From Herzog on Herzog, 2002

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Werner Herzog

In Conversation with Karen Beckman

Booklet featuring selections from:
Herzog on Herzog, 2002
Minnesota Declaration, 1999
Of Walking in Ice, 1974

Produced and edited by Aaron Levy and Nicola M. Gentili,
With the 2007-2008 RSUI Bergman Foundation Curatorial Seminar, University of Pennsylvania

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Very special thanks also go to Paul Heidengräber and Nathaniel Kahn.
Wednesday 11 December

All I see in front of me is route. Suddenly, near the crest of a hill, I thought, there is a horseman, but when I moved closer it was a tree; then I saw a sheep and was uncertain as to whether or not it would turn out to be a bush, but it was a sheep, on the verge of dying. It died still and pathetically; I've never seen a sheep die before. I marched swiftly on.

The region was very disconsolate, like outskirts that refuse to stop, interspersed with a few farmhouses. The electrical cables howled and swayed in the storm; I walked bent forward a bit to avoid being blown off my feet. The clouds were no higher than 300 feet at most, just one big chasm. Near a factory a guard screamed at me from behind, thinking I intended to enter the premises, but I was merely keeping away from the trucks carrying huge fountains on them. It's impossible to walk across the fields, everything's flooded and swampy. Where the land is plowed, the soil is too ponderous. Fortified by the weather, it was easier to confront faces today. My fingers are so frozen that I can write only with a great deal of effort.

1. By dint of declaration the so-called Cinema Verité is devoid of verité. It reaches a merely superficial truth, the truth of accountants.

2. One well-known representative of Cinema Verité declared publicly that truth can be easily found by taking a camera and trying to be honest. He resembles the night watchman at the Supreme Court who resents the amount of written law and legal procedures. ‘For me,’ he says, ‘there should be only one single law; the bad guys should go to jail.’

Unfortunately, he is part right, for most of the many, much of the time.

3. Cinema Verité confounds fact and truth, and thus plows only stones. And yet, facts sometimes have a strange and bizarre power that makes their inherent truth seem unbelievable.

4. Fact creates norms, and truth illumination.

5. 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.


7. Tourism is sin, and travel on foot virtue.

8. Each year at springtime scores of people on snowmobiles crash through the melting ice on the lakes of Minnesota and drown. Pressure is mounting on the new governor to pass a protective law. He, the former wrestler and bodyguard, has the only sage answer to this: ‘You can’t legislate stupidity.’

9. The gauntlet is hereby thrown down.

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

11. We ought to be grateful that the Universe out there knows no smile.

12. Life in the oceans must be sheer hell. A vast, merciless hell of permanent and immediate danger. So much of hell that during evolution some species—including man—cried, fled onto some small continents of solid land, where the Lessons of Darkness continue.
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Minnesota Declaration
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 30, 1999

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