marañon de las Aventuras de Lope de Aguirre* (1623; rpt. Lima: Biblioteca Cultural Peruana, 1942) contains an extensive bibliography of material on this expedition. I have also consulted Walker Lowry, *Lope Aguirre* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1952) and Adolph F. A. Bandelier, *The Gilded Man* (1873; rpt. Chicago: Rio Grande Press, 1962). See also Ramón Sender's novel, *La Aventura Equinocial de Lope de Aguirre* (New York: Las Americas Publishing, 1964).

[4]Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame* (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1977), p. 182. See also Béla Balázs' discussion of "microphysiognomy" in *Theory of the Film* (New York: Dover, 1950), pp. 60–88.

[5]*Lope Aguirre*, p. 50.

[6]*Lope Aguirre*, p. 38.

[7]Carvajal is not mentioned as a member of this expedition in the historical accounts I have examined, although a Fr. Gaspar de Carvajal is cited in the 1942 edition of Simon's work as the author of *Diario de Viaje por el rio de las Amazonas*.

[8]In "Why Being rather than Nothing?" *Framework* 3 (Spring 1976), 24, Herzog repeats Aguirre's comment to Carvajal in an entirely different context. This article is composed of a series of narrative sketches, each inspired by a photograph of the Jean Renoir family.

[9]Herzog has explored the possibilities of voice-over narration in *Fata Morgana* and several of his documentaries. In *The Great Ecstasy of the Woodsculptor Steiner*, for example, Herzog himself assumes the role of the narrator, and like Carvajal, his narration emphasizes facts and the chronological sequence of events.

[10]*Fata Morgana*, filmed in Africa and the Sahara Desert, is Herzog's most complex examination of mythmaking and a mythic conception of history. The voice-over

narration for this film is based on the *Popul Vuh*, a collection of Mayan creation myths.

[11]The many anecdotes and first-hand accounts of the filming of *Aguirre* suggest that Herzog and his crew weathered "perils" almost as "great" as those encountered by the Spanish expedition, the most notorious being Herzog's confrontations with Klaus Kinski, the actor who plays Aguirre (and who also plays the main character in both *Nosferatu* and *Woyzeck*). See, for example, *Was Ich Bin, Sind Meine Filme (I Am My Films)*, a 1978 documentary about Herzog directed by Christian Weisenborn and Erwin Keusch. In "Akte des Widerstands," in *Herzog, Kluge, Straub*, p. 33, Wolfram Schütte goes so far as to call Herzog "eine Abenteurer- und Entdeckernatur wie T. E. Lawrence." Journeying all over the world to make his films and often placing himself in very real physical danger, Herzog is perhaps the only major contemporary filmmaker to follow in the Robert Flaherty tradition of the filmmaker-as-explorer.

[12]Kraft Wetzel, "Werner Herzog: Kommentierte Filmographie," in *Herzog, Kluge, Straub*, p. 104.

[13]Given Aguirre's insistence on the basic distinction between producing plays and forging history, it is interesting to note the clear parallels between this sixteenth-century conqueror and the "overreaching" hero-villains of English Renaissance drama. Because of his much-emphasized physical deformities (a fact often mentioned in historical accounts of this expedition), Aguirre particularly calls to mind Shakespeare's Richard III. Even more intriguing, however, are the analogies between *Aguirre* and Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. For example, Tamburlaine, like Aguirre, proclaims himself the "Scourge and Wrath of God" and believes the world is at his command.

[14]The other major image of the theater in Herzog's films appears in *Every Man for Himself and God Against All*. In this version of Kaspar Hauser's life, theater is represented by a fair side-show that contains the "Four Mysteries of the Spheres," including an Indian musician who is dressed like the Indian slaves in *Aguirre*.

[15]For a discussion which emphasizes the role of landscape as projection or subjective vision of the characters in Herzog's films, see Peter W. Jansen, "innen/aussen/innen: Funktion von Raum und Landschaft," in *Herzog, Kluge, Straub*, pp. 69–84.

[16]The shots I have termed soliloquies in *Aguirre*, are, in fact, a basic hallmark of Herzog's style in all his films. Consider, for instance, Steiner's monologues in *The Great Ecstasy of the Woodsculptor Steiner*, the final image of Hombre in *Even Dwarfs Started Small*, the peasants' interviews in *La Soufrière*, and the many shots in *Nosferatu* when the vampire confronts a stationary camera.

[17]As Rudolf Hohlweg notes in "Musik für Film—Film für Musik," in *Herzog, Kluge, Straub*, p. 46, the music in the opening sequence of *Aguirre* also parallels the descent of the expedition from mountain top to jungle. Hohlweg's essay is the most perceptive analysis of Herzog's use of musical motifs in *Aguirre* and *Every Man for Himself and God Against All*.

[18]Compare these whirlpool images and the movement of the camera at the end of *Aguirre* with the empty cars that endlessly circle in *Even Dwarfs Started Small* and *Stroszek*—vehicles in repetitive motion that serve to emphasize the impossibility of creative motion in these films.

[19]Tony Rayns, rev. of *Aguirre, Wrath of God*, *Sight and Sound* 44, No. 1 (1975), 57. *Herzog, Kluge, Straub* includes a bibliographical listing of several other reviews of *Aguirre*.