**Herzog, Werner (b. 5 September 1942 - )**

Werner Herzog is a filmmaker widely considered one of the greatest figures of the New German Cinema. Early in his career, he also established his reputation as an extreme personality. He became notorious for driving himself, his actors and his crews to dangerous lengths in challenging environments.

Herzog was born in Munich in September 1942. Having recognized his calling as a filmmaker by the age of fourteen, he stole a 35 mm camera from the Munich Film School. After extensive travels, and a brief stint working for a radio station in Pittsburgh, Herzog returned to study at the University of Munich. His first feature, *Lebenszeichen* (*Signs of Life*), won a Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 1968. Adapted from an early nineteenth century novella by Ludwig Achim von Arnim, *Signs of Life* showed a wounded soldier who has been sent to the Greek island of Kos to recuperate, gradually losing his mind.

Herzog would continue to draw on the German Romantic heritage, both thematically and stylistically, even referring to himself as part of a *Dichterpriestertum*—a priesthood of poets. Lone figures on the brink of vision or madness remained one of his recurring themes. Herzog based *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle* (*The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, 1974) and *Herz aus Glas* (*Heart of Glass*, 1976) on legends from eighteenth and nineteenth century Bavaria; he adapted *Woyzeck* (1979) from the play of that name by Georg Büchner. *Nosferatu* (1979), also set in nineteenth century Wismar and Transylvania, remade F. W. Murnau’s 1922 classic of that title.

In interviews and essays, Herzog has repeatedly repudiated neorealism as a “cinema of bookkeepers” or “accountants,” placing his own work in the tradition of the sublime. Two films shot on location in the Amazon helped establish his international reputation. *Aguirre: der Zorn Gottes* (*Aguirre: The Wrath of God*, 1972), which depicted the voyage of a crazed conquistador searching for El Dorado, won a César award.  *Fitzcarraldo*(1982), about a would-be rubber baron determined to haul a steamship over a mountain, earned Herzog the Palm for Best Director at Cannes. Both have been read as allegories of Germany’s fate under Hitler. They also made a legend of the director’s violently combative but highly productive relationship with star Klaus Kinski, which Herzog documented in *Mein Liebster Feind* (*My Best Fiend*, 1999).

       Herzog outlived the New German Cinema. Since the mid-1980s he has established a kind of second career, primarily making documentaries. Herzog, however, rejects the distinction between fiction and nonfiction filmmaking, and continues to move fluidly between these genres, experimenting with re-enactments, scripted dialogue, and voiceovers. Many of his documentaries, like *Grizzly Man*(2005) and *Encounters at the End of the World* (2008), explore extreme natural settings and eccentric characters similar to those in his fiction features. He shot and released his 2010 documentary about the Chauvet cave paintings, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, in 3D.

Since the mid-1980s Herzog has also directed many opera productions.

**Further reading**

Corrigan, T. (ed.) (2013) *The Films of Werner Herzog: Between Mirage and History*. London: Routledge.

Cronin, P. (ed.) (2002) *Herzog on Herzog,* London: Faber and Faber.

Prager, B. (ed.) (2012) *A Companion to Werner Herzog,* Oxford: Wiley.

Prager, B. (2007) *The Cinema of Werner Herzog: Aesthetic Ecstasy and Truth*, London: Wallflower Press.

List of works:

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

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

*Herz aus Glas* (*Heart of Glass*) (1976)

*Woyzeck* (1979)

*Nosferatu* (1979)

*Aguirre: der Zorn Gottes* (*Aguirre: The Wrath of God*) (1972)

*Fitzcarraldo*(1982)

*Mein Liebster Feind* (*My Best Fiend*)(1999)

*Grizzly Man* (2005)

*Encounters at the End of the World* (2008)

Paratextual materials:

Early German language documentary *Massnahmen gegen Fanatiker* (*Measures Against Fanatics*) (1969) [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AZhl9V1j_4>].

Inteview with Pico Iyer at UC Santa Barbara [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Px4cPMMn2HU]

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