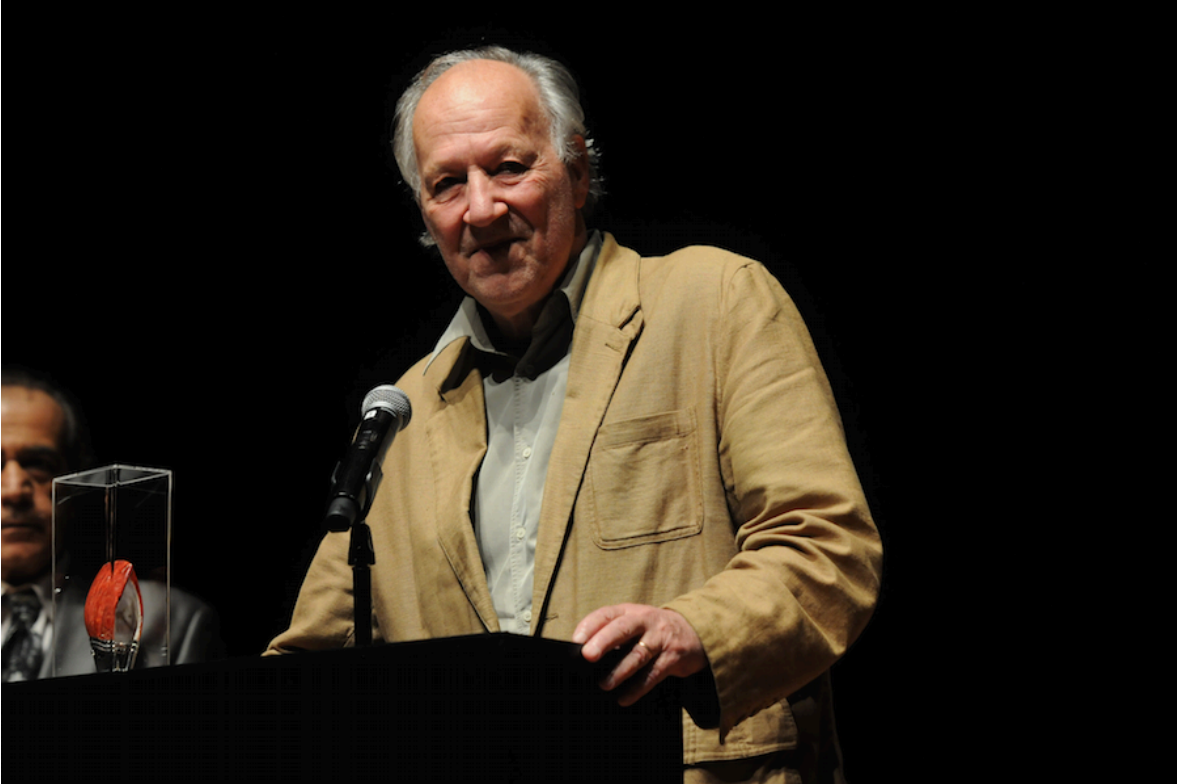


## WERNER HERZOG ACCORDING TO JOSÉ KOEHLIN



Werner Herzog at Gran Teatro Nacional, Lima 2015 (Photo: Javier Zapata)

Werner and I met by the end of 1971, when he arrived to Lima to present his first films at Champagnat High School. By that time he had created experimental and profound works such as *Even the Dwarfs Started Small* and *Fata Morgana*, aiming to grasp the unfathomable aspects of human existence. Werner had received a grant from a German TV station to make a film on Lope de Aguirre, the mad Conquistador that betrayed the Spanish Royal Crown and led an expedition in search of El Dorado.

After attending the screenings and starting our friendship, I convinced him to reach a wider audience with his first feature film. My role as co-producer was decided with a verbal agreement and a hand shake – no budget, no paperwork nor any form of restriction, in order to let Werner work with complete freedom. *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972)<sup>1</sup> was

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released a year later and it played in Parisian theaters for three years in a row, contributing to the development of tourism in Peru. Nowadays it is considered one of the best films of all time.



Werner Herzog, Lima 1971

For me, cinema is the most effective way to present a destination. It occurred with Acapulco during the 1960's, when it was promoted by film as a paradisiacal beach. Tourism in many other destinations in Europe was encouraged this way. Making *Aguirre* helped portraying the true character of Machu Picchu, particularly with the arresting take that opens the film, in which Incas and Conquistadores descend like a row of ants from the cloudy heights of Wayna Picchu Mountain, before immersing themselves into those "fever dreams" concealed in the Peruvian Amazon.

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*Aguirre, the Wrath of God (1972)*

In 1978, aiming to recover the investment for *Aguirre*, I travelled to Germany to meet with Werner and proposed him to produce another feature film in the jungle. I told him about Carlos Fermín Fitzcarrald, Peru's great geographic hero. Fitzcarrald was the first to cross through the 'Fitzcarrald Isthmus'. He integrated Madre de Dios to the Peruvian economy with the Amazon Rubber Boom, and defended the country from foreign migrants. He deserved a 20<sup>th</sup> Century monument, a film to show his determination.

One detail of this story fascinated Werner, as he recalls in the foreword for his book *Conquest of the Useless*: "A vision had seized hold of me, like the demented fury of a hound that has sunk its teeth into the leg of a deer carcass and is shaking and tugging at the downed game so frantically that the hunter gives up trying to calm him. It was the vision of a large steamship scaling a hill under its own steam, working its way up a steep slope in the jungle." Werner intertwined this epic image with the story of an opera fanatic determined to bring Caruso to the

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Amazon, and to avoid any contingencies with name rights we named it *Fitzcarraldo* (1982)<sup>2</sup>.

Making *Aguirre* and *Fitzcarraldo* were true adventures and unrepeatable achievements. Both were filmed in extremely harsh conditions in the rainforest, I believe no other film will be made under those circumstances. Werner and I faced limit situations and, under these conditions, both of us became more resilient towards adversity. Experience taught us that there is always an alternate way of working, living and solving problems to get through. There were very difficult moments that served us for becoming true friends.

*Fitzcarraldo* is one of the main modern-day ethnographic documents, which presents Maschos, Piros, Campas, Aguarunas and other native communities. Their participation is documented by other film I produced, *Burden of Dreams* (1982)<sup>3</sup>, Les Blank's documentary on the four-year making of *Fitzcarraldo*. It depicts the conditions endured by local communities to protect their land, cultures and traditions from foreign influence.



Burden of Dreams (1982)

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We initially met with Mario Vargas Llosa and proposed him to write the screenplay for *Fitzcarraldo*, but he was still writing *The War of the End of the World*. Jack Nicholson was the first choice to play 'Fitzcarraldo'. After joining Werner in the making of *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979), we visited Nicholson in the set where he was filming Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*. Due to schedules, Jason Robards was casted as the main character and Mick Jagger in the role of Wilbur. Robards did not endure the virgin rainforest and left the production due to an illness. Mick stayed many days in the Lima Country Club Hotel, waiting for the production to start again. He was already committed to a world tour and he was not able to continue filming. Under these state of affairs the legendary Klaus Kinski got the lead role, while Claudia Cardinale played his paramour Molly.



Fitzcarraldo (1982)

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Werner never had health problems while shooting, as he is a strong and knowledgeable soldier. He made a lot of research before working in Peru, as he always does for pre-production. He is blessed with the virtue of envisioning authenticity in people and environments, allowing true life to enter his films. He has a very strong will and does not accept any adverse situation to stop his work.

We frequently feed our friendship. After completing *Fitzcarraldo*, Werner has returned to Peru on many occasions. In front of a raging river in Machu Picchu he filmed some scenes for *My Best Fiend* (1999), an intimate portrait of his relationship with the unpredictable Klaus Kinski. He has also made *Wings of Hope* (2000), revisiting with survivor Juliane Koepcke the LANSA 508 plane crash, which Werner almost boarded during the making of *Aguirre*; and *My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done?* (2010), starring Michael Shannon in an existential search with unexpected consequences.

The Lima Film Festival is one of the most popular cultural events in this country. The tribute Werner was honored with at Gran Teatro Nacional and a retrospective of his work are a much deserved acknowledgement for everything he has done for Peru. He is one of the true artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: many years ago Truffaut named him “the most important film director alive” and I believe he still is.

The experience of producing *Aguirre* led me in 1975 to the foundation of Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica (Madre de Dios), which would soon become Peru’s first land concession with tourism purposes. Since then we have pursued our dreams with Inkaterra, producing scientific research to determine how to conserve biodiversity via ecotourism and sustainable development, providing a source of income to local communities.

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In 2012, Mick Jagger visited the Inkaterra properties along with his family, to share with his son Lucas his experiences on the making of *Fitzcarraldo*. This time Werner visited the Cusco region with his wife Lena – a brilliant photographer with a unique sensibility – to celebrate Inkaterra’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. As he declared, it has been a celebration of our friendship, and I hope it will awake in Werner the desire to film in Peru once again.

<sup>1</sup> Aguirre, The Wrath of God - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJDuicFyJPg>

<sup>2</sup> Fitzcarraldo - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F53yUsgVuL0>

<sup>3</sup> Burden of Dreams - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYOYi9WLLVU>