

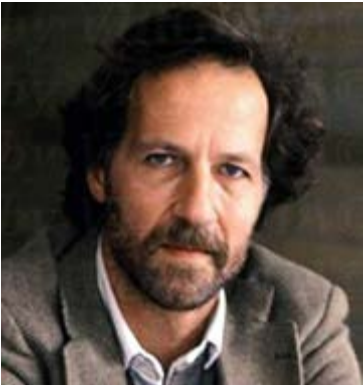
Werner Herzog

David Church November 2006 Great Directors Issue 41

b. Werner Herzog  
b. 5 September, 1942, Munich, Germany

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With a singular vision continually blurring the fine line between reality and fiction, Werner Herzog has become one of cinema’s most controversial and enigmatic filmmakers. A strong authorial presence pervades each of his films, whether fictional features or documentaries. For Herzog, there is no distinction between the two styles – they are all just “films” – because real life and fiction feed off each other for mutual poetic inspiration. His worldview often seems bleak and anti-humanistic, featuring quixotic outsiders who reject or are rejected by society, only to be crushed by the weight of their own ambitions. Civilisation is always teetering at the edge of self-destruction, “like a thin layer of ice upon a deep ocean of chaos and darkness” (1), with faith and superstition minding the tattered border. An air of Romanticism finds human kind dwarfed by the terrifying might and majesty of nature, while strange landscapes exist as reflections of inner mental states. Although keenly aware of his nation’s violent past, Herzog’s films generally eschew specific historical and political considerations in the face of a universe filled with murder, destruction and the demise of the individual. These themes gradually emerge throughout a body of work at once stunning and perplexing.



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As with the subject matter in his “documentaries”, it is often difficult to separate the “real” Herzog from the myriad fictions that have sprung up around him, either as myths perpetuated in the media or as subtle fabrications maintained by Herzog himself (2).

Born in 1942, Herzog grew up amid post-World War II destruction in the small Bavarian village of Sachrang. He saw his first movies at age 11 and quickly discovered film technique by taking heed of continuity errors and generic conventions in cheap B-movies (3). At age 14, he began a short period of intense Catholic devotion, around the same time that he discovered the virtues of travelling on foot and became determined to make films (4). As a teenager, Herzog learned about filmmaking from an encyclopaedia entry on the subject, but because of his youth and lack of formal training, he was unable to find producers for his early screenplays. Consequently, he founded Werner Herzog Filmproduktion and began producing his own films (5). He has written, produced, directed and often narrated virtually all of his own films since then, becoming an auteur in the proper sense.

Directed at age 19, his first short film was *Herakles* (1962), an editing experiment juxtaposing footage of bodybuilders with the famous racing accident at Le Mans. Herzog’s conception of the strongman “encompasses intellectual strength, independence of mind, confidence, self-reliance, and maybe even a kind of innocence” (6), making it a central trait of his protagonists and of himself as a filmmaker; he has repeatedly argued that filmmaking is much more of an athletic endeavour than an aesthetic one. However, the strange juxtaposition of footage in *Herakles* also suggests that even the strongman striving for some superhuman quality can still be cut down by cruel acts of chance – as evidenced in *Invincible* (2001) and many other Herzog films with doomed protagonists. His next short was a documentary called *Spiel im Sand* (*Game in the Sand*, 1964), about four children and a rooster in a cardboard box, but he has never publicly shown the film. His next fictional short, *Die beispiellose Verteidigung der Festung Deutschkreuz* (*The Unprecedented Defense of the Fortress Deutschkreuz*, 1966), told the absurd story of four men guarding a derelict Austrian castle from imaginary attackers as they gradually lose their sanity.

After travelling Europe and North America for several years, Herzog returned to Munich in 1968, where he met Volker Schlöndorff and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, two other young directors who would emerge as guiding lights of the New German Cinema. Set on Crete during the Nazi occupation of Greece, his first fictional feature, *Lebenszeichen* (*Signs of Life*, 1968), follows the same theme as *The Unprecedented Defense*, telling the story of a young German soldier named Stroszek who goes mad while defending a



useless ammunition dump from nonexistent enemies. Suddenly becoming violently active, Stroszek frightens away the few other soldiers and begins shooting fireworks at the nearby town, but only succeeds in killing a donkey before being captured and carted away. Emphasising existential angst over historical accuracy and political commentary, the film shows the utter absurdity of “putting the instruments of war into the hands of individuals” (7), an idea that would resurface years later in Herzog’s controversial documentary *Ballade vom kleinen Soldaten* (*Ballad of the Little Soldier*, 1984). During the making of *Signs of Life*, Herzog also shot the experimental short *Letzte Worte* (*Last Words*, 1968), about a hermit who is brought back to civilisation, where he refuses to speak; meanwhile, other members of society obsessively repeat themselves to the point of nonsense. This film would mark the start of Herzog’s investigation into human language, and his continued steps toward increasing narrative stylisation. It was followed by *Massnahmen Gegen Fanatiker* (*Precautions Against Fanatics*, 1969), a humorous short about paranoid people at a Munich racetrack trying to prevent “fanatics” from assaulting the horses.

A surge of interest in New German Cinema was emerging during the late-1960s (especially after the 1968 Oberhausen Film Festival) and Herzog became seen as one of its key filmmakers, along with others like Fassbinder, Schlöndorff and Wim Wenders – all members of the first important generation of German filmmakers to emerge in the post-war era. However, Herzog never saw New German Cinema as a cohesive movement, nor did he consider himself a part of it. Furthermore, he disliked many German films of the time period for being “impossibly provincial” and explicitly ideological, whereas he made many of his own films outside Germany, aiming for an international audience. His films have rarely been successful within Germany itself, for he claims that Germans mistrust their own culture (8). Nevertheless, he seems to consider New German Cinema’s project of reconstituting a domestic national identity to be less important than gaining “legitimacy as a civilized nation” abroad, a continuing struggle even today (9). Part of seeking this legitimacy meant reaching back to the period of pre-Nazi German cinema, and film historian Lotte Eisner (author of influential studies like *The Haunted Screen*) provided the link between the two eras. Eisner was an early champion of Herzog’s work and New German Cinema in general. She provided a voiceover for *Fata Morgana* (1970) and would be a great inspiration to Herzog in later years. Herzog’s 1979 remake of F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922) would solidify his aim of gaining legitimacy by bridging the history of German cinema (10).

A trio of films emerged from a near-fatal journey to Africa in 1969. *Die fliegenden Ärzte von Ostafrika* (*The Flying Doctors of East Africa*, 1969), a documentary about doctors travelling Africa to prevent the eye disease trachoma, was (in Herzog’s estimation) more of a practical “report” than a proper film, much as *Behinderte Zukunft* (*Handicapped Future*, 1971) would be several years later (11). The second film, *Fata Morgana*, is one of Herzog’s boldest and most experimental “documentaries”. Surreal images of mirages,



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landscapes and desert dwellers are arranged into three parts – The Creation, Paradise and The Golden Age – accompanied by narration from *Popol Vuh*, the Mayan book of creation myths and history. Though it was released in some places as a psychedelic picture, the film’s original concept was to be a sort of documentary pieced together from footage shot by extraterrestrials that have landed on a strange planet and discover people waiting for an impending collision with the sun; the film would allow humans to see how aliens might perceive our planet. Although this concept was scrapped during filming, the idea for a sort of science-fiction documentary would persist in *Lektionen in Finsternis* (*Lessons of Darkness*, 1992) and *The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005), two other deeply impressionistic documentaries that form a sort of loose trilogy with *Fata Morgana*. Herzog has repeatedly said that in *Fata Morgana* and his other films, he is capturing the “embarrassed landscapes of our world”, places where human colonisation has desecrated the earth. Likewise, his eerily beautiful landscapes are not meant to be picturesque and idyllic, but rather evocative of inner states, collective dreams and nightmares (12). This dual characteristic of his landscapes also suggests that basic human consciousness has been desecrated by the forces of capitalism and modernity, an idea that can be found in films ranging from *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* to more “ethnographic” films like *Where the Green Ants Dream*, and *Ten Thousand Years Older*. Landscapes often form the core of his films, and he lingers upon them in his overarching mission to find fresh images; he considers civilisation threatened by an exhaustion of images (linked to consumerism and mass media technology like television) and a death of the imagination (13).



Aggressively surreal imagery would again fill his third film in Africa, *Auch Zwerge haben klein angefangen* (*Even Dwarfs Started Small*, 1970), a nihilistic black comedy about inmates who rebel and take over their asylum. With a cast composed entirely of short-statured people, the world of consumer goods and bourgeois society appears vividly out of proportion, and so the dwarves begin destroying everything as they vent their anger toward a world not built for them. As in films like *Kaspar Hauser* and *Stroszek*, the protagonists are somehow at odds with their

surroundings, but while their reactions seem quite normal, it is wider society that emerges as truly monstrous. Thomas Elsaesser notes that *Dwarfs* seems to be “Herzog’s way of representing his isolation after the 1968 Oberhausen Festival” and “the impossibility of combining political revolution with radical subjectivity” (14). Indeed, Herzog intended the film to ridicule the 1960s world revolution because he felt that the counterculture’s desire to overthrow the government and install a utopian socialist society was simplistic and narrow-minded at best (15). After it was briefly banned, critics bashed *Dwarfs* as anarchistic and blasphemous, and Herzog was denounced as a fascist.

Despite his problematic use of an all-disabled cast for metaphoric purposes in *Dwarfs*, *Handicapped Future* would be a practical documentary to raise public awareness about the need for disability access in Germany, using recent disability rights legislation in the United States for comparison. During its filming, Herzog met Fini Straubinger, a woman whose deafness and blindness allows her to only communicate via a tactile language. The resulting documentary, *Land des Schweigens und der Dunkelheit* (*Land of Silence and Darkness*, 1971), expands several themes that run throughout Herzog’s oeuvre in films like *Last Words*, *Kaspar Hauser* and *Lessons of Darkness*. Like many of his other characters, he portrays Fini and the other deaf-mute people as outsiders isolated from society, suffering from an inability to “properly” communicate their means of existence. Because Herzog claims that all of the people in his films (both documentaries and fictional features) are sympathetic points of self-reference, as if he has been gradually filming his own life, their inability to communicate reflects the autodidactic Herzog’s own struggle to find “a new grammar of images” capable of communicating his stories cinematically (16). To this end, subtle stylisation is employed in *Land of Silence and Darkness* and virtually all of his documentaries (though only with subjects willing to cooperate in the process), whether by staging certain scenes for the camera, scripting bits of dialogue, or even fabricating whole sequences from limited historical facts. In his 1999 “Minnesota Declaration”, Herzog laid out the principles of his personal documentary style, attacking the failure of *cinéma vérité* to go beyond a superficial “truth of accountants” based in objectively observable facts. Herzog distinguishes between surface facts and a deeper, “ecstatic truth” that can only be reached “through fabrication and imagination and stylization” (17). As Elsaesser says, Herzog “wants to document the fascination that emanates from the fictional or fantastic elements at the very heart of the everyday occurrence” (18). Because his films vary wildly in their degree of fabrication, it becomes very difficult to categorise them traditionally as either documentaries or fictional features, and Herzog views them all simply as “films”. Some of his documentaries (e.g. *Fata Morgana*, *The Wild Blue Yonder*) dramatically challenge traditional documentary form, others are almost wholly fictionalised films in the guise of documentaries (*Bells From the Deep*, *Gesualdo – Death for Five Voices*), while still others provide the inspiration for his fictional features (e.g. *Dark Glow of the Mountains* and *Scream of Stone*, *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* and *Rescue Dawn*). Meanwhile, his fictional features are often shot like documentaries (always on location), leaving purely aesthetic concerns behind; as with his documentaries, historical and political facts are only loosely adhered to, for he always digs beneath the surface facts of history to find the “ecstatic truth” (19).

This would be the case in *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (*Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, 1972), his first



international success and the first of five collaborations with actor Klaus Kinski. Very loosely based upon Spanish conquistador Lope de Aguirre's doomed expedition to find El Dorado, the film (perhaps Herzog's best) details one man's descent into madness as he rebels against the Spanish crown and nature alike. Aguirre is a quintessentially Herzogian (anti-)hero, encompassing both the "over-reacher and prophet or underachiever and holy fool", put in bizarre locations and situations "often in order to let a strange and touching humanity emerge from impossible odds" (20). Aguirre's mission becomes a quixotic, even existential exercise in absurdity, especially as he proclaims himself superior to the laws of nature – though not without nature's final retribution. Elsaesser notes that Herzog's heroes – "solitary rebels, incapable of solidarity but also incapable of success" – typically exist in an ontological void due to their determination to investigate the limits of what it means to be human; from one film to another, they oscillate between being super-human and sub-human characters, both types being dialectically linked via an eventual shared failure "that redeems their vaulting ambition and their hubris" (21). The attempted transgression or transcendence of humanity's limits is a common theme in films ranging from *The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner* to *Scream of Stone* to *Grizzly Man*. Aguirre was widely read as an allegory for Nazism, but Herzog maintains that this was not his intent, regardless of how German art is misunderstood in light of its national history (22).



His next film, *Die Grosse Ekstase des Bildschnitzers Steiner* (*The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner*, 1973), would document ski-jumper Walter Steiner's flights and crashes, focusing on the "ecstasy" of defying gravity while leaping almost suicidally against the fear of death. Facing these fears becomes another common theme for Herzog (who was an avid ski-jumper as a youth), for many of his films focus upon dreams of flight or the defiance of gravity (as transcendence of human limits) that are then broken by sudden catastrophe, but later revisited and overcome. For Steiner, catastrophe comes in an injurious crash from which he must pick himself up to go on jumping. But in other films, it is a more traumatic event, often involving a family member's death; examples include *The Dark Glow of the Mountains*, *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*, *Wings of Hope* and *The White Diamond*. Scaling mountains (as in *Fitzcarraldo* or *Scream of Stone*) is a recurrent means of defying gravity.

His next feature, *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle* (*The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, 1974 – its German title means, appropriately enough, "Every Man For Himself and God Against All") would bring Herzog's interest in language to the fore again, this time based on the true story of a young man who was imprisoned for his first 16 years and then turned loose into an early 19th century German city without any conception of civilisation. Unable to speak more than a few pre-rehearsed sentences, Kaspar is able to see the world with completely fresh eyes (much like the aliens in the original concept for *Fata Morgana*) and must quickly learn to communicate with his surroundings. The townspeople take an immediate interest in him, whether by exhibiting him as a freak or by trying to study and educate him. He is finally murdered under suspicious circumstances (perhaps having been related to royalty) and the town is delighted to learn that Kaspar's autopsied brain shows abnormalities, confirming their secret hopes that he truly is somehow different from them. Herzog describes Kaspar as "full of basic and uncontaminated human dignity" (not unlike his descriptions of indigenous tribes in other films), for although Kaspar is an outsider, bourgeois society is what is truly at fault for his eventual destruction (23). Elsaesser suggests that Kaspar is also a metaphor for the filmmakers of the New German Cinema: left abandoned and without a father generation, they are uncertain about the means of socialisation, "attempting to survive between a good father substitute and a bad father image" (24). Filled with visions of Kaspar's dreamed landscapes, the film seems to maintain an uneasy balance between Herzog's anti-humanist views about civilisation and his genuine sympathy for the very human Kaspar. Many of Herzog's films feature this tension between the innate purity of humanity, the corrupting influence of society, and the all-powerful might of nature.



After the critical success of *Kaspar Hauser*, Herzog followed with another period film, *Herz Aus Glas* (*Heart of Glass*, 1976), about the fragility of civilisation in a pre-industrial Bavarian village. The village is renowned for making a special red glass, but when the master glass blower dies with the secret to make it, a collective madness begins to take over as the town turns upon itself.

Meanwhile, a prophet on the outside of society makes ominous predictions about the future of the town and the wider world. John Sandford sees the film's central thesis as that "one day factories may be as obsolete as castles are today" (25), and the uneasy passage of time in *Heart of Glass* seems to bear this out. The film's deliberately slow pace is in ironic contrast to the relativity of time suggested by a town huddling the brink between different industrial eras, captured in a web of prophecies inextricably linking past and future to the present diegetic moment. To create a sort of "waking dream" quality for the film's action, virtually all of the actors perform under hypnosis. The characters drift about almost aimlessly, their actions emerging abruptly from beneath an

eerily emotionless stupor; the effect is strange but gives the film a glacial pace that many viewers did not appreciate. Though the film contains some of Herzog's most beautiful landscapes, the unfolding of events is so slight that most critics responded negatively to Herzog's experiment. It was followed by *Mit mir will keiner spielen* (*No One Will Play With Me*, 1976), a darkly humorous short documentary about a preschool-age boy ostracised from interactions with his classmates until a girl who has become interested in his pet crow provides the link to social acceptance.

*How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck* (1976) is a documentary capturing the World Championship of Livestock Auctioneers in Pennsylvania. The almost unintelligible speed, skill and repetition with which the auctioneers conduct business fascinated Herzog because it seemed to be "the real poetry of capitalism", a form of language pushed to the extremes of efficiency and (literal) economy (26). This system is juxtaposed with the pre-modern Amish farmers who come to watch the auction. Herzog would then return to the American Midwest to film *Stroszek* (1976), a fictional feature about an alcoholic man who moves from Germany to Wisconsin with his neighbour and a prostitute, only to find poverty and fatal disillusionment in place of the "American Dream". Capitalist America becomes another society that destroys the individual, but Herzog sees the film as less a critique of the United States than "a eulogy" in the wake of the American Dream, for such shattered hopes could develop in virtually any country (27). Very documentary-like in style, *Stroszek* is one of Herzog's most natural features, and is certainly one of his strongest.

The documentary *La Soufrière* (1977) brought Herzog and his two-man crew to the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe just before a volcano was set to obliterate it. They speak with the few people who have refused to evacuate, several natives too poor to leave and start a new life elsewhere. Herzog has later noted that this picture was one of the only times that he consciously put himself in real danger while filming, but that there is "an element of self-mockery in the final film", for the volcano so precisely predicted to erupt never actually did so, leaving the film as a sort of banal chase towards a catastrophe that never occurred (28). Events such as this have earned Herzog a rather exaggerated reputation as a risk-taker and an inviter of danger.

His next two features (both starring Kinski), filmed back-to-back in 1979, saw Herzog looking to earlier, "legitimate" German culture: *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (from Murnau's 1922 film) and *Woyzeck* (from Georg Büchner's dramatic fragment, posthumously published in 1879). Although many scenes and images (e.g. the vampire's physical appearance) are obvious



adaptations from Murnau's film, Herzog's retelling of the well-known *Dracula* story feels overall closer to the revived Gothicism of Bram Stoker's 1897 source novel than Murnau's Expressionism. The vampire is another of Herzog's existential heroes, an outsider who transcends the limits of human possibility through his undead-ness, evoking the terrors of nature (i.e. the plague) in his wake. As in *Heart of Glass*, bourgeois society is turned inside out by a sudden change when the plague arrives, and after Dr Van Helsing finally drives a stake through the vampire's heart, the insipid town bureaucrats attempt to arrest him for murder, forgetting that the plague has already wiped out the town's government, police force and judicial system. As in many of Herzog's other films (e.g. *Heart of Glass*, *Bells From the Deep*), faith and superstition still exist at the limits of civilisation, a remnant from earlier periods of human development when monsters and myths constituted all of the unknown forces beyond the bounds of society. This relates to his interest in our collective dreams and nightmares – whether dreams of surpassing human limits or nightmares about civilisation falling into chaos. Thematically similar to *Signs of Life*, *Woyzeck* is a very different film, showing a petty soldier abused by virtually every social and economic force around him. As he struggles to make sense of his existence and give his life some semblance of meaning, he finally goes mad and brutally murders his wife. Given the film's source material as a dramatic fragment, it is staged almost theatrically, shot in a series of deep-focus, four-minute long takes that would make André Bazin proud. Though *Woyzeck* is not as readily "cinematic" as many of Herzog's other works, it does afford Kinski a relatively restrained performance punctuated by the seemingly unending slow-motion murder that closes the film.

Two contrasting documentaries about religious faith in the United States were produced in 1980: *Glaube und Währung* (*God's Angry Man*) and *Huie's Predigt* (*Huie's Sermon*). Originally titled *Creed and Currency*, the first of these documents the eccentric televangelist Dr Gene Scott, whose California-based broadcast is a humorously aggressive and absurdly fanatical plea for financial pledges. Declaring that "God's honor is at stake every night", Scott represents a radical yoking together of zealotry and consumer capitalism. Herzog describes him as "appeal[ing] to the paranoia and craziness of our civilization" (29) – but this is in marked contrast to Brooklyn-based Bishop Huie Rogers, the subject of the second documentary. Although both figures are very successful in their aims, Rogers is the antithesis of Scott's fanaticism. *Huie's Sermon* is a straightforward look at how an unassuming clergyman can bolster faith and significantly engage his listeners without the exploitative and deliberately alarming means used by Scott. Each film captures a different form of faith in action, but Rogers emerges as easily the more sympathetic of the two men. Figuring it as a "distant religious echo" from his teenage period of intense Catholic belief (30), Herzog's films often focus upon faith, whether a faith in one's own ambitions, a Romantic faith in the shadow of all-powerful nature, or a faith in religious or superstitious idea(l)s seemingly at odds with society or conventional reason.





These forms of faith would converge in *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), one of Herzog's finest and most well known films, as much the product of his faith in filmmaking (see Les Blank's documentary about the film's production, *Burden of Dreams*) as in the power of the cinematic image. Described by Herzog as his best "documentary", it is a fictional feature that details a wealthy

industrialist's obsessive quest to bring European opera to the Amazon. To finance his dream of building a new opera house, this "Conquistador of the Useless" travels upriver and, with the help of local indigenous peoples, literally pulls a huge steamboat over a mountainside to access a fertile tributary. After the boat reaches the other side of the mountain, the natives cut it loose, sending it into violent rapids to appease the spirits residing there. Fitzcarraldo ultimately fails in his mission, but limps back to port with a compromised version of his dream – a dream that money alone cannot buy – still intact. A chaotic four years in the making, the film's completion was as much a Sisyphean task as Fitzcarraldo's own quest to elevate his dreams over reality – especially because Herzog used no miniatures or special effects in order to pull the full-sized steamboat up and over the mountain, determined to give the film a wholly natural sense of wonder and physical magic (31). Despite many wild controversies surrounding the film's making, it earned Herzog a Best Director award at the 1982 Cannes Film Festival.

Herzog directed three films in 1984, one of which, *Gasherbrum – Der leuchtende Berg* (*The Dark Glow of the Mountains*), follows the recurrent theme of an individual pushing against human limits in defiance of gravity, but now forced to return to and overcome an earlier trauma. Famous mountaineer Reinhold Messner lost a brother during a climbing expedition in the Himalayas, but still persisted in climbing all of the world's tallest peaks without oxygen tanks. Herzog takes him back to the mountain that claimed his brother and later follows Messner as he embarks upon a continuous oxygen-free climb of two 8,000-meter mountains. Messner is a somewhat difficult figure for Herzog because he ostensibly seems to embody the "adventurer" lifestyle that Herzog so despises; according to Herzog, "adventuring" is an egocentric act that embarrasses landscapes by relying upon clichés about being pushed to the limits of humanity and conquering nature. For Herzog, however, nature is not a conquerable entity, nor are most of the subjects of his films adventurers in this sense. Transcending the bounds of humanity should not be a pastime, but rather a selfless compulsion, an essential part of one's identity and a means of justifying one's own existence. In Messner's case, he is compelled to re-climb the same mountains, including the one that killed his brother, because mountaineering is as much a part of him as life itself (32).

Much more controversial would be Herzog's documentary *Ballade vom kleinen Soldaten* (*Ballad of the Little Soldier*, 1984), a look at child soldiers fighting against the Sandinistas on behalf of the Miskito Indians, an indigenous group long victimised by the ruling powers in Nicaragua. According to the film, Sandinista troops destroyed over 60 Miskito villages in an effort to launch their program of scientific socialism. The film was viciously attacked as anti-Sandinista



propaganda, despite Herzog's claim that it is not a political work. He claims that the film's emphasis is not on the specific political or historical background of the Miskito-Sandinista conflict – though he is sympathetic to the Miskitos while endorsing neither side – but rather on the human element that could take place in any country: the tragedy of children marched off to war with the instruments of death placed in their hands (33). George Paul Csicsery's analysis of the film echoes Herzog's sentiments, though he points out that while Indian rebellions have figured in films like *Aguirre* and *Fitzcarraldo*, now Herzog is finally filming from the side of the Indians themselves. Csicsery notes that Herzog and his assistant director Denis Reichle use this conflict to draw connections to "all boys who have fought for all desperate lost causes throughout history." Because Reichle himself was drafted as a teenage German soldier in the closing days of World War II, he is now atoning for his own sins (revisiting a past trauma to overcome it) by highlighting the "endless cycle of more death" embodied in the figure of the child soldier, thus subverting the romanticised "cult of the young hero sacrificing himself for his country in the full bloom of innocence" that so appealed to the Nazis. Csicsery goes on to observe that Herzog's film is as much about the personal risks and travails of the filmmakers themselves as it is about the documentary's subjects, thus blurring the line between documentary and fiction, making the film nihilistically apolitical (34). *Ballad of the Little Soldier* illustrates one of the more potentially problematic elements in Herzog's films: in his efforts at stylisation and evocation of the "ecstatic truth", poetry is always more important than politics, leaving observable facts to be loosely filtered through Herzog's creative lens. Because there is such a strong authorial voice in his documentaries (and also a literal authorial voice, because he narrates his own films, retaining the power of the speaking subject), it becomes very difficult to discern the "facts" of a given situation, resulting in much criticism over concerns of historical accuracy and political content.

His position as a white European speaking subject remains controversial because by deliberately stripping historical and political contexts from his films, his focus on the human or natural elements retains a certain romanticised (and potentially politically incorrect) air. Aside from anthropomorphising nature in many of his

films (35), his depiction of indigenous peoples is often sympathetic (in part because of their proximity to and respect for nature), but generally emphasises a certain natural purity or primitiveness lacking in Western/European society. Often using colonialism (whether physical or cultural) to show how one group makes outsiders of another group, he wishes to challenge bourgeois society by showing its decadence and corruption, but also to illustrate the fragile boundary between civilisation and a chaotic state of nature. Although his intent is to critique Western society, he does so in what could be seen as potentially negative ways. *Wo die grünen Ameisen träumen* (*Where the Green Ants Dream*, 1984) is an example of a fictional feature (loosely based on historical facts) that bears this tension. When a group of Australian aborigines go to court to prevent a mining company from desecrating one of their culture's sacred sites, they are given an airplane and a runway in the Outback as a gift. The court case goes on and on, but eventually the mining company wins and the aborigines take off in the plane, flying into oblivion. The film's sympathies are clearly with the aborigines, their plight to preserve their heritage from colonisers, and the problems posed by cross-cultural communication differences when native languages are being wiped out. However, the film also leans toward a somewhat ethnographic view of aboriginal life. Herzog notes that because he does not claim to fully understand their ways, much of the film was invented, including various depictions of aboriginal culture. "I respect them as a people who are in a deep struggle to keep their visions alive," he says, "and because my own understanding of them was limited, I wanted to develop my own mythology" (36). Herzog is after showing the deeper truths of their cultural struggle, even if it means stylising his own interpretations of their belief system. He is less concerned about misrepresenting "objective" facts about a culture than about portraying the underlying conflicts of a group at odds with modern Western civilisation. As Elsaesser observes, Herzog retains "a 'stupid' eye, one that is merely curious rather than knowing or demonstrative" (as in ethnographic films). Whether in fictional features or documentaries, his method of superimposing myths over politically or historically analysable situations provides a narratological framework that is "both deliberately inadequate and highly ironic: it implies other models of understanding which are subverted by a commentary at once ludicrous and solemn" (37).

After shooting a short documentary self-portrait called *Portrait Werner Herzog* (1986), *Cobra Verde* (1987), his final collaboration with Kinski, would indirectly address colonialism again in its fictional story of a bandit sent to the west coast of Africa as a slave catcher, only to become a slave himself before leading a rebel army of female soldiers to overthrow the king. After it is learned that the king is already dead, Cobra Verde turns his back on a position of



great power and instead dies during a futile attempt to escape into the sea. Herzog insists that the film is "about great fantasies and follies of the human spirit, not colonialism" (38). Although the film points toward the fine line between freedom and slavery, inverting notions of otherness throughout the plot, Herzog is satisfied to focus primarily upon Cobra Verde's existential struggle for freedom and self-definition, not the historical or political context of slavery. Furthermore, he claims that his films are anthropological or ethnographic "only in as much as they try to explore the human condition at this particular time on this planet. I do not make films using images only of clouds and trees; I work with human beings because the way they function in different cultural groups interests me", though he claims to have never made a film with the explicit purpose of studying a particular cultural group (39). For example, in his next documentary, *Wodaabe – Dei Hirten der Sonne* (*Wodaabe – Herdsmen of the Sun*, 1989), he films the male beauty contests of the Wodaabe people in Africa. Because there is no voiceover, he is not the sort of all-knowing Western interpreter found in ethnographic films, but neither does he invent his own mythology around the customs (as he has done in other films, such as *Where the Green Ants Dream*). By using classical European music over the images, he allegedly stylises the film into "a story about beauty and desire" instead of a traditional ethnographic documentary (40). But despite his intent, his stylisation of facts and apolitical viewpoint can nevertheless render a number of his films especially problematic, notably when he also occupies the role of documentary narrator (and therefore, Western speaking subject).

The documentary *Echoes aus einem düsteren Reich* (*Echoes from a Sombre Empire*, 1990) brought Herzog back to Africa to revisit various places marked by events during the reign of the Central African Republic's Emperor Jean-Bédel Bokassa, a despot renowned for numerous crimes and atrocities, including cannibalism. Using archive footage intercut with discussions with the victims, wives and enemies of Bokassa, Herzog paints a grim picture of a power-mad dictator and a legacy of horror. As with *Ballad of the Little Solider*, his perspective is aimed less at the specific history of Bokassa's time in power than at the more universal issue of the lurid and evil extremes toward which the human psyche can devolve. In a sense, *Echoes* is Herzog's own *Heart of Darkness*, a look into the depths of one man's nightmares, and an appropriate real-life corollary to the sort of mad (though usually more benign) dreamers that frequent Herzog's films.

*Das excentrische Privattheater des Maharadjah von Udaipur* (*The Eccentric Private Theatre of the Maharaja of Udaipur*, 1991) is a rather straightforward documentary about an extremely extravagant day-long event for the Maharaja of Udaipur in India. With over a thousand performers and countless hours of preparation leading up to a single unrepeatable show, the one glorious and fleeting moment in time takes on almost absurd dimensions. Herzog's second film of 1991 is *Schrei aus Stein* (*Scream of Stone*), a fictional feature about two men, a mountaineer and a free-climber, who compete to see who is the world's



greatest climber. Tensions mount as the two climbers must race up opposite sides of the same mountain, braving extreme conditions and landscapes. Based on an original idea by Reinhold Messner, the film follows in the same vein as *The Dark Glow of the Mountains*, but in a more conventional fictitious narrative. The resulting film is somewhat commonplace and Herzog, who liked the idea of reviving the German “mountain film” genre, has since considered it too much of an artistic compromise, having had little input on the screenplay (41). Also in 1991, Herzog directed the 4-hour (8-part) TV miniseries *Film Lesson*, featuring such guest lecturers as a magician, a tightrope walker, a cosmologist, director Volker Schlöndorff, and Herzog himself. These strange but imaginative lessons focus upon such topics as magic, athletic agility, camera orientation, landscapes and even advanced mathematics.



The documentary *Lessons of Darkness* brings the horror of the 1991 Gulf War to a more surreal and cinematic level – “by transforming things that are physically there into more intensified, elevated, and stylised images”, as Herzog says of his overarching filmmaking process – separating the images of burning oil fields and massive destruction from their specific circumstances. As with *Ballad of the Little Soldier*, some people attacked him for removing a historical or political

context, while others criticised him for “aestheticising” the horror and not naming any historical particulars of the war, but the film was generally a critical success (42). The images are treated as if from any war throughout history, receiving a certain unearthly detachment through Herzog’s narration. The same sort of science-fiction framework from *Fata Morgana* operates here, using alien eyes to see only the “embarrassed landscapes” of a planet and the strange creatures (e.g. heavy-suited firefighters and a boy who has lost the ability to talk) that inhabit it. Reminiscent of *Fata Morgana*’s creation myth structure, *Lessons of Darkness* is divided into pseudo-biblical chapters, ending with a certain ontological crisis as the now-extinguished oil wells are reignited just so there will be something for the firefighters to battle against again.

It was followed by another of Herzog’s most stylised (and best) documentaries, *Glocken aus der Tiefe* (*Bells from the Deep*, 1993), which focuses on the thin line between religious faith and superstition in Siberia, particularly concerning a mythic city that supposedly exists at the bottom of a deep lake. Faith in such beliefs becomes another instance of the collective dreams that exist at the tattered edges of modern civilisation. Herzog admits that much of the film was fabricated, though it still captures the “ecstatic truth” surrounding the different phenomena that believers and pilgrims will embrace out of a sort of desperate faith. Pilgrimages and the strength of faith would be a topic for several of his later documentaries, including *Gott und die Beladenen* (*The Lord and the Laden*, 1999), *Pilgrimage* (2001) and *Rad der Zeit* (*Wheel of Time*, 2003). Filmed in Mexico and Guatemala, *The Lord and the Laden* looks at how the Catholic Church has tried to superimpose its belief system over the Mayan god Maximón, and how worship of the resulting syncretic deity blends faith and superstition in fascinating ways that cause the Church some unease. The short *Pilgrimage* is composed of footage from various pilgrimages around the world, including sequences from *Bells from the Deep* and *The Lord and the Laden*. The resulting film is more of a musical poem than anything else. *Wheel of Time* is a fuller reflection upon pilgrimages and faith, focusing on one in which thousands of Buddhists from around the world converge on a location where the Dalai Lama oversees the construction of an intricately detailed sand mandala representing the Buddhist conception of time and the universe. Though the ceremonies only last several days before the Wheel of Time is wiped away, some pilgrims travel on foot for years (we see one who stops to bow his head to the ground after every step) just to reach the spot. This sort of devotion fascinates Herzog as he tries to capture images of great spirituality on film.

*Die Verwandlung der Welt in Musik* (*The Transformation of the World into Music*, 1994) documents Herzog’s efforts to stage Wagner’s *Lohengrin* at the Bayreuth Opera Festival. He has directed operas (mostly by Wagner) periodically since 1986, including a performance of Schiller’s *Giovanna d’Arco* that he filmed in 1989. The influence of opera is obvious in *Fitzcaraldo*, but the music also makes its way into many of Herzog’s other films. He argues that opera plots are often completely unrealistic, but that the music somehow renders such strange machinations and wild emotions believable. This elevation of an opera’s self-contained world toward a sort of deeper musical truth resonates somewhat with Herzog’s approach to filmmaking, though he claims that film is more about transforming the world into believable images than into the unreal archetypal situations found in opera (43). This sentiment would be put to the test in his documentary *Gesualdo – Tod für fünf Stimmen* (*Gesualdo – Death for Five Voices*, 1995) for which he would take only the loosest historical facts about 16th century composer and prince Carlo Gesualdo, fabricating a bizarre biography about madness and murderous eccentricities. One of Herzog’s most playfully entertaining and even comical documentaries, it features historians and bizarre Gesualdo enthusiasts presenting the composer’s life and work. The resulting film emerges as a delightful ode to Herzog’s skill in stylisation and his love of music – which he cites as a greater inspiration for his films than literary or filmic influences (44).

His next two documentaries, *Flucht aus Laos* (*Little Dieter Needs to Fly*, 1997) and *Julianes Sturz in den Dschungel* (*Wings of Hope*, 1999), each follow the sort of pattern established by *The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner* and *The Dark Glow of the Mountains*, bringing their subjects back to



the scene of an earlier trauma involving flight or defiance of gravity. In the former, German–American Dieter Dengler returns to the jungles of Laos where he had been shot down during his first mission as a pilot in the Vietnam War. The film tells of his harrowing journey of survival in a POW camp, his return to civilisation, and above all, his unquenchable love of flying. The film was critically very well received, though some criticised Herzog for not denouncing the war or taking a political position. In addition, Dengler's story would provide the basis for Herzog's fictional feature *Rescue Dawn* (2006). *Wings of Hope* takes Juliane Köpcke back to the Peruvian jungle where she was the sole survivor of a plane crash that killed her family in 1971. We learn that Herzog himself had been scheduled to be on the same flight, as it was during the filming of *Aguirre*, but by chance he was not. The film follows the circumstances of Juliane's miraculous survival and her struggles of endurance in the jungle. Herzog's next film is *Mein liebster Feind* (*My Best Fiend*, 1999), an enjoyable documentary about his working relationship with Klaus Kinski (who died in 1991), featuring interviews with cast members of various films, various footage of Kinski in action both on- and off-set, and Herzog's remembrances of Kinski's life.



Following *The Lord and the Laden* and *Pilgrimage*, his fictional feature *Invincible* takes loose details about several historical figures from the 1920s and moves them to the period of the Nazi Party's rise to power in early-1930s Germany. Zishe Breitbart (Jouko Ahola) is a Jewish strongman whose ethnic identity is kept hidden while performing as the Aryan hero Siegfried (one of Wagner's operatic heroes) in a popular stage show. Meanwhile, a hypnotist (who keeps his own Jewish ethnicity a secret) (Tim Roth) tries to exploit Hitler's interest in the occult and work his way into a powerful government position. Breitbart begins having premonitions about the fate of the Jewish people and decides to drop his cover to warn them, only to be brought to trial and eventually to die from a small nail scratch. Since *Signs of Life* only uses World War II as a quiet backdrop for its existential themes, *Invincible* is probably Herzog's first film to directly address Nazism, but it does so through familiar Herzogian tropes: the visionary strongman figure is also the social outsider doomed to failure, faith in (occult) superstitions undergirds the Third Reich's will to power, collective madness prevails in a society that destroys the individual, and Breitbart's inability to properly communicate the coming danger puts him at odds with not only the Nazis but his own people. The film garnered favourable reviews, even if it remains one of Herzog's least memorable fictional features.

His interesting but problematic short documentary segment “Ten Thousand Years Older” from the portmanteau film *Ten Minutes Older: The Trumpet* (2002) veers toward an ethnographic look at several members of an indigenous South American group only recently exposed to Western society. He contrasts their earlier mode of life (e.g. attacking foreign expeditions to their area) with their quick but bewildering acclimation to Western influences over the period of about a decade. This film was followed by *Wheel of Time* and *The White Diamond* (2004), the latter of which carries on thematically from *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* and *Wings of Hope*. Here, Herzog follows Dr Graham Dorrington to Guyana, where he attempts to test the eponymous experimental airship. Dorrington's dreams of flight and of a practical return to the golden age of dirigibles inspires him to carry on with a project that has already claimed the life of his documentarian friend. Herzog captures the dangers of Dorrington's flight trials, the pain of returning to a past trauma, and the ecstasy of success as memories of that trauma are overcome.



His greatest critical success in many years, *Grizzly Man* (2005) explores the life and death of environmentalist Timothy Treadwell, who lived illegally in an Alaskan wildlife refuge for many seasons, studying and trying to protect grizzly bears. Much of the film is composed of Treadwell's own footage of himself as a self-styled crusader for the bears; Herzog duly notes his respect for

Treadwell as a fellow filmmaker, especially in his depictions of the natural world. However, Herzog chastises Treadwell's paranoid persecution fantasies (in one scene he comments that Treadwell's furious ravings are like fits he has seen on movie sets, subtly referring to Kinski) and his lack of respect for the dangers of nature. Various friends and officials weigh in on Treadwell's life, and the conclusion is reached that Treadwell's death resulted from following his dream of crossing the boundary between man and bear. Because he wanted to leave humanity altogether and become a bear, Treadwell risked (and finally lost) his life to a natural universe that Herzog describes as full of murder, chaos and death. As with *My Best Fiend*, Herzog refrains from stylising much of the film since its subject is dead and thus unable to cooperate with or respond to Herzog's fabrications.

*The Wild Blue Yonder* is a strange and impressionistic documentary in the same vein as *Fata Morgana* and *Lessons of Darkness*, as if composing the third film in a sort of “science-fiction” trilogy. Divided into

chapters like *Lessons of Darkness*, the film is narrated onscreen by an alien whose species has unsuccessfully attempted to colonise Earth. He tells of how the Earth's environment has become so unlivable that a crew of astronauts in orbit are sent on what may be a suicide mission to discover new planets capable of sustaining life. The astronauts eventually discover the alien's own aquatic planet and begin exploring it, later draining it of its natural resources and making it unlivable as well. As the astronauts return to Earth, they discover that human life has been entirely wiped out, leaving only ruins, and that nature has taken over again, healing the planet's wounds. Herzog fashions this pseudo-documentary narrative from footage of a 1989 space shuttle mission, scenes from a scuba journey beneath the Antarctic ice sheet, unused shots from *The White Diamond* and interviews with an astrophysicist talking about wormholes in space. Although Herzog himself once considered joining NASA just to film new images in space (45), *The Wild Blue Yonder* is intended as a critique of space exploration. He claims that the chances of finding life-sustaining environments in space are so slim (and so far away) that such exploration is a huge waste of time and resources that could be better spent improving our own world (46). If *Grizzly Man*'s Timothy Treadwell went too far in his efforts to protect one species of bear, *The Wild Blue Yonder*'s closing images of nature reclaiming an unpeopled planet Earth suggests Herzog's own environmental warning about the future: the power of nature is not to be trifled with, for the self-sufficient Earth will exist long after humanity has wiped itself out through war, pollution and death. Perhaps Herzog's more "ethnographic" films (and others like *Heart of Glass*) are a part of this anti-humanist viewpoint, since by looking at more supposedly "primitive" cultures, we can see the fragility of our "modern" civilisation, looking simultaneously back to the past and beyond to the future end of human existence. Historical and political contexts do indeed drop away in the face of our species' relatively brief moment in geological time.

Herzog's latest film is *Rescue Dawn*, a fictional feature based on *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*. He has described the film's production as the worst he has seen in many years (47), but such adversity tends to produce great results for Herzog. In his own words, "cinema comes from the country fair and the circus, not from art and academicism." He does not consider his own films to be art, but rather artisanal products akin to poetry. Likewise, he typically ignores or rejects critical analyses of his work, making films without pre-established themes in mind. As critical of high-minded European art cinema as he is of artificial Hollywood pictures (48), it can be difficult to summarise his work without falling into the traps he has laid out for would-be critics. Nevertheless, Herzog remains one of cinema's most fascinating and energetic filmmakers, and his oeuvre contains a number of tropes that shed much light on how he constructs a very personal body of work, blurring the line between his peculiar subjects and his own experience as auteur.

# Endnotes

1. Werner Herzog, *Herzog on Herzog*, Paul Cronin (ed.), Faber and Faber, London, 2002, p. 2. ↑
2. Sometimes chaotic but always fascinating, the stories behind the filming of Herzog's pictures can rival the finished films themselves – as seen in Les Blank's 1982 documentary *Burden of Dreams*, about the tumultuous making of *Fitzcarraldo*. This article will focus primarily upon the finished films, leaving anecdotes about their making to books like the essential *Herzog on Herzog*. However, Herzog admits that while he does not deliberately seek risky or dangerous filming environments, he has observed that people put under extreme pressure will reveal deeper insights about themselves and the human condition. See *Herzog on Herzog*, p. 19. ↑
3. *Herzog on Herzog*, pp. 9, 229–30. ↑
4. Ibid., p. 1. ↑
5. Ibid., p. 11. Herzog typically works very quickly and instinctually, writing scripts in less than a week. ↑
6. Ibid., p. 16. ↑
7. Ibid., p. 40. ↑
8. Ibid., pp. 32–4, 37–8. ↑
9. Ibid., p. 34. ↑
10. Ibid., pp. 152–3. When Eisner fell ill in late 1974, Herzog walked from Munich to Paris to visit her. His travel journal was later published as *Of Walking in Ice*. Apart from detailing the creative virtues of foot travel, it contains various early ideas that would emerge as films like *Stroszek*. ↑
11. Ibid., p. 45. *The Flying Doctors* was also Herzog's first film to premiere on television. Many of his subsequent documentaries have been made for television. ↑
12. Ibid., pp. 47, 61, 81. Herzog's relationship to landscapes as reflecting inner states strongly suggests the Romantic notion of nature as evoking a distinctly *sublime* blend of awe and terror, as in the poetry of William Wordsworth or the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. ↑
13. Ibid., p. 66. ↑
14. Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, 1989, p. 157. ↑
15. *Herzog on Herzog*, pp. 55–56. ↑
16. Ibid., pp. 68–69, 202. ↑
17. Ibid., pp. 239–241, 301. ↑
18. *New German Cinema: A History*, p. 166. ↑
19. *Herzog on Herzog*, pp. 107, 113. The blurred boundaries between Herzog's documentaries and fictions may have something to do with an admitted "communication defect" whereby he takes everything very literally and does not understand irony (p. 26). ↑
20. Thomas Elsaesser with Michael Medel (eds), *The BFI Companion to German Cinema*, British Film Institute, London, 1999, pp. 135–36. ↑



21. *New German Cinema: A History*, pp. 220–21. Elsaesser also notes that heroism in Herzog’s films is more of “a strategy for survival rather than a will to power” (p. 224), but Aguirre seems to be a notable exception. ↑

22. *Herzog on Herzog*, p. 93. ↑

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12, 115. For the part of Kaspar, Herzog cast Bruno S., a street musician who had been beaten and imprisoned for most of his life. Biographical elements of Bruno’s life were also key factors in *Stroszek*, a film that Herzog wrote specifically for him to star in several years later. ↑

24. *New German Cinema: A History*, p. 226. This is especially apropos given that Lotte Eisner often visited the set of *Kaspar Hauser*, inspiring Herzog to carry on with his work. ↑

25. John Sandford, *The New German Cinema*, Oswald Wolff Publishers Ltd., London, 1980, p.57. ↑

26. *Herzog on Herzog*, p. 140. ↑

27. *Ibid.*, p. 144. ↑

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 148, 150. ↑

29. *Ibid.*, p. 169. ↑

30. *Ibid.*, p. 10. ↑

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 177, 188. ↑

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 195, 198–99. ↑

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 190–93. ↑

34. George Paul Csicsery, “*Ballad of the Little Soldier: Werner Herzog in a Political Hall of Mirrors*”, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 2, winter 1985/86, pp. 9, 11–14. ↑

35. Consider, for example his comments in *Burden of Dreams* that the jungle holds “the harmony of overwhelming and collective murder.” However, there are clearly limits to this sort of anthropomorphism, for Herzog criticises Timothy Treadwell in *Grizzly Man* for treating the bears like human companions, whereas Herzog believes the bears should be respected for the natural threat they pose. Herzog’s anthropomorphism therefore seems to extend to treating all-powerful nature with a certain self-abasing humility, but not to making a friend of something so potentially murderous. ↑

36. *Herzog on Herzog*, pp. 206–08. ↑

37. *New German Cinema: A History*, p. 166. ↑

38. *Herzog on Herzog*, p. 212. ↑

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 213–14. ↑

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 214–15. ↑

41. *Ibid.*, p. 223. ↑

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 243, 245–46, 248, 259. ↑

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 259–60. ↑

44. *Ibid.*, p. 137. ↑

45. *Ibid.*, p. 67. ↑

46. According to comments made by Herzog at a special screening of *The Wild Blue Yonder* at the Seattle Art Museum on November 8, 2005. ↑

47. According to a personal conversation with Herzog at the *Wild Blue Yonder* screening noted above. ↑

48. *Herzog on Herzog*, pp. 138–39. For example, he claims that “Jean-Luc Godard is for me intellectual counterfeit money when compared to a good kung fu film, a Fred Astaire picture, or a porno” (p. 138). ↑



Filmography

Films directed by Herzog

*Herakles* (1962) short feature

*Spiel im Sand (Game in the Sand)* (1964) short documentary

*Die beispiellose Verteidigung der Festung Deutschkreuz (The Unprecedented Defense of the Fortress Deutschkreuz)* (1966) short feature

*Lebenszeichen (Signs of Life)* (1968) feature

*Letzte Worte (Last Words)* (1968) short feature

*Massnahmen Gegen Fanatiker (Precautions Against Fanatics)* (1969) short feature

*Die fliegenden Ärzte von Ostafrika (The Flying Doctors of East Africa)* (1969) documentary

*Auch Zwerge haben klein angefangen (Even Dwarfs Started Small)* (1970) feature

*Fata Morgana* (1970) documentary

*Behinderte Zukunft (Handicapped Future)* (1971) documentary



*Land des Schweigens und der Dunkelheit (Land of Silence and Darkness)* (1971) documentary

*Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes (Aguirre, the Wrath of God)* (1972) feature

*Die Grosse Ekstase des Bildschnitzers Steiner (The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner)* (1973) documentary

*Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle (The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser)* (1974) feature

*Herz Aus Glas (Heart of Glass)* (1976) feature

*Mit mir will keiner spielen (No One Will Play With Me)* (1976) short documentary

*How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck* (1976) documentary

*Stroszek* (1976) feature

*La Soufrière* (1977) documentary

*Nosferatu – Phantom der Nacht (Nosferatu the Vampyre)* (1979) feature

*Woyzeck* (1979) feature

*Glaube und Währung (God's Angry Man)* (1980) documentary

*Huie's Predigt (Huie's Sermon)* (1980) documentary

*Fitzcarraldo* (1982) feature

*Ballade vom kleinen Soldaten (Ballad of the Little Soldier)* (1984) documentary

*Gasherbrum – Der leuchtende Berg (The Dark Glow of the Mountains)* (1984) documentary

*Wo die grünen Ameisen träumen (Where the Green Ants Dream)* (1984) feature

*Portrait Werner Herzog* (1986) short documentary

*Cobra Verde* (1987) feature

*Les Gauloises* (1988) short documentary, episode of series *Les Français vus par...*

*Wodaabe – Dei Hirten der Sonne (Wodaabe – Herdsmen of the Sun)* (1989) documentary

*Giovanna d'Arco* (1989) filmed opera

*Echoes aus einem düsteren Reich (Echoes from a Sober Empire)* (1990) documentary

*Das excentrische Privattheater des Maharadjah von Udaipur (The Eccentric Private Theatre of the Maharaja of Udaipur)* (1991) documentary

*Schrei aus Stein (Scream of Stone)* (1991) feature

*Film Lesson* (1991) documentary, eight-part series

*Lektionen in Finsternis (Lessons of Darkness)* (1992) documentary

*Glocken aus der Tiefe (Bells from the Deep)* (1993) documentary

*Die Verwandlung der Welt in Musik (The Transformation of the World into Music)* (1994) documentary

*Gesualdo – Tod für fünf Stimmen (Gesualdo – Death for Five Voices)* (1995) documentary

*Flucht aus Laos (Little Dieter Needs to Fly)* (1997) documentary

*Julianes Sturz in den Dschungel (Wings of Hope)* (1999) documentary

*Mein liebster Feind (My Best Fiend)* (1999) documentary

*Gott and die Beladenen (The Lord and the Laden)* (1999) documentary

*Pilgrimage* (2001) short documentary

*Invincible* (2001) feature

*Ten Thousand Years Older* (2002) short documentary, segment of *Ten Minutes Older: The Trumpet*

*Rad der Zeit (Wheel of Time)* (2003) documentary

*The White Diamond* (2004) documentary

*Grizzly Man* (2005) documentary

*The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005) documentary/feature

*Rescue Dawn* (2006) feature



*Bad Lieutenant* (2009) feature

*My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done* (2009)

*Queen of the Desert* (2015)

*Salt and Fire* (2016)

**Other Films Featuring Herzog**

*Was ich bin, sind meine Filme (I Am My Films)* (Erwin Keusch & Christian Weisenborn, 1979) documentary

*Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe* (Les Blank, 1980) short documentary

*Burden of Dreams* (Les Blank, 1982) documentary

*Location Africa* (Steff Gruber, 1988) documentary

*Werner Herzog Essay* (Peter Buchka, 1988) documentary

*julien donkey-boy* (Harmony Korine, 1999) feature, as actor

*The Ball is a Scumbag* (Christian Weisenborn & Rudolph Herzog, 2000) documentary

*Incident at Loch Ness* (Zak Penn, 2004) mockumentary feature, as actor/producer

*Meeting With Werner Herzog* (2004) documentary

*Grizzly Man* (2005) documentary

*Walking to Werner* (Linas Phillips, 2006) documentary

*Encounters at the End of the World* (2007) documentary

*La Bohème* (2009) documentary short

*Happy People: A Year in the Taiga* (2010) documentary

*Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010) documentary

*Ode to the Dawn of Man* (2011) documentary short

*Into the Abyss* (2011) documentary

*The Killers: Unstaged* (2012) video

*From One Second to the Next* (2013) documentary short

*On Death Row* (2012-13) Television series documentary

*Lo and Behold, Reveries of the Connected World* (2016) documentary

*Into the Inferno* (2016) documentary



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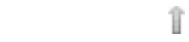
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Articles in *Senses of Cinema*

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Web Resources

[Werner Herzog Filmproduktion](#)  
Official website, includes news, comprehensive filmography and bibliography, ordering information, links to film-specific websites, etc.

[BBC Storyville: Werner Herzog Q&A](#)  
Two BBC Four interviews with Herzog from February 2003, including a discussion about *Wheel of Time*.

[The Trail of Werner Herzog](#)  
An *Offscreen* interview with Herzog from 2003, conducted in Montreal.

[Weblinks / Film / Showroom / Werner Herzog](#)  
A page containing miscellaneous links to Herzog interviews, articles, film clips, etc.

[An adaptation with fangs](#)  
Article by Garrett Chaffin-Quiray for *Kinoeye* on Herzog's *Nosferatu*.

[The Enigma of Werner Herzog](#)  
Short summary of Herzog's work by Lyall Bush.

[Film Directors – Articles on the Internet](#)  
Several articles can be found here



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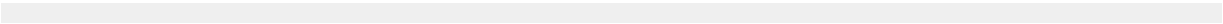
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