



Werner Herzog

Few directors have challenged the limits of German and international art house cinema over the last few decades more consistently than Werner Herzog. Whether hauling boats through the Amazon rainforest, tracking deadly bears in Alaska, or mapping the devastation of natural or human-made disasters across the globe—Herzog’s films and protagonists are known for their uncompromising gestures, their unwavering exploration of different ways of being in the world, their unpredictable mingling of the ecstatic, the visionary, the bizarre, and the aesthetic. Combining synchronous with asynchronous elements, this online seminar will explore the development of Herzog’s work from the late 1960s to the present. We will study Herzog’s seminal feature films, his unique contributions to the documentary and essay film genre, as much as his work for opera and installation art. Additionally, we will investigate Herzog’s status as an icon of indie filmmaking and examine the extent to which his films, amid an ever-shifting landscape of moving image art, continue to redefine what we might want to understand as art cinema.

All readings and discussions in English.

German 5890 | CMA 3892

Thursdays 4:00-6:30 pm

Instructor: Lutz Koepnick

For questions please contact: lutz.koepnick@vanderbilt.edu

Fall 2020

Films to be discussed include:

- Fata Morgana (1971)
- Aguirre (1972)
- Heart of Glass (1976)
- Nosferatu (1979)
- Fitzcarraldo (1982)
- Lessons of Darkness (1992)
- Little Dieter Needs to Fly (1997)
- My Best Fiend (1997)
- Grizzly Man (2005)
- Encounters at the End of the World (2007)
- Cave of Forgotten Dreams (2010)
- Family Romance LLC (2019)

and

- Plastic Bag (2009)
- Jack Reacher (2012)

No prerequisites.
All students welcome.



**VANDERBILT
UNIVERSITY**

Werner Herzog



Class Time	Thursdays: 4:00 – 6:30 pm (actual meeting time within this time window might vary each week)
Room	ONLINE (synchronous and asynchronous)
Instructor	Lutz Koepnick
Email	lutz.koepnick@vanderbilt.edu
Telephone	615.875.9065
Office	Furman 121A
Office Hours	W 1-3, Th 2-3 Zoom Meeting ID: 956 3939 8564 Passcode: 086110
TA	Kate Schaller (katherine.m.schaller@vanderbilt.edu) Office Hours: M 1-2 pm; T 9-10am Zoom Meeting ID: 919 9669 5564 Passcode: 566132

COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore the work of Werner Herzog and engage with the artistic, philosophical, social, and political dynamics that have driven his career as a director over the last six decades.
- Students will gain a better understanding of the role of art cinema in contemporary moving image culture.
- Students will approach the work of an individual filmmaker—a so-called auteur—to investigate the diversity of film cultures outside of the Hollywood model.
- Students will learn how to articulate their response to challenging films with the help of robust analytical and theoretical frameworks.
- Students will learn how to make use of scholarship to evaluate individual films and rethink their own initial responses.
- Students will probe their own role as film spectators, including their sense of patience, temporal commitment, and open-mindedness as they face films that place considerable demands on their viewers.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

- 1 Final Paper (6-8 pages) or Project: 20% (due December 10, 12 noon)
- 1 Film Introduction: 15%
- 1 Group Project: 10% (due November 5, 2020)
- Reading responses: 15% (due every week)
- Film responses: 20% (due every week)
- Group Work: 10%
- General attendance and participation: 15%

REQUIRED TEXTS

Materials marked “ONLINE” in the course schedule will be made available electronically through Brightspace.

All other books are available for purchase at the Vanderbilt University Bookstore.

- Eric Ames, *Ferocious Reality* (ISBN: 9780816677641)
- Eric Ames, *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (ISBN: 9781844577538)
- Brad Prager, *The Cinema of Werner Herzog* (ISBN: 9781905674176)
- Brad Prager, *Nosferatu* (ISBN: 9781844576531)
- Lutz Koepnick, *Fitzcarraldo* (ISBN: 9781640140363)

ACTIVITIES & ASSIGNMENTS

A note on deadlines and workflow: Since this class will be taught online, we have prepared all kinds of work modules on Brightspace to help you prepare, complement, and reflect on what we do during our weekly zoom meetings. In many cases the zoom meeting will be shorter than posted on YES simply because some work, whether group or individual, will take place asynchronously and on your own terms.

Please be aware of the sequencing of work modules each week. You will be asked to carry out various activities before our zoom meeting and some after them. We will remind you of deadlines for different module components each week, but it is important that you stick to these deadlines and the workflow they reflect in order to learn effectively. All activities associated with a weekly class module will need to be completed by Friday 2pm of a week in question.

Film Introduction: Your task is to introduce the film in question. Think of your audience as people generally interested in “art” cinema, but with no real knowledge about the film they are about to see. You don’t want to give away too much, but you do want to identify some of the film's main themes or accomplishments and perhaps some facts about the production background. If you wish, find a trailer for the film and re-record the soundtrack with your voice introducing the film in general. If that's too complicated, simply make a "talking head" recording. Post your video here no later than 48 hours before our weekly meeting (i.e., by Tuesday, 4 pm) . It should not be longer than 3 minutes. Post your video on: <https://flipgrid.com/wernerherzog2020>

Feedback: You will be asked to provide anonymous feedback to other students’ film introduction each week. Please make it as useful as possible for your peers. Forms will be provided each week.

Weekly Film Response: Unless specified otherwise, film responses reflect on your viewing of assigned films within two hours of you viewing the film. Share some thoughts about your viewing experience: What did you like? What did you dislike? What did you consider remarkable scenes? Or shots the filmmaker should not have included? Your response does not need to be deeply analytical; it can formulate some "gut reactions." But please write in complete sentences. You may also respond to other responses. In some instances we use film responses to wrap up our discussion of a particular film or topic; or to reflect about some very specific aspects of a given film. Special instructions will be given in that case. Please follow them carefully. Typically due Thursdays at 2pm.

Weekly Reading Responses: Each week you will be asked to respond to some of our assigned readings. Good responses are about 200-300 words in length. Use the space to reflect about the reading, raise questions or concerns you might have. What was your main take away? In certain weeks, you’ll be asked to respond to more specific prompts. Please follow them carefully. You are encourage to respond to other people’s responses as well. Typically due Thursdays at 3pm.

Groupwork: We will divide the class into 4-5 subgroups early in the semester in preparation for a number of assignments and discussions throughout the semester that are meant to be carried out in smaller settings. While the whole class of course will still meet every week, discuss films and texts, and listen to various mini-lectures, subgroups will convene in specific weeks either during class time or outside class time to carry out certain tasks and assignments. Groups may use zoom to connect with each other at agreed times to work on these special tasks. In certain weeks such meeting might take place during official class time, at others either before or after, following our instructions. We will take students’ time-zone into consideration when forming the groups to ensure you all can work together effectively.

Final Paper or Project: Options for final papers and projects will be posted on November 5, 2020. This will involve a number of prompts for 6-8 page essays or various possible video projects.

COURSE POLICIES

ZOOM PROTOCOL: Please mute your mic when not speaking. Please keep your camera on during class time even if you do not actively contribute to class discussion. Use a virtual background if your physical setting calls for this.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Students are bound by the University rules on academic integrity in all aspects of this course. All references to ideas and texts other than the students' own must be so indicated through appropriate footnotes, whether the source is a book, an online site, the professor, etc. All students are responsible for following the rules outlined at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/studentaccountability/>. I will not tolerate plagiarism or other violations of Vanderbilt's Honor System.

READINGS: Readings should be completed as noted in the course schedule. Not everything in the reading will be covered in class and some readings can be difficult. Thus it is important that you read closely and take notes. You are responsible for the content in the readings even when the material does not come up explicitly in class. If you do not understand elements of the reading, you should feel free to ask questions in class or in office hours, or use the reading response discussions to ask your question

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: The Cinema and Media Arts Program is committed to making educational opportunities available to all students. In order for its faculty members to properly address the needs of students who have disabilities, it is necessary that those students approach their instructors as soon as the semester starts, preferably on the first day of class. They should bring an official letter from the Opportunity Development Center (2-4705) explaining their specific needs so that their instructors are aware of them early on and can make the appropriate arrangements.

WARNING: We will be watching films that may contain graphic violence and other emotionally disturbing themes, and that deal with adult themes. If you think this content will offend or disturb you, you should reconsider your enrollment in this class. Please feel free to talk to me if you have questions or concerns.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS: Students who expect to miss classes, examinations, or any other assignment as a consequence of their religious observance should provide me with notice of the dates of religious holidays on which they will be absent no later than September 3, 2020.

OFFICE HOURS: I am happy to talk to you during scheduled zoom office hours (and by appointment) about the material in this class.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (8/27/20)

Introduction

Reading: "The Minnesota Declaration" (1999)

In-class screening:

On the Ecstasy of Ski-Flying (2007)

Encounters at the End of the World (2007) (sel)

Burden of Dreams (1982) (sel)

Week 2 (9/3/20)

Ecstatic Lives I

Film: *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972)

Reading: Ames, *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*

Prager, *The Cinema of Werner Herzog* (1-19)

Week 3 (9/10/20)

Ecstatic Lives II

Film: *Fitzcarraldo* (1982)

Reading: Prager, *The Cinema of Werner Herzog* (20-48)

Koepnick, *Fitzcarraldo*

Interviews with Werner Herzog (12-17, 59-81) [ONLINE]

Week 4 (9/17/20)

Ecstatic Lives III

Films: *Cobra Verde* (1987)

My Best Fiend (1999)

Reading: Prager, *The Cinema of Werner Herzog* (171-197)

Interviews with Werner Herzog (147-154) [ONLINE]

A Companion to Werner Herzog (301-326) [ONLINE]

Week 5 (9/24/20)

Traumatic Histories I

- Films: *La Soufriere* (1977)
Lessons of Darkness (1992)
- Reading: *Interviews with Werner Herzog* (109-114) [ONLINE]
A Companion to Werner Herzog (80-98) [ONLINE]
Ames, *Ferocious Reality* (49-80)

Week 6 (10/1/20)

Traumatic Histories II

- Film: *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1998)
- Reading: Prager, *The Cinema of Werner Herzog* (142-170)
Ames, *Ferocious Reality* (181-214)

Week 7 (10/8/20)

Traumatic Histories III

- Film: *Grizzly Man* (2005)
- Reading: Ames, *Ferocious Reality* (215-268)

Mid-term Survey

Week 8 (10/15/20)

Interlude

- Film: *Family Romance LLC*
- Reading: J.A. Baker, *The Peregrine* [ONLINE]

Week 9 (10/22/20)

Uncanny Encounters I

- Film: *Heart of Glass* (1976)
Fata Morgana (1971)
- Reading: Prager, *The Cinema of Werner Herzog* (49-119)
Interviews with Werner Herzog (42-46) [ONLINE]

Week 10 (10/29/20)

Uncanny Encounters II

- Film: *Nosferatu* (1979)
- Reading: Prager, *Nosferatu*

Week 11 (11/5/20)

Ecstatic Truths I

Film: *The White Diamond* (2004)

Reading: *A Companion to Werner Herzog* (510-524) [ONLINE]
Ames, Ferocious Reality (1-16)

Week 12 (11/12/20)

Ecstatic Truths II

Film: *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2011)

Reading: *Interviews with Werner Herzog* (172-180) [ONLINE]
Ames, Ferocious Reality (259-269)

Week 13 (11/19/20)

Ecstatic Truths III

Film: *Lo and Behold* (2016)

Week 14 (11/19/20)

No Class

Week 15 (12/3/20)

After Herzog

Film: *Plastic Bag* (2009, dir. Ramin Bahrani)

Jack Reacher (2012, dir. Christopher McQuarrie)

Reading: Prager, *The Cinema of Werner Herzog* (198-202)
A Companion to Werner Herzog (35-57) [ONLINE]

“After Herzog” Survey