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Herzog's 'ecstatic truth' shines in film retrospective

By [Scott Garceau](#) (The Philippine Star) | Updated May 14, 2017 - 12:00am



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Klaus Kinski puts the bite on Isabelle Adjani in *Nosferatu*, showing tonight, 6 p.m., at Goethe Institute's "Werner Herzog Retrospective."

MANILA, Philippines - While filming *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* in the Peruvian forests in 1972, German director Werner Herzog got into such heated encounters with star Klaus Kinski that he ended up threatening to shoot the actor with a gun if he walked off the set. (The film's look and tone — and perhaps the frenzy on set — were later a major inspiration for Francis Ford Coppola while filming *Apocalypse Now*.)

For 1976's *Heart of Glass*, Herzog hypnotized his cast (with their consent, of course). Most of them — non-actors, local farmers and the like — amble through that dreamy film — a tale of a remote town where the chief glassblower dies, taking his secrets along with him and driving the rest of the townspeople to madness — reciting their lines like sleepwalkers, projecting an otherworldly distance.

Madness is never far away in Herzog's films, because the human psyche is often shown as battered by excessive forces, often natural, sometimes supernatural. For the Goethe Institute's extensive retrospective on Herzog (ongoing until June 4, and held Saturday and Sunday nights, 6 p.m. at FDCP Cinematheque Manila, 855 Kalaw Avenue), expect an overview of a career spent exploring "ecstatic truth," a sort of heightened reality shown in films like *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), *Nosferatu* (1978) and sci-fi fable *The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005).

Whether you follow Herzog's films along a straight line leading from 1970's *Even Dwarfs Started Small*, or whether you crash into their strangeness through the reimagined *Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans* (with a typically over the top Nicholas Cage), *Rescue Dawn* (with Christian Bale on the edge as an imprisoned US soldier during the Vietnam War), or his many envelope-pushing documentaries (like 2005's *Grizzly Man* about an ill-fated Alaskan bear enthusiast, or 2007's *Encounters at the End of the World*, about what long stretches of living in Antarctica does to the human psyche), you will always be subtly changed by his point of view.

Herzog rarely parachutes into and out of his subjects; he gets enmeshed, entangled. "Tourism is sin, travel on foot virtue," he writes in his "Minnesota Manifesto." Considered one of the architects of the New German Cinema (along with Wim Wenders and Rainer Werner Fassbinder), he has little patience for Cinema Verité, likening those who simply point and shoot "the truth" to "tourists who take pictures amid ancient ruins of facts." He prefers allowing his subjects to simmer toward the truth, or else bring them to a boil, as he reportedly did in baiting Kinski's tantrums while filming *Aguirre*.

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Total Carbohydrate 12g	24%
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Sunday, May 14: *Nosferatu*, *Phantom of the Night* (1978)

Saturday, May 20: *Cobra Verde* (1987)

Sunday, May 21: *The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005)

Saturday, May 27: *Bells from the Deep* (1993)

Sunday, May 28: *Woyzeck* (1997)

Saturday, June 3: *Queen of the Desert* (2015)

Sunday, June 4: *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1970).

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Fitzcarraldo (1982)

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