



**WERNER HERZOG IN CONVERSATION WITH PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER**

**WAS THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY A MISTAKE?**

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**NATHANIEL KAHN:** Hello. Okay, thank you for coming to the New York Public Library—and I have a couple of brief—I’m Nathaniel Kahn and I have a couple of—can everybody hear back there? A couple of brief notes, first of all thank you very much for joining us tonight. And this is a promotional offer—we’re happy to offer each person who signs up on our e-mail list, one free ticket to a LIVE from the New York Public Library program in the Spring 07 season. Just to give you a little preview of the coming events. On March 7<sup>th</sup>, Paul has a conversation with William T. Vollmann and it’s called “Are You Poor?” and the answer for all of us is probably yes. March 10<sup>th</sup>, Mira Nair and Jhumpa Lahiri, March 26<sup>th</sup>, Clive James in conversation with Paul Holdengräber, and that’s called “Cultural Amnesia.” And lastly, we encourage you to become a Friend of the library and support these wonderful events, and

they are wonderful, at LIVE from the New York Public Library, and you can sign up at the Friends table.

This is an enormous honor for me to introduce Werner Herzog, who needs no introduction from me, but when Paul asked me to introduce him, of course I said yes—how can you not say yes to introducing your hero?—even if it is a little like asking the ant to introduce the elephant. There are lots of things I could tell you about. I could tell you about the fact that Herzog’s made over sixty films and he speaks many languages. I could tell you about how Herzog directs not only films but also operas. I could tell you about how he’s been to every continent on the earth—he just came back from Antarctica. I could tell you how he’s eaten his shoe, or walked five hundred miles in protest of death or how, recently, he was shot during an interview, but kept going, saying, “I am not afraid.”(laughter)

But you could read all this in books. I am not a film critic or a film historian. I’m only a filmmaker, so I think it best just to say a little bit about what Herzog means to me. When I was in college, we had film societies, projecting 16mm prints on various walls around campus, and it was magic. It was on those walls that my friends and I discovered Werner Herzog. His movies blew us away—*Nosferatu*, *Aguirre*, *Every Man for Himself and God Against All*, known somewhat unfortunately here as *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, *Land of Silence and Darkness*, *La Soufrière*, *Heart of Glass*, *The Great Ecstasy of the Woodcarver Steiner*, and *Fitzcarraldo*. The titles alone still give me a chill. We *inhaled* his movies. We got *drunk* on them. We quoted them endlessly and they were fun to quote, especially when they were narrated by Werner himself. I had a friend who constantly justified his terrible behavior by adapting a line from *La Soufrière*—“I only survive because I am the baddest guy in town.” (laughter) Herzog’s movies were different from anyone else’s. They captured our imagination. They held us prisoner. They

made us question everything we'd been taught. They made us want to be brave. They made us see the world as if we were aliens visiting this planet for the very first time. They made us want to be filmmakers.

I ran through the Herzog films I saw then, and the ones I've seen since then, in my mind and discovered something extraordinary. Every one has made a lasting impression, an image or a scene or a feeling, a splinter in my mind. I don't mean a story—stories often fade and blend together over time—I mean a splinter, something you just can't get out. Something that now shapes the way I see the world. For me there's only one word for this phenomenon, and that is “cinema.” Cinema is Herzog. Herzog is cinema.

A few of those images, and there are so many, I'll run through them quickly. They just come to mind and they kept pouring out. From *Aguirre* the very beginning, a huge vista of a mountainside in the Amazon, an establishing shot, you'd think, but the shot goes on a long time, so long that you wonder if something may have gone wrong in the projection booth, and then you see it: A line of people like ants winding their way through the landscape. This is not an establishing shot at all. It is suddenly about all of humanity, about nature and human enterprise, about the insignificance of human endeavor.

From *La Soufrière*, a traffic light changing from red to green and back again on a deserted street—that's all it is, a traffic light, a single shot, yet it is a more powerful evocation of the apocalypse and the collapse of our orderly world than any number of disaster films with a bigger budget for coffee and doughnuts than this entire film.

From *Kaspar Hauser* the hilarious and beautiful scene about the two villages, one of liars and the other of truth tellers. You have only one question to tell which village a certain person comes from. Of course the philosopher has a very logical answer to the question, but Kaspar, the man who's only recently emerged from the dungeon in which he grew up, has a much better question: Just ask the man if he's a tree frog. If he's truthful, he'll say no. If he's a liar, he will say yes. Such a scene. Bruno S.'s acting is unforgettable. That face. All of Herzog's faces.

From the *Great Ecstasy of the Woodcarver Steiner*, the whole darn movie. Steiner is a ski jumper, perhaps the greatest who's ever lived, and I just learned tonight that Herzog himself was a ski jumper. He jumped so far, they'd have to make him start further down the slope because he'll go past the landing zone. We've all seen ski jumping, sure, it's in every Winter Olympics, but this is ski jumping as ecstasy. Steiner is different. He does not ski jump, he ski flies. This is a Herzog man, a Herzog hero. A man who must fly even though this makes him the loneliest man on earth.

From the magnificent *Grizzly Man*, think about the genius of this film. He took another man's footage and made something utterly transcendent. I think of that shot on the hillside, an accidental shot, the camera was left on and captured the grass blowing in the breeze. The shot holds a long time, and then Herzog's voice comes in. He tells us that this is cinema, it is more cinema than all those Hollywood movies that get shoveled down our gullets, and he is right. I will never see a hillside in the breeze the same way again.

Finally, the scene in *My Best Fiend* when the butterflies land on Klaus Kinski. It seems like a stroke of luck, but such things happen again and again in Herzog's movies. How does he do it? I can only

conclude that it's something about the very being, his way—about *his* very being, his way of engaging the whole world with his body and soul that *makes* these things happen. He's a director of nature itself. Nature obeys his cinematic will. Several years ago, I was in California opening my film *My Architect* and I had the honor of spending an evening with Werner and his talented, beautiful wife Lena. She told a fantastic story about how the two of them are on a plane and they encounter terrible turbulence. She turns to Werner for comfort. He says, "Don't worry, Lena, one way or the other, the plane will come down." **(laughter)** And it's true. One way or another the plane comes down, and our life is over. But Herzog's cinema will last forever. "Wake up," he says, "look around you." Don't be the little man at the end of *Kaspar Hauser* who tries to explain everything and understands nothing. Fly like Steiner. Live. Werner Herzog.

**(applause)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Thank you so much for accepting this invitation, Werner, it's wonderful to have you here. Werner Herzog and Fred Astaire, **(laughter)** I mean, who would have thought of the connection? Is there a connection?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, there's quite a few connections. Number one, I love Fred Astaire movies. I think some of his movies are the best that Hollywood has produced among other great movies. Most of what Hollywood does is not my cup of tea.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Really?

**(laughter)**

**WERNER HERZOG:** But here I also wanted to show this clip, which I like a lot. It gives such a strange, completely invented aspect of New York City. You cannot get further away from the realities of this city **(laughter)** when you see the—don't monkey with Broadway—and that's a wonder, that's a miracle of cinema that you live in collective dreams, that you live through ecstasies, you live through images that are only images of collective dreams, and here in this Fred Astaire and in many other Fred Astaire movies you have this kind of lightness of vision which I like and you have something very, very much cinematic. Movie movies.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Say something more about “movie movies.” I know you've said that Fred Astaire for you is essential filmmaking, the way kung-fu movies are or porno movies.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Porno movies' movement, and do not misunderstand me, but there's something very essential about pornographic films because they have moved technology to quite a degree. For example, videos were pushed heavily by the existence of pornography on film, and that created a whole new aspect in technology, and it created some good sort of things that followed suit. But the driving force, I believe, for videos was pornography, so we should not underrate it completely, and dismiss it as something which shouldn't be on the screen. Of course pornography is a more private thing and people watch it in seedy motels, a sort of motel-room ugliness.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** But sometimes they're much better than movies, other movies.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Much better than pretentious movies, these artsy-fartsy films that I just can't take any longer, so I—

**(laughter)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** You switch to pornography.

**WERNER HERZOG:** I switch to Anna Nicole Smith, I switch to Wrestlemania. **(laughter)** Yes, because, I believe, Paul, that that's one of my dictums. The poet must not avert his eyes. You do not live in a ivory tower, you'd better participate physically, or if you can't—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Say something more about that, because “the poet does not avert his eyes,” I mean it sounds like something that Hölderlin might have written.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Well, yes, Hölderlin, whom I adore and who is probably the greatest of all German poets, yes, but he was involved in a dangerous way, so deeply involved in the world that he lost his mind over it, he became insane and in his language goes to the very very borderlines, the very borderlines of the German language, my own language. So, yes, sometimes danger's in it to get into the world and I believe he became insane after he traveled on foot from Bordeaux to Frankfurt and he arrived in Germany raving mad and unfortunately spent his last thirty-five or so years of his life locked up in a tower and living with a family of a carpenter, I think, in the city of Tübingen. Or others like a Baroque poet whom I love a lot, Quirin Kuhlmann, nobody knows him not even the German—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Experts.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Experts in German literature. But also someone who explored the borderlines, the very, very edges, the outskirts of our, and the deepest of roots in our language, and again he was one Baroque poet in the 1640s or so, someone who took strangely enough and I feel like him because I'm not capable of irony, he took things literally, everything literally, and for example he dug in the ground with a spade with some other strange man and tried to find the stone of wisdom, and he was the one who probably staged the very last Crusade. 13:45 He set off for Constantinople with two hysterical women, a mother and a daughter, and tried to set up a Jesus Kingdom in Constantinople. The women abandoned him already in Venice and took off with some sailors. **(laughter)** And the ship left without him, and he jumped into the water and almost drowned by trying to reach the ship and they hoisted him on board and took him to Constantinople, where he was immediately imprisoned and spent quite some time in prison and he actually died going to—all the way, he was traveling on foot criss-crossing Europe with all these strange sects and wild fantasts in religion, philosophy, language. He traveled on foot to Moscow and incited some sort of a religious riot, which was misunderstood by the authorities as a political riot, and he was burned at the stake together with his books.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** This sounds suddenly like a Herzog script.

**WERNER HERZOG:** It would be wonderful. Kinski could have been the right one to play Quirin Kuhlmann **(laughter)** but what I mean to say, yes, Quirin Kuhlmann was so deeply into the very essence of life, dangerously far going into it, and perished in it. There's nothing wrong perishing in the travails and tribulations of life, I have no problem with that, personally.



**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** You bring up so many of what one might call your obsessions, though I'm not sure you will take well to that word. One of the interesting clusters of ideas that come up in my mind as you speak is the importance *walking* has for you, and you have sometimes likened walking to filmmaking and seen a relationship between the two.

**WERNER HERZOG:** I would be careful to call it walking. There is no real expression in English. I would call it traveling on foot. And traveling on foot is something that we have lost out of our civilization. But we are *made* for traveling on foot—physically we are made for traveling on foot, and in our minds to move at a certain pace, and seeing things with intimacy and seeing the details and having en route, you have only substantial encounters. If you run out of water—I had a canteen, and on a hot day and no creek, nothing, and so I had to knock at a door of a farmhouse and ask whether I could fill my canteen at his tap, at his faucet, sure, he would allow me and would ask me, “Where do you come from?” And I said, “I come from Meiningen,” he said, “How?” And I said, “I came walking, well, a thousand kilometers,” “Really?” From that moment on you only have an exchange of very, very fundamental human things. He would tell me the story of his very last day in the Second World War, where he was captured, that he has not told his family for thirty-five years or forty years and you would have only, only, only the most essential encounters, and I have walked around Germany following the border. I have walked once to Lotte Eisner when she dying, and I would not like her to die, I wouldn't like to allow her to die.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** So you walked from Munich to Paris.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, instead of flying, even though I was told on the phone, “Lotte is dying.” I have to explain—Lotte Eisner was a preeminent film historian who fled Germany the day Hitler took power and who, as one of the great film historians, wrote the definitive study on Expressionist cinema, Weimar cinema, *The Haunted Screen*. And she was probably my most important mentor, very supportive from very early on, and at the time I received the call, I knew it was too early, she should not—she *must* not die, I would not allow it. I just would not let her die because I came walking one million steps and somehow I knew she would, she would be out of hospital and she would be alive, she actually *was* alive.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And she stayed alive for some years.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yeah, she was already eighty or so, nobody knew exactly how old she was, but she lived another eight or nine years, and then it was very strange, because we had a very casual way to say important things. She would nibble on some cookies and have tea, and she would say, “Listen,” she would say, “Listen, there is this spell still on me that I *must* not die but now I’m almost blind, and I cannot walk anymore, and I cannot read, and I cannot watch movies anymore, could you—would it be okay if you lifted that spell off me?” (**laughter**) And I said, almost casually, “Yes, Lotte, sure, you may die now,” and then we went on talking about something else, and she died two weeks later. And it was right that she died then, she was *saturated* with life and ideas and movies and everything that I admire about a cultured person, a person with incredible spirit and enthusiasm, and—so, we need more Lotte Eisners.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** A great agitator of ideas, as you say. “The collective agitation of mind.”

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, that is actually my definition of culture.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Right.

**WERNER HERZOG:** A collective agitation of mind. That constitutes culture.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** No, I didn't come up with that. I know it's yours. **(laughter)** And I very much feel it was yours. But let's—I want to move in two directions at the same time, which is hard to do, I want to move backwards and forwards. Let's move forwards first, to move backwards later. Forward-moving, many people may not know this. We started with a tap-dancing scene here with Fred Astaire. Many people may not know that you make now your home California, and you make your home Los Angeles.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Los Angeles, indeed.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And if I'm not mistaken, you are known to say that Los Angeles is one, is perhaps the *only* place in America with substance.

**(laughter)**

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, you find it funny, I know that, yes. **(laughter)** But, no, I'm speaking of cultural substance. If you look at New York, which would be a close candidate. **(laughter)** But New

York, the real substance of New York is finances and not so much culture. Culture is more being *consumed* here. Much of the culture is borrowed from Europe. And things get done in Los Angeles, as ugly and as vulgar as it may appear at the surface and as bizarre things that you may observe, there are stretch limos and people who talk seriously about pyramid energy (**laughter**) and a neighbor who is a very reasonable, decent man speaking about his cat, and that the cat was kind of freaked out and he called the cat psychic and the cat psychic spoke for only \$160.00 for three minutes to the cat and the cat calmed down. (**laughter**) It is utterly, utterly strange and utterly bizarre and yet you have, you have this wild exuberance of collective, very often vulgar, very often intense and interesting, dreams.

And Los Angeles is much more than just filmmaking. You find some of the most fascinating writers and musicians and mathematicians, for example, and you just name it—I love the fact that only thirty minutes from my doorstep by car there is Pasadena Mission Control Center for the Mars Rover landings and for Galileo and being fascinated about the demise of the space probe Galileo, which was sent on a suicide mission into the atmosphere of Jupiter, it got me so fascinated that I somehow wrestled myself across or passing all the security and I made it in there. And they allowed me to be in there and film, even, and out of that originated a film that is very close to my heart, *The Wild Blue Yonder*, a science fiction fantasy. So in many ways Los Angeles has some intensity of cultural life.

It sounds odd, but what probably would have been more convincing to talk about the last half century or so. In the last half century, almost every single important cultural trend and technological trend originated from California, like computers, like Free Speech Movement, like accepting gay and lesbian people as an integral part of society, like—you just name it, on and on and on. At the same time, all the stupidities of our times. New Age pseudophilosophy, I mean, it can't get any more vulgar and stupid.

**(laughter)** Or the hippies, or, as I said, pyramid energy or tantric whatever and people going to yoga class or going to aerobics studios—it can't get—and eating vitamins—fistfuls of vitamins **(laughter)** every day, it's just, it's so gross that you can't even talk about it. **(laughter)** But at the same time, at the same time, quite important deep-plowing phenomena. I've been fascinated by Anna Nicole Smith, the *Anna Nicole Smith Show*.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Talk about that a little bit.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yeah, I was so fascinated that I even forced Roger Ebert, who was appalled by my suggestion, I forced him to watch it, telling him “don't avert your eyes,” **(laughter)** because there is something of great importance going on there, because—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Why?

**WERNER HERZOG:** A vulgar, I mean a perversion, an obscenity, the obscene perversion of an American dream, an obscene perversion of what constitutes beauty. In many ways something very, very revealing about what is going wrong in this civilization. A monumental *failure* of civilization, and I said to Roger Ebert, and I said, unfortunately she died. I really regret that she died, but I hear so many times as a foreigner here, and a guest in your country, I hear so many times how, “We do not understand what are grievances of the Muslims, the fundamentalists, and they attack the World Trade Center.” Yes, they do, and they have grievances, and my advice is watch the *Anna Nicole Smith Show* and you will understand what sort of cultural loss of dignity, what amount of loss of decent—decency and whatever decadence is in all this and you would understand, you would understand much better. By the way,

Muslim Fundamentalism is probably the only massive cultural movement that is *not* born in California **(laughter)** and yet has great consequences. And I'm speaking of the last fifty years and you have to look back to Egypt in the 1950s, how it all originated.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Let's move you backwards now from your home in California to your very early years, the very first few years you spent in a very small village near Munich, and I'd like you—

**WERNER HERZOG:** In the mountains. But near Munich sounds like a suburb or so, but it was the remotest place that my mother could—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** On the border of Germany and Austria.

**WERNER HERZOG:** The remotest place that my mother could find, who got frightened because the house next to us was bombed, and where we lived was half destroyed, and I was under a huge pile of debris, glass shards and bricks, and I was only two weeks old but unhurt. So she fled into the mountains, and we got stuck there, so I grew up with Bavarian dialect, I grew up without knowing technology. I mean, I've said it many times, it's strange that I'm making films and I did not even know that cinema existed until I was eleven, when a traveling projectionist arrived at the schoolhouse, I did not know that cinema even existed, and I made my first phone call when I was seventeen, so that gives you a little bit of background.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** What are your earliest memories of that time?

**WERNER HERZOG:** The end of the war. We played at the balcony and tossed the white flag down and Sachrang where I grew up was the last, last, last unoccupied little pocket that remained until that also fell, to American troops in this case, and the farmers were really frightened that we tossed down the white flag, and I remember the commotion that we had thrown down the white flag. And I remember that I had, that I talked to a very big black man, for me a Moor, because I knew about Moors from fairy tales, and there was one. And I found him most fascinating and he talked to me for two and a half hours on the slope next to the house and I had a wonderful conversation with him and I claimed that I spoke American with him.

And I remember my mother ripping us out of bed in the middle of the night and carrying us up to the mountain slope, and the entire sky was illuminated red and orange, and she said, “Boys, I woke you up because you should see this. The city of Rosenheim is burning. But Rosenheim is forty kilometers away and the entire sky illuminated from it.” So you do not forget things like this.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And you had an early experience where you felt you were in contact with God.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yeah, well, I—on Santa Claus day, Nicholas day, which is fifth of December for us, Santa Claus comes with his companion Grampus, some sort of demon spirit with him, and he admonishes you, and I was so frightened that I crawled under a sofa, and Grampus pulled me out, so I peed my pants, **(laughter)** and all of a sudden there in this door stands a man with a brown overall and with huge oil spots on him, and looked so nicely at me and so mild I knew this was God Almighty, that

he saved me. And later I learned that he was some sort of a maintenance worker at the little electrical plant behind the house. **(laughter)** There was a waterfall. And he was just curious and walked in and leaned at the door and I loved him.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** What games did you play as a child? I know that you spoke about Berlin and Munich as a great place for children to be after the war because there was a lot of rubble for them to play in.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Games, yeah. Yeah, not just rubble. When you see images of Berlin right after the war it was an incredible surreal sort of a place, and not only Berlin, I think 715 major German cities were wiped out more than 90 percent. So an incredible, surreal stage of bombed-out buildings and whole blocks and so on. And it was the most wonderful time for children who grew up in cities, owning the whole block of bombed-out buildings and playing their games and inventing the world. For us in a secluded, rural area it was different—there we had to invent our games. There was nobody who would teach us games. We invented our own games. There were no toys, so we *invented* our toys and I remember—I'm still proud of that—we invented an arrow, which was a slice of beech wood, a flat arrow which would sail, and it had—it was slightly humped but we didn't know anything about aeronautics, and somehow figured it out that it would sail on like a Frisbee, and we did not shoot it with a bow, but we had a whip and a little hook on the string of the whip, and we whipped it away and it would sail on and on and on much further than you can shoot an arrow, and that was what we invented, for example.



**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** As an adolescent, what was your view of America? I know you said you started to watch films late.

**WERNER HERZOG:** I had very little experience of it with the exception of right after the war. And we got—sure, after the war, my knowledge of America is that they were fishing for trout, and we found them little worms, and they gave us a chewing gum, so America was a trading partner. **(laughter)** And we knew it was dangerous with them around because we had found a lot of weapons that were dropped and hidden by the last SS men fleeing into the mountains. And at age four I was in possession of a submachine gun, a functioning submachine gun, **(laughter)** and my brother had a hand grenade **(laughter)** and I tried to shoot a bird, a crow, actually, because we were always hungry, so hunger is one of the great reminiscences of that time, two and a half years of hunger.

And later when I went to school in Munich, America didn't really affect me. Everybody in my class was involved with Elvis, and they went wild over Elvis, and I went with them into a movie theater when the first Elvis movie came in, and it was a very strange scene, because everybody was seated quietly, all young people. They watched the film, and like one man they got up and systematically and quietly took the place apart. **(laughter)** They ripped out the seats and started to destroy it, without shouting, without rioting, just quiet, methodical destruction of the theater, **(laughter)** and of course it was massive. It was a massive event but didn't interest me. It did not affect me like the other kids in school, who were raving about Elvis and wanted to see where is the next movie coming, and does anybody dare to play the next Elvis movie.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** But something must have affected you in this collective grouping of people in a darkened room.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, but at that time, I didn't see much more than let's say Elvis films and Dr. Fu Manchu and Zorro and things like that, and it didn't dawn on me that I would make films, it came when I was fourteen, fifteen. All at the same time I had a dramatic religious phase. I started to travel on foot and I knew I was going to make films, and I walked around Albania, following the border, which was a mysterious country at the time.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** When you started to make films, and as you grew up a little bit in age, what perception did you then, once you started to know a little bit more about American films, have of them?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Not really—I had a very strange question today. I spent some time with students at Columbia University, a film class, and I was asked about influences by American cinema and about landscapes and about men who are doing physical things and who are trying to do the best out of their situation. They kept talking about Howard Hawks. And I had to stop them, and I said, “Until this very day, I have not seen a Howard Hawks film yet, and I have seen only one film by John Ford.”

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Which one?

**WERNER HERZOG:** I didn't remember the title but I was told it was *The Searchers*, about a woman, a young woman who was raised by native Indians, by a tribe.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** What did you see in the John Ford film?

**WERNER HERZOG:** I forgot it. **(laughter)** I forgot the title and I remembered vaguely. So, I liked how he deals with landscapes, so I liked that, like an inner concept of America, not just a backdrop, something essential about the American soul. Yeah, I liked that but American cinema didn't affect me or in fact cinema didn't affect me that much until this very day. It has not and I'm not a very frequent moviegoer. A year ago I saw during the entire year I think I saw two films and that was that.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Was that out of choice?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, out of choice. Well, one was out of choice, *King Kong* because—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** No, was it out of choice not seeing films?

**(laughter)**

**WERNER HERZOG:** Well, I prefer to read, or I prefer to watch *Anna Nicole*, or things like this.

**(laughter)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Because?

**WERNER HERZOG:** And I've been working a lot, let's face it, I've been nonstop working. So, and I'm a methodical worker, so not much time to see films. And the films I see sometimes are films of choice like the second film, the part of *King Kong* which interested me for a new way to deal with digital effect. The other film I forgot the title it was which the film lasted less than a weekend in the theaters, and the whole plot of the story was young people going on spring break to Cancún in Mexico and the only—and it was eight young girls and eight young men, and the only point of the movie was who gets laid first **(laughter)** and it had something fascinating because it was so focused. **(laughter)** It was without any pretext, so, but the film didn't last. And I went because a friend of mine produced it and said, "You'll please come and see the film?"

**(laughter)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Forgive me to ask you this, but I'm curious about this statement that I've read you say many times and I've heard you say it, that you have no irony. What do you mean? I mean, obviously there's a big distinction to be made between irony and humor.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Humor, yes, I've got that. All my films are full of humor, in particular if you see a film like *The Wild Blue Yonder*, people are rolling in delight and laughter, they laugh more than at Eddie Murphy films **(laughter)** and I'm witness of it because I was standing in the back, or *My Best Fiend*, people really laugh because it's so absurdly intense and so, so crazed, yeah, sure there is a lot of humor, and I do understand humor. Irony is a very different concept philosophically and whatever, how we function in our brain, that everything that is said, is being said or shown indeed functions in a different abstract metaphorical level, and I do not make the connections and that's so often the French. I

can't be in a conversation with French people in a café, they immediately show how beautiful their language is, and they make, they listen after the sound of their sentence, **(laughter)** and they speak in irony with you and I mean, yeah, I don't understand it, I'm sitting like a Bavarian beer drinker with them **(laughter)** and I answer straight and they—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** In this country it always strikes me that irony, people always go like *that* **(makes quotation gestures with hands)** when they want to be ironic to make sure.

**WERNER HERZOG:** It's very, very disappointing meetings with the French **(laughter)** I must say. And then much of the French language is so much just the mouth and they are not that deep-plowing and they like the bon mot. I mean the one who you never should trust is Godard. **(laughter)** He's not even French but he tries to out-French the French. **(laughter)** And what does he do? He says because it sounds so good and it sounds so intelligent, he makes it for the sake of the bon mot he says, "Cinema is truth twenty-four times a second." I mean, you're just—**(laughter)** how can a human being with an ounce of brain say that? **(laughter)** And he's considered an intelligent man.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** This speaks to some of the comments you have made about cinema vérité.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Oh, yeah, the cinema vérité, now we are coming into what is *assumed* to be truth, yes, cinema vérité, and I've insulted them by naming them, "You are the accountants of truth," **(laughter)** and of course, oh, yeah, they were really miffed. But I think there is something I'm after, something much deeper, some sort of an ecstasy of truth, something where we step beyond ourselves, something that happens in religion sometimes, like medieval mystics, an understanding of God in the

form of ecstasies. Yes, it is possible, and it's possible in music and in poetry and in cinema. And we are not really looking after it. But it's very, very elusive. Truth is extremely elusive.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** In cinema it is particularly possible in your view to arrive at that ecstatic truth, it's a medium that perhaps—

**WERNER HERZOG:** Well, I'm trying, I'm striving, I'm striving to achieve it. Maybe sometimes I got *kind* of close, but I do not really know. I'm not a good judge. But what puzzles me, and I've just written a screenplay for a feature film, and a central image in this is an image that haunts me because it's so strange and points at what *truth*, or what truth of vision is all about and how misleading it could be. There is a monastery in Rome, Santissima Trinità, and you have a cloister, and the painter, I forgot his name, in the 1620s, along—when you look along this corridor, on the left-hand wall, he paints a picture of Saint Francisco di Paola, not Francisco di Assisi, Francisco di Paola, in some sort of rapture. The saint is in rapture under a tree. And you see it clearly, you see a saint in rapture under a tree. When you approach this image, the more distorted and the more incomprehensible does this image become. It totally becomes—and when you're standing right in front of the image, the saint has disappeared, the whole image has stretched out over thirty feet length it has stretched out and has the saint, the face of the saint, his hands, everything has morphed into a landscape, and the landscape has actually been identified as the Strait of Messina, and you even have sailing ships passing by. And what fascinates me about it is the very clear point that the painter makes—the closer you get, you seem to have understood something, and you seem to have grasped a truth of an image, the closer you get, the more incomprehensible it becomes, until it finally morphs, some physical strokes of a brush, morph into a landscape. It's absolutely mind-boggling and it somehow will be the central image of a film that I'm going to make.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** You used the word “landscape” now in describing this painting, you used “landscape” in describing the single John Ford film you saw. I’d like you to elaborate a little bit on the importance of landscape for you, landscape also as it connects to music, and I remember in particular, I think it’s in *My Best Fiend*, there’s a moment where you compare your view of landscape to the view that Klaus Kinski has, and I remember at the beginning of *Aguirre* he believed that the greatest landscape was the face, and he said to you when you didn’t want to film him in that way, he said to you, “You’re a megalomaniac,” and you answered, “Well, at least now we’re two.” (laughter) A very different view of landscape.

**WERNER HERZOG:** But Kinski—in this case the backdrop was Machu Picchu, and you have a sugarloaf-formed, very, very intense mountain in the background, Huayna Picchu, and he wanted to stop ahead of this army and pass through the ruins of Machu Picchu. And I said to him, “This is postcard kitsch now and I’m not into that, it’s not a backdrop,” and I want to have a much more limited frame of the landscape, where it’s completely ecstatic, not recognizable as a backdrop but like a part of our innermost being, our soul.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Does “ecstatic” mean “invented”?

**WERNER HERZOG:** To some extent, yes, the way I filmed it invented with the music and with the kind of action in it, it is, it is ecstatic, yes. Nathaniel Kahn actually mentioned this image at the beginning of *Aguirre*—yes?—there is something like an ecstasy, something like, and of course a landscape is directed, the landscape is partially invented the way it was shot. And I have done that all

my life and I have invented, I even invented a different planet, as if I had shot on a planet where the ceiling was all ice, and it was on the outskirts of the Andromeda Nebula.

The interesting thing about this and we may show a clip in a moment, the interesting part of it is set, the part that music plays in this, because the music was created before the images, and I set up a certain rhythm of floating in this music. And it's an extraordinary achievement by musicians, actually. The head of all this is an avant-garde Dutch cello player, Ernst Reijseger, and five Sardinian singers, very prehistoric, primordial sort of shepherd singing and we added a singer from Senegal who sings along in his native tongue, in Wolof, and the music, and we played some music when the place filled, the music itself is totally unrehearsed, the Senegalese singer was sitting there and had a mic, and I said to him, "Mola, I changed the text of the music and I slowed down the rhythm," and he said, "Yeah, I am a singer, don't tell me, I know how to—I'll blend in," so yeah, and then I said, "But Mola, I changed the text, and it's this and that." And he said, "Don't worry, I'm also a poet," **(laughter)** And we turned on the microphones, and they sang this, and they played this, and it was completely unrehearsed and we have two and a half hours, all in all, of music, unrehearsed. It's some of the most intense work I've ever done with musicians in my whole life.

And the music somehow changes the images, and it's a complete—something completely invented about astronauts who find a planet with clouds, with the entire atmosphere frozen, all the clouds are frozen to ice, and they are drifting in liquid helium, and they explore this place, and only by dissolving into particles, and only by dissolving into sheer light, they can return. And maybe we can play that one piece, it's from *The Wild Blue Yonder*, and it's a very very strange form of an invented landscape, music that was recorded first, the film somehow organized after that in a tunnel of time.



**(music and dialogue not transcribed)**

**(applause)**

**WERNER HERZOG:** What is also very evident that quite often in my films we deal with gravity, like *Fitzcarraldo*, how do you pull a 360-ton boat over a mountain? Or the *Great Ecstasy of the Sculptor Steiner* man who flies like a Frisbee? Or here? Or Fred Astaire, but for him gravity does not exist anymore. Of course it does, but he gives the appearance of someone who is not subject to gravity, and I love him for that, and in this clip you see there seems to be an absence of gravity.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Let's—by way of gravity, let's get to one of the core subjects of our evening, which is why—or *is*—the twentieth century a mistake?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yeah, we thought about how we should call this—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** We were wondering how should we get people into the hall. **(laughter)**

We thought if we said, “Was the Twentieth Century a Mistake?” people might come.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, but of course it has a background because I doubt very strongly what the twentieth century has done to us, to the human race. And I mean not only that we have witnessed the worst cataclysmic wars that the world has seen just in one century, that we had communism and fascism, the Nazis, and all the consequences. It's many, many other things. I do believe that the highly

technological civilization that we are living right now is not sustainable, period, it is not, and we should not have an illusion that—it *cannot* continue much longer like this. Number one, the amount of human beings is increasing too fast. We have *way* too many human beings on this planet. The resources are being wasted in a way that is completely and utterly unhealthy and is not sustainable, so something is utterly wrong and it's—in fact, it is not just the twentieth century, but it became very massively visible in the twentieth century. And it's—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** For you it *started*, I mean, the *mistake*, the *misguided* nature of human beings, if I understand, you well, has a very long history. It started a long—it started when Petrarch went to the Mount Ventoux.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, well, that's one of the sins of civilization. Why do you climb mountains? I think that there is something, a disrespect of the mountains, and Petrarch, by the way, did not consider it as a conquest of the mountains, when you read about the 1950s, and I have been with some of the mountain climbers like Reinhold Messner, they always had the feeling, “Yeah, we have to conquer it, and we have to—” and they speak in military terms of conquest, which I have abandoned by now, because there's nothing more to conquer. And I think there was a mistake, that it was the end of something *mysterious* about our planet, the same insipid quest for being the first on the North or South Pole and since I have been in Antarctica very recently, becomes absolutely evident, there was something not going right.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Why?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Adventure! Adventure, which, and I cannot stand the term “adventure” nowadays, I lower my head and charge, it has degenerated in such an obscenity that you can go to the travel agency and book an adventure trip to New Guinea, to the headhunters, to the cannibals. So I really do not like this anymore and things went wrong—why did Petrarch climb a mountain, actually? He was looking more into the interior, he was stunned by what he saw, the first one in modern time who climbed up a mountain.

And you gave me the translation today, I only knew the original, he wrote it in Latin, but I have a translation now. And it’s very interesting, I have the letter here because he quotes, he quotes something important. He had a little volume of Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, with him and he opens the book, and he opens it by—randomly, he claims it, he swears to God that he opened it randomly at one spot in St. Augustine and it’s a very, very interesting quote. And he opens it—oh yeah, he got severe, serious warnings by a shepherd, an old shepherd, don’t climb mountains, because fifty years ago, this shepherd had climbed the mountain as a young man, never remembered that anyone else ever climbed it and regretted it deeply that he did that as if it were a sin, and it *was* a sin, and Petrarch had a feeling of that. Once up on the summit, he opens Saint Augustine, and he quotes Saint Augustine and I’d like to read it, because it’s a very significant statement. St. Augustine says, “And men go about to wonder at the heights of the mountains, and the mighty waves of the sea, and the wide sweep of rivers, and the circuit of the ocean, and the revolutions of the stars, but themselves they consider not.”

So this is a very, very significant moment in the history of humankind. Number one, he should not have climbed it, there was something, an arch sin in it in taking all mysteries away from our planet, and

tourism is one of the consequences in the long run. Tourists and tourism has devastated cultures, it has had *devastating* effects.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Let me try this on you. What if someone at this point said—not me—that your films, some of your films, precisely are sinful insofar that they also go and not only climb mountains but climb them with ships behind them and go in some way to the extremity of what a human being maybe shouldn't be doing.

**WERNER HERZOG:** No, I think it's something different. It's an inner image, it's some sort of a deep metaphor, dormant inside of us that I make visible, metaphor for what I can't tell, but I know it's a huge metaphor, and it gives us insight into ourselves, into our visions, into our dreams, into our nightmares, whatever, you name it. But the twentieth century, I think, has—and going back to Petrarch—and actually I should make an elliptic detour. I think that the trouble began at the beginning of Neolithic times, where for the first time— **(laughter)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** A long time back.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, where people started to live a sedentary life. Breeding, breeding cattle, breeding the first dog—breeding a dog was not sinful because you would continue in your nomadic existence with a dog as a hunting companion. But the breeding of the first pig was an arch sin because it made people sedentary, and I do understand religions like the Muslims and the Jewish people who—for whom it's something abhorrent to eat pork, there's something wrong about it, they have a sense of sin. I think it's across the ages and since man became sedentary and I shared this idea with Bruce Chatwin,

who became a very close companion to me in some respect, because we both shared this view and both of us traveled on foot.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** So share with us your relationship with Bruce Chatwin and let's expand the relationship, your relationship with Bruce Chatwin, also to include someone else who was important to both of us, and who just very recently passed away, who was Ryszard Kapuscinski, with whom you had a relationship.

**WERNER HERZOG:** I'll try to stay focused and make it short. I had a sporadic, very intense friendship with Bruce Chatwin, but we stayed remote to each other most of the time, then had intense movements, and since we were travelers on foot we understood each other. And when Bruce Chatwin died, and he was—I did not know that he was so, so close to death already, he wanted to see a film I made on tribesmen in the Southern Sahara, *Herdsmen of the Sun*, and he could only see it in ten-minute portions and would lapse away into, would drift away to unconsciousness, and being a skeleton. I mean, there was less than a skeleton of him left, and he would always shout at me—he would wake up and shout at me and shout, “I've got to be on the road again! I've got to be on the road again!” I said, “Bruce, that's what you should, but you are dying, you can't.” And he said, “Yeah,” he looked at himself, he knew (**inaudible**) and he said, “Yeah, but I have to—the rucksack is too heavy.” And he had a leather rucksack made by an old saddler in Central England, and I said, “Well, if you really recover, ever, then I'll carry the rucksack,” and then he understood that he would never walk again and he was dying, and he gave me the rucksack, so it's one of the most precious objects that I have. I do not have much physical property, but that is some of the dearest thing I have in my possession. And Kapuscinski,

yes, with Kapuscinski, we had similar ways of being barefoot, being down to earth, with the people, in Africa.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** He refers to his own work as “literature by foot,” and he once was asked what his worst experience had been, and, in a way, what I’d like to ask you is the same question that was asked of him, and to comment a little bit about Kapuscinski, and perhaps come up with a taxonomy of the *good* traveler, because there may be—Chatwin and Kapuscinski may be—there may be very few since Neolithic times were good travelers.

**WERNER HERZOG:** I’ll say it’s easy, the traveler on foot is virtuous. Tourism is sin, period, as simple as that. But Kapuscinski shared these feelings, and he was down to earth in living with the Africans, and I got fascinated by him because he had more insight into Africa and our civilization than probably anyone I’ve seen. And we had a plan, a vague plan, to do a science fiction film, but the science fiction film not projected of our possibilities in technical terms, but like in the great migration after Roman and Greek antiquity ended in a slow cataclysm.

The achievements of civilization were lost for almost a millennium, and that’s what both of us foresee, that we will lose our technical abilities. A bicycle you can repair, a computer you cannot repair. In Lagos, Nigeria, the lady at the teller has a computer, and she pretends to type in the informations about your person, but you see vines are growing, algae and vines are growing out of the keyboard. You know that this computer is terminally dead, and *nobody* will be able to repair it, there’s nobody who will be able to repair it, and there will be a time fairly soon where we will not—where we lose technical

abilities, and they will be lost for, if not forever, they will be a lost for a very, very long time. And this is a science fiction vision.

Lagos where you—where he could not reach the harbor for years, because there was traffic jams, and you could not pass through the traffic jams. You had to fill your bathtub with water because military would turn off the water, and when everybody was thirsty and couldn't find water, they would come with a tank, with a huge tank, and sell you water very expensively, so you had to store water. Things like this. When you went into a hotel, somebody would walk the stairs up with you, because of course the elevator was terminally dead, would never be functioning again. You could tell when you looked at the elevator, you didn't even start to try to push a button, you would follow the man upstairs into the hotel room, and he would produce a light bulb and put the light bulb into its socket. So. And the light bulb will be dead fairly soon, and then the hotel doesn't have a light bulb anymore. So it's a very scary vision that we shared, and we planned to do a science fiction film in the South, in Southern Sudan, but it was way too dangerous, and both of us said no, we are not going to do it.

And I have been in this area. When I was eighteen I left school and I wanted to see the cataclysm of civilization in the Congo after its independence. And, I mean, not only organization was gone and marauding bandits around, and tribalism, there was cannibalism, full blast back into average behavior. I thank God on my knees that I never made it. I fell very ill south of Juba City in the southern Sudan, never reached the border, almost died, and somehow scrambled back. Kapuscinski was one of the very few who actually made it across the border, also through Southern Sudan, and he was there for one and a half years, and he was, I think, with the exception of one, the sole survivor. All of them were killed off,

all of the reporters were killed off, disappeared, were never seen again. I think a Canadian survived, and he.

And Kapuscinski, being in eastern Congolese provinces in that time, in one year he was arrested forty times and condemned to death four times. So I asked him, “Ryszard, can you tell me what was the worst for you?” and he said, almost casually, “Well, I was condemned to death—that was okay, but they threw me into a cell and I was there for a whole week and day after day they kept throwing more and more poisonous snakes into my dungeon.” **(laughter)** And very casually said, “That’s why in this week my hair turned white,” and then continues talking about something else. So that is Ryszard Kapuscinski.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And what was your worst and most dangerous?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Similar things. I was in Africa in some jails, very badly mistreated, beaten, ill. I don’t want to go into details, but it was bad. I mean, as bad as it can get. And, of course, it forms a perspective on the world, and you do know after you have seen things like this, you know the heart of men.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** But it forms you only if you are *formable*.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Maybe, yes. Maybe, yes. But I do not really know. But knowing the heart of men, I can give you one example about this science fiction film. I met astronauts of a space shuttle mission, because they had filmed wonderful footage on 16mm film, and I met them in Houston and wanted to engage them now sixteen years later or so for being, taking part in the movie as actors. And it



was embarrassing, we were seating in a circle, and the officials who introduced me left, and now I was sitting with five of them, who had been many times in space, and I looked around and was kind of embarrassed, didn't know what to say and all of a sudden, like a relief, I looked into the face of one. He was the pilot and a mission specialist, William [*sic*] McCulley, and he looked like a very good solid man. And I said to him, "Sir, Mr. McCulley, as a child I grew up in a small village in the mountains and I learned how to milk cows, and since then, I can tell by just looking into a face that there is a person who knows how to milk a cow. You are one of them." And he laughed, and said, "Yes, I milked cows in Tennessee," and that broke the ice, **(laughter)** and he really knew how to milk a cow, and that was where the ice broke. And how did I know? I cannot tell how did I know, but I know the heart of men, and I can tell who milks, who can milk a cow, and this is part of my profession.

**(laughter)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** You have said—I mean, two ideas come to my mind. One of them is your choice of actors and I'd like to go to that in a minute, and you've also said that a filmmaker needs to know how to pick locks.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, among other things, you have to have a certain amount of criminal energy **(laughter)** and you have to be able to forge documents and to do all sorts of en route fraudulent things to make it possible to make a film that only—that not even Hollywood could make. But Paul, before we go into other things, I would linger a little bit on the twentieth century and what went wrong, and I think Petrarch, who says, "Of the human beings we speak not." And one of the things that is quite evident and it looks like a good thing in the twentieth century, the ecologists, the ecologists' movement, yes, it

makes a lot of sense, the fundamental analysis is right. The fundamental attitude they have taken is also right, but I miss something completely out of the twentieth century, which is—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Culture.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Which went wrong in the culture, yes, and that is, yes, we see embarrassments like whale huggers, I mean, you can't get worse than that, or tree huggers, even, such a strange bizarre behavior. And people are hugging whales, and they are concerned about the panda bear, and they are concerned about the wellbeing of salad leaves, but they have overlooked, they have completely overlooked that while we are sitting here and spending two hours probably the last speaker of one language that is still spoken may die in these two hours. There are six thousand languages still left, still left, but by 2050, by 2050, only fifteen percent of these languages will survive.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** So we are paying attention to the wrong things.

**WERNER HERZOG:** No, to pay attention to ecological questions is not the wrong thing, but to overlook, to overlook the immense value of human culture. And I met an Australian man in Port Augusta in an old-age home and that was twenty—more than twenty years ago and he was considered—well, he was named “the mute.” He was the very last speaker of his language, had nobody with whom he could speak and hence fell mute, fell silent. He had no one left, and of course he died meanwhile because he was eighty at that time. And his language has disappeared, has not been recorded. It's as if the last Spaniard had died and Spanish literature and culture, everything has vanished. And it vanishes very, very fast. It vanishes much faster than anything we are witnessing in terms of, let's say, mammals,

mammals dying out. Yes, we should be concerned about the snow leopard, and we should be concerned about whales, but nobody, why is it that nobody talks about cultures and languages and last speakers dying away? And nobody cares about it.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Why?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Because something went utterly wrong in the twentieth century. **(laughter)** There's something not healthy about it. It was a mistake, one of the *massive* mistakes of the twentieth century, and we don't have to move back to prehistoric times to name where the mistakes were. There's a massive, a massive, colossal, and cataclysmic mistake that is happening right now and nobody sees it and nobody talks about it. So, that's why I find it most enraging that people hug whales. Who hugs the last speaker of an Inuit language in Alaska? Nobody. Nobody cares about them. So, yeah, and it makes me just *angry* when I look back at the twentieth century, and I'm afraid it continues like that. And, because of an essential look back into essential things that go on inside of us, we have gotten into a meaningless consumer culture, we have lost dignity, we have lost all proportions of, let's say, going into warfare, and I'm not speaking of Iraq, I'm speaking of the Second and the First World War.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** We have many millions of books underground, seven floors of books, and we happened to go under Bryant Park.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Paradise.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Paradise as you called it, but I remember one moment, which it's my anecdote about you now. Paul Cronin is here who wrote one of the most extraordinary books, *Herzog on Herzog*, which I highly—there's a new edition coming out now, I highly recommend it to everyone in this room if you would like to know more than we can say in this brief moment. We were underground, and we were there with a librarian, and you asked the librarian, in the case of a holocaust, what would we do with the precious books? And I remember the librarian feeling rather anxious by that question.

**(laughter)** No provisions had yet been made, I don't know if they've been made ever since your comment. But I remember him wondering, you know, how to answer it. And you pushed him a little bit, you said, "You know, where will you put the important books that you have, is it here that they will go?" And he said "Well, in the case of a holocaust, maybe we will come here." And you said, "Ah, people. It's the books that matter!" Do you remember that? And I—

**(laughter)**

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yeah, it sounds misleading in the context of the previous, but please continue.

**(laughter)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Well, but the books are the repository of our memories and our culture. In that sense—

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, of course a subway tube is more—is probably a safer place than the library here, so. And of course when you talk to the librarian, how do you save things, how do you save the

codices, how do you save the important parts of the—what would you preserve, how deep under the park would you go—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Would you go to keep it? So that, you know, these languages which are disappearing as we are talking now, have a place where they're archived, where they're kept, even if the culture itself has become mute, it still can be studied.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Most of the six thousand still-spoken languages are not recorded—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Don't have a grammar.

**WERNER HERZOG:** —are not recorded in written form. Many, many, many, many of them. So then they disappear without a trace. That's evident. But, yes, books, sure, we must preserve them and we must somehow be cautious and careful with them, because they carry our culture, they carry—and, of course, those who read books own the world, those who watch television *lose* it. So be careful and be cautious with the books.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And what you do with your time.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, but we do have disagreements of what are the most precious ones that we would keep, of course, you would go for James Joyce immediately, and I have my objections, **(laughter)** because I think he's—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Who would you go for?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Hölderlin. No, I mean James Joyce isn't really bad, but—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** James Joyce is on a trajectory for you—

**WERNER HERZOG:** Which went somewhere wrong—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Somewhere wrong, starting with Petrarch and then going to someone like Laurence Sterne.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Well, we talked about Laurence Sterne. Yes, Laurence Sterne is somehow a beginning in modern literature, where literature really became modern but also went on a detour and the result—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** A detour from what?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Detour from what, yes—that's not easy to say, detour into all the way let's say to *Finnegans Wake*, where literature should not end up, and it's a cul de sac, in my opinion, and much of James Joyce is a cul de sac, per se. At the same time, when he wrote, people like Kafka wrote, or, for example, Joseph Conrad wrote, I have a feeling, yes, there is something hardcore, some essence of literature, and you have it in a long, long, long tradition and you find it in Joseph Conrad, you find it in Hemingway, the short stories, you find it in Bruce Chatwin, and you find it in Cormac McCarthy today.

And many of the things that went wrong, including, in my opinion, James Joyce, somehow was a detour, it was not, was not where literature really has its hard physical core. Very hard to express it and to explain it. Of course, we should shove a volume of *Ulysses* into the vault under the park, and should preserve it, but maybe preserve it as an example how literature branched out and went into, lost itself in nowhere, no man's land.

**(laughter)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Let's talk briefly about how you came to recognize some of the actors you worked with most. I'm thinking some of the ones you worked with most, obviously Klaus Kinski, you call, I think, every gray hair on your head a Kinski.

**WERNER HERZOG:** I call it Kinski.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** You call it Kinski. Kinski, but before we speak about Kinski, let's briefly talk about Mick Jagger, who had a—made a cameo appearance in a movie but then in fact never made it to the movie.

**WERNER HERZOG:** No, he didn't have. He actually was—some of his performance was preserved in a film that Les Blank made, *Burden of Dreams*. Actually *Fitzcarraldo* started out with Jason Robard and Mick Jagger as his sidekick, a retarded man from England, **(laughter)** who carries a heavy barber chair, made turn of the last century, on his big back, sixty kilos heavy, I mean he was, he barely could carry it and he dreams that he's partially insane, and Jagger played that. When Robards became so ill that he had

to return to the States and was not allowed by his doctors to come back, and Mick Jagger who played the second leading part in the film, I knew I could not—I could not have him in the second round of shooting, which was then with Klaus Kinski, and that's the film now. I wrote his whole part out of it.

But Jagger has not been—has not been really understood fully by other directors as a very, very great acting force. He's a very, very talented, intense man, and besides, I mean, he's a wonderful comrade. He would have a car, we gave him a car in Iquitos and there were strikes and shootings, and all sorts of things and our actors were frightened, and extras were frightened, to cross town to get to the river, so Mick said, "I'm driving them, I'll play the chauffeur for you," and I said, "Mick, this is an attitude I really like." **(laughter)** And he had a great, great, very unusual, fantasy about acting and how he did it. A great loss that I have suffered in my life as a filmmaker. And there were a few films, and he was never really significant in the films, but I wish I could have made the film with him, let's say Kinski and him, but he had to go on a world tour with the Rolling Stones. He was phenomenally good. And somehow . . .

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And Kinski was—

**WERNER HERZOG:** . . .as odd as it may sound, I spotted him for the right part and he was really good in this part.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** The spotting is the filmmaker as detective in some way.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Not that I go on a long search and do detective work by observing the nightly street and looking into the windows.



**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** But it's signs, it's signs. That reminds me of Carlo Ginzburg's idea that the historian must be a detective, it's little—or Oscar Wilde's line that it's only superficial people who do not judge by appearance. **(laughter)**

**WERNER HERZOG:** Partially right even though I function slightly different. There is not much question in my heart, yes, Mick Jagger would be wonderful for this part, and there's not much searching, not real detective work, going in it, but a keen *awareness* of people around. I see them. I spot them. And I spot the man who milks the cows, and I spot the man who would be perfect as the retarded Englishman playing—delivering the soliloquy of Richard the Third, and Mick Jagger does it in a way that you just could drop dead, it's so wonderful. But I threw everything away and only by coincidence Les Blank grabbed some of the snippets and somehow held onto it.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** As we wind down this conversation to open it up to the audience, I'd like you to talk a little bit about what you've called the physical nature of filmmaking. You've opposed aesthetics to athletics, rather athletics—

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, it's a little bit a construct to talk about this kind of opposition of things. I just got sick and tired by overacademic zealots who tried to talk me into what sort of—I don't know very complicated academic concepts, and I said, no, it's not so much a cerebral, academic work that I do, it's much more physical. It comes from physical work, from physically understanding, for example, the jungle. The way in *Rescue Dawn*, which is not released yet, a feature film with Christian Bale as the

leading character, we plowed through the underbrush of the jungle in a way that is *extremely* physical, and, whenever it's as physical as that, I'm good as a filmmaker.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** You've spoken about yourself as a good soldier of cinema.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, but that's more like a metaphor of someone who tries to hold out at an outpost that has been abandoned by almost everyone around (**laughter**) and not being afraid and having a sense of duty. I have a sense of duty. And I'm saying that without pretension.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Duty to—

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yeah, duty to what, to who, to what? That's a difficult question. I know I have it and I know I have little choice. Lotte Eisner would be someone. "You will not give up," even when I was desperate, when after ten years no one wanted to see any of my films, and I was an abject failure, and she says, "You will not give up, you have a duty, and you will not abandon making films. You will go on." And in her sense, yes, there is a duty. A cultural duty, a duty of seeing things that others do not see yet, and making it visible and making it known to us.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** In Paul Cronin's magnificent book *Herzog on Herzog* he quotes at the very beginning this line by David Mamet that I think captures this, in maybe what one might call your, I think I'm—I don't usually like talking about my admirations on stage, but I will. As I grow a little bit older I've come to realize that the people I really admire are those people who cannot be fake. And David Mamet says, "Those with something to fall back on, invariably fall back on it. They intended to,

all along. That is why they provided themselves with it. But those with no alternative see the world differently.”

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yeah, I think it’s a good choice as some sort of a motto that Paul Cronin found. Fact is I have no fallback position, yeah, it’s true. There’s no trenches behind me into which I can jump and duck.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And your work purely comes out of your imagination.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Not only. I mean, I’m not inventing everything, actually. I’m living through many of the things that I’ve seen and I transform them and bring them on a screen. In a way, for example, Joseph Conrad would experience the jungle in the Congo or in Southeast Asia, and remember all these things that he had seen and experienced and write short stories about it. You have the feeling the man must have experienced it all.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** What do you think of Treadwell?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Of Timothy Treadwell? In *Grizzly Man*. Very fascinating and I have to give him credit as being a magnificent filmmaker, but also very much misguided as a human being, somehow with his compass not intact. And of course I have an ongoing argument with him throughout the film, even though he was already dead for about a year. How should I say? There’s something which fascinated me about him because he was so bold to expose himself to his own camera with all his follies with all his, I say it in quotes now, stupidities, with all his generosity, with all his grandiose designs,

which were quite dignified and great designs, and it was clear to me this was not a film about wild nature, it was going to be a film about human nature. And Treadwell is unique because he offers us a glimpse into the deepest abysses of the human soul, and we owe him, we owe him our admiration for that courage, the courage and the single-mindedness he had. And it doesn't matter that much how wrong his basic assumptions were and how romanticized he saw wild nature.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And he was wrong because he trespassed.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, a borderline between wild nature and us that we should not trespass. We should not hug a bear, period. **(laughter)** We should not *love* the bear, we should *respect* the bear.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** I asked a few people to provide me with some questions. And I got three people asking me the same question, so I thought I would, in closing, ask you this question. Why did you shave your mustache?

**(laughter)**

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yeah, it was a good one, I must say. **(laughter)** Somehow it was some sort of a defense and I could hide behind it like I am hiding behind an adopted name. I liked it. I wish I could do my work anonymously, like the painters in late medieval time, a master of the Cologne triptych, but of course nowadays with the media and so on they are too sensitive and there are too many people involved, you cannot hide. But the mustache was some sort of a bastion behind which I felt kind of safe, but then in travails and tribulations of life I kind of lost it.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** You lost—

**WERNER HERZOG:** I lost the mustache. I actually shaved it, but it's like losing it and like accepting that I have no real defenses. But other things, things in my life went very well, so life has been good to me.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Even without the mustache?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Even without the mustache, yes. Life has been good to me and I am grateful for that and I don't need the mustache anymore.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Thank you very much.

**(applause)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Werner Herzog will be very happy to take questions. I insist on the nature of questions, rather than comments.

**Q:** About Martin Heidegger.

**WERNER HERZOG:** What was the question?

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Can you say something about Martin Heidegger?

**WERNER HERZOG:** I have never read anything of Martin Heidegger. I am not good in reading philosophy. We are sitting here with a trained philosopher, a learned philosopher, and Paul has always been appalled that I have not read this and not that and not the other so I have hardly ever read Heidegger.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** It always reminds me of a comment of a teacher of mine when he was asked if he had read something: He said, “Read it? I haven’t even taught it.”

**(laughter)**

**WERNER HERZOG:** But I think your question aims more into the biography of Heidegger, is that correct?

**Q:** Well, it’s just that you, much of what you say seems to very much recall Heidegger’s own ideas about a kind of wrong turn in human history.

**WERNER HERZOG:** It could be, but I have made an attempt at one page of Heidegger and after a day and a half struggling over the first three sentences, it’s hopeless. And I have, I have the same problem with Hegel, for example, I will never be able to break the Hegel code. **(laughter)** Kant eludes me because I do not understand the language. It’s too difficult for me. And I’m not philosophically—I’m

not a philosophical person in abstract terms like Heidegger would be. But I may be partially philosophical but out of experience in drawing my conclusions.

**Q:** Thank you.

**Q:** You talked about Neolithic peoples and stuff like that and you mentioned this idea of like this sin of agriculture and subsequent like development of organized human society and stuff like that, but at the same time, though, you emphasized this idea of like gathering knowledge and stuff like that, like all the books in the bunkers and stuff like that that you think is like really important and kind of gathering and pooling our information. So I was wondering that if hypothetically there was like a time machine that you could go in and go back to like Neolithic times and the sin of like the pigs breeding and stuff like that, and you could stop it and just be a caveman and we would all still be like cavemen, would you have done that or not?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, it's a wonderful question, I think, **(laughter)** because I cannot eradicate, I cannot eradicate ten thousand years of human history, and I cannot really revert to it. But I can do certain things. I can understand certain things like tourism or traveling on foot or I can understand that I should not drive my car as much as I used to do. Since ten years I drive maybe ten or fifteen percent of what I would have done ten years ago in my car, and it's a great lesson, and a colossal achievement of human ingenuity that we have computers, and much of what I am doing nowadays instead of traveling here and there, I do e-mail, which is a wonderful tool and we do not have to print out everything. So we cannot revert things. We can only try to figure out where we are standing and try to steer the course in a way that will not abolish the irreversibility of the human race, that we are going to be extinct.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** But e-mail has its dangers.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Well, I can see it how you are using it, Paul.

**(laughter)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** I speak of experience.

**WERNER HERZOG:** You speak of experience. Now, if you go to—if you spend too much time on cell phones it's not healthy and too much time on a computer doing e-mail it's not very healthy.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** I was thinking about how much these objects make us solitary.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, of course they make us solitary . . .

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Less milking of the cows.

**WERNER HERZOG:** . . .and the more technical instruments, the more instruments of communication we have, and we have the cell phones and e-mail and radio and television and whatever, interactive this and cyberspace, the more instruments we have and the more we use it, the more solitary we become. And I'm speaking solitary in a deep human way, we are not isolated, but we are deeply, deeply solitary.



And the huge explosive evolution of tools of communication makes us more lonesome than we have been ever before. So beware of your BlackBerry or whatever it's called.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** My virtual leash.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, but you have to use it and that's legitimate, but it's wonderful to hear that you went, I think, to Mexico and you left it behind.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Yes, it's still catching up. **(laughter)**

**Q:** You were talking about preserving like all these languages, these six thousand languages that 85 percent of them are going to be gone in fifty years.

**WERNER HERZOG:** In less than fifty years.

**Q:** Less than fifty years. What's the point? What's the point of preserving all these like six thousand languages if only like one guy speaks them, and he's going to die out if we like write it down in a book and you put it like in a vault under the library.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, there's limited value about that. But the real value would be to see that there are twenty-five remaining speakers of a language, of a tribe, to take care of them, to consider them as something very, very precious, much more precious than the last fifty or so panda bears that we have. Support them. Encourage them to stay in their culture. Encourage them to have children, encourage

them to live a decent life that is beyond the barest poverty. It's not just preservation as an archivist, that is only part of it, but encouraging the last speakers, encouraging the Gaelic people, "Stick to your language. Speak it in school. Multiply it. Carry it out in the world and do not go under." It's the people I would more care than the archival preservation.

**Q:** Thanks.

**Q:** Keeping in the vein of what went wrong in the twentieth century. I was wondering where did you get the footage for *Lessons of Darkness* and what prompted you to make that film?

**WERNER HERZOG:** *Lessons of Darkness* was a film I shot in Kuwait when all the fires were still burning and I got the footage, yes, to be straightforward, it's not just my film, it is a film by Paul Berriff, a British filmmaker, and me. Paul Berriff is a wonderful cinematographer and you see the caliber of his cinematography but I had an idea of what I wanted to shoot in Kuwait and he had a team and a shooting permit and all of a sudden it was clear that the fires would be extinguished within three weeks and it was a hopeless case for me to get bureaucracy in Kuwait moving so fast and giving me a shooting permit.

So I found out—through asking around, I found out that a British film team was on standby ready to go to Kuwait and filming a film, and I contacted the man, Paul Berriff, and I said to him, you know, met him actually for twenty minutes or so, thirty minutes in a hotel room in Vienna. And I said to him, "Paul, I know exactly what I want to shoot." And I sensed he was not quite clear, and I said, "Can I step in and wrestle the role of director away from you that you normally would do, or quite often would do, and you would be the cinematographer?" and he's a very strange man like a terrier, he has the

abruptness of a terrier and goes for—and he stood up with an abruptness and I thought he would charge now, **(laughter)** and he bowed to me in a very strange way, **(laughter)** an abrupt way, and he said, “It would be an honor,” **(laughter)** and two days later we set off for Kuwait and filmed it. So I owe the man a lot. And how did I get it, yes, by stepping into a role that was actually someone else’s role, and having found a man of great magnanimity who would allow me to do it and a man of great, great caliber as a cinematographer, so that’s how I got the footage.

**Q:** Thank you very much.

**Q:** Werner, with cinematographers like Thomas Mank and Edward Lachman who built, they build a kind of visual poetry, in the way that you see landscapes, I’m wondering if you would ever consider films that were just visual poems.

**WERNER HERZOG:** I have done that. For example, *Fata Morgana* is nothing but a visual poem. *Lessons of Darkness* in a way is a visual poem, it’s like a requiem, and *The Wild Blue Yonder*, it’s a requiem, it’s a science fiction fantasy, I call it a science fiction fantasy, but I could have called it a science fiction poem, I think it would be as legitimate as that.

**Q:** Well, they achieve the ecstasy that you speak of when you speak of the medieval mystics, you know, that visually they do, I mean, I think it’s very, very special, and I’d like to see you do more of that.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, but the problem with films like *Fata Morgana*, is these films do not occur to you very often, you do not have a situation where you can film it. Besides, it's very difficult to find more than a hundred people willing to see the film. **(laughter)** *Fata Morgana*—

**Q:** You've earned that following, I think they would.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, but, but if you have endurance enough, and I have been endowed with some perseverance, with other films it's so often—somehow it is carried along in the avalanche, it somehow pops up once in a while. I love to do these films but please do not forget that I am quintessentially a storyteller. And a storyteller in the way you would find a storyteller in the marketplace in Marrakech and having a group of people and you have to tell them your story, they should not walk away and go shopping. You want to tell the story. You want to have your coin in your basket on the ground.

**Q:** Well, I hope you tell the story of Adam Hochschild's King Leopold's humanitarian crimes, I hope you'll consider that, because I keep asking you to do something with that, and I think it's your film.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Could be, I'm not too familiar with the story and we should not forget of course it's a very highly politically charged sort of subject, and I try—

**Q:** Well, it was a holocaust, it was an African holocaust.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, but probably more a subject for a study in the form of a book.

**Q:** Thank you. Thank you for great films.

**Q:** Hello, I was going to ask you a question that's not directly about movies. And I don't know, maybe you've addressed it in interviews before, I'm not sure. But do you have any specific views on religion or on our relationship or the experience of God personally, and also how do you think that fear of God plays into experiencing truth, or do you?

**WERNER HERZOG:** It's a mighty question and should not be debated in a large and public circle. If I knew you, if you were my friend, I could debate it easily with you. I give a few hints, yes. I had a very intensive and dramatic religious conversion when I was fourteen. I became a Catholic. I was baptized and became a Catholic and it had a great intensity, and somehow it dwindled away fairly soon.

**(laughter)** No, it does happen and I cannot claim that I am still the child I was when I was fourteen. But I had a different approach into religion and concepts of a higher spirit, of God, and it carried me. It carried me very far and very deep, and until this very day, you still can see a distant or sense a distinct echo of that time in many, many of my films. Including *The Wild Blue Yonder*. Including—the word God appears quite often including *Aguirre the Wrath of God*, or the Kaspar Hauser film, *Every Man for Himself and God Against All*. So there is an echo there. I would not like to go beyond this in a public meeting like this.

**Q:** Thank you very much.

**Q:** I was curious residing now in California, in a feature film, would you cast your governor? **(laughter)**  
And what are your thoughts on his talents as leader and actor?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Schwarzenegger as—well, I kind of liked him in *Conan the Barbarian*.

**(laughter)** Particularly when Conan—early in the film, when Conan grows up as a child, and all of a sudden you see thighs I mean as massive as this and pushing this wheel around and the kind of face he has. I like him for this very primitive collective dreams that he, dream that he personifies. It's actually a human—a human—an idol of beauty which went awry, like Anna Nicole Smith went awry, because it is basically a comic book perversion of the human body. So it was Anna Nicole Smith. Comic books play an important part in our concepts of beauty, of the human body. So he's a very, very strange sort of delineation inside of our collective fantasies, and hence as he's such a topos, such a known terrain within our human experience, cultural—I mean low-cultural— experience, he's a very interesting phenomenon. He's not a great actor, but it doesn't matter.

Fred Astaire is not a great—I mean, he's the lousiest actor, he has got the most insipid face you can ever find in cinema, **(laughter)** and yet I adore him, and he cannot—I think there was something about him in 1928 or so in some sort of a scoring card when he auditioned for one of the studios, Warner Brothers or whatever, and this card survived and it says, “Cannot act. Cannot sing. Dances a little.” **(laughter)**  
And yet he's such a great star and he has been in some of the most enjoyable movies ever made. So, and again, Fred Astaire is some sort of a collective, a collective representation of some sort of a dream that is configured within ourselves. Very mysterious what sort of people, faces, characters, bodies, cinema brings into our collective visibility. I like him, actually. I mean, Schwarzenegger. **(laughter)**

**Q:** Hello. In *The Wild Blue Yonder* you inserted scenes of the astronauts kind of doing very mundane things, you know, exercising, but they strap themselves in to exercise, and we see them strap themselves into bed. Is this your like humorous jab, you talked about tourism tonight, is this a humorous jab at tourism, are we trying to go into outer space as like another place to put into our travel?

**WERNER HERZOG:** No, I think this is very blunt realism film by the astronauts themselves. If you do not strap yourself into a bed which is actually on the wall—and they are glued to the wall—you will drift away, and you will drift into the cockpit and somehow disturb the instruments. And if you are on a treadmill and you are walking or running on the treadmill, you would immediately, with each step, fly against the ceiling, you would propel yourself against the ceiling, so they have to strap themselves down to the ground. And the ground is actually the ceiling, which doesn't matter, because there is no upside or downside or left or right anymore in space.

**Q:** But they don't have to strap themselves into a bed, they can just sleep in free space. There's no need to strap themselves into a bed.

**WERNER HERZOG:** No, but there would be a disturbing object floating around in the cockpit.

**(laughter)** So it would be very advisable if you went into space, you better strap yourself down when you sleep or tie yourself on a leash.

**Q:** Hi. You were talking about tourism being a sin and Petrarch going to the mountains and that and how ultimately communication—right?—is a sin.

**WERNER HERZOG:** No, not a sin, but, yeah, okay.

**Q:** Why don't you see cinema as tourism?

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Why don't you see cinema as tourism?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Why don't I see cinema as tourism? I do not see literature as tourism, either. I don't have a straight answer. The question is too odd for me to imagine that. **(laughter)** Yes, you can of course make a film about the beaches in Hawaii and substitute tourism—

**Q:** What I mean is you shot all these movies in jungles and I mean, this last one was in Thailand, right, *Rescue Dawn*? Why don't you see going and showing—I mean, I don't necessarily agree—but why don't you see that as its own kind of tourism?

**WERNER HERZOG:** Not like it because I'm not exploiting. I'm not exploiting a foreign culture into some sort of a vulgar consumer good. What I'm trying to do in a different culture, in a different environment, very often I give it a voice, very often, like in *Wodaabe: Herdsmen of the Sun*, these tribal people have a voice all of a sudden that they have never had before. I never consume, I never expose their landscapes as a consumer item. I actually stylize the landscapes and these people in a way that they become dear to us. They become part of our inner visions. They become part of a universal understanding of us as a human race. And tourism doesn't do that. Tourism does other things. They exploit cultures, they consume cultures until there is nothing left. You have to go to Bali, which I have



never seen, but I am told go to Bali and you know what I'm talking about. Bali is destroyed utterly. Or go to Mexico.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And tourism is also a way of not being present. I remember that wonderful line of Susan Sontag when she was talking about tourism, she said, "Just wait until now becomes then, you'll see how happy we were." It's a way of distancing oneself from the present.

**WERNER HERZOG:** And photographing certain places to death. Landscapes can be embarrassed and can be consumed and wasted to death and we have seen a lot of that.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Let's take one last question.

**Q:** Thank you. This really follows up on your refusal of exploitation, I think. I'm just wondering if you gave yourself a private screening of the footage from *White Diamond* of what was behind the waterfall.

**WERNER HERZOG:** Yes, I've seen it, it's not that interesting anyway. Because it's fairly dark. Very, very strange because it's overgrown with mosses and very strange green sort of things and you have one and a half million swifts nesting back there. But it was evident I would not show it since I was asked not to do it because it has a great meaning for the tribal people there. Sometimes it is much better to have a question and no answer. Sometimes it's better just to not know and not go any further and stop. And retrace your footsteps and not expose the footage. This is why I did not expose the footage or the audiotape of Timothy Treadwell's and Amie Huguenard's death. They were mauled by a bear and

skinned alive by a bear before they died. And what you hear on the tape must not be published and quite often these things have been.

It reminds me of an episode with Errol Morris. In his early times he had written about, had written much, much material about mass murderers and one case in Wisconsin, Plainfield, Wisconsin, where I ended up shooting *Stroszek* and he was fascinated by the fact that Ed Gein, the most notorious of all mass murderers in American criminal history, had dug up graves and skinned the bodies, freshly interred bodies, and had made lampshades and all sorts of atrocious things. In the very center of a perfect circle of dug-up graves was the grave of his mother. Now Errol asked did he dig up his mother or not and we argued and we talked about it and the mystery that was there, and I came up with this absurd idea and I said, "We will go there secretly and we will dig at night," so I showed up in Plainfield, Wisconsin, but he had chickened out and he didn't come. But the lesson of all this, the lesson of all this was, good that we didn't do it because having a question and no answer to it is much more exciting and has much more depth than having the answer.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Ladies and gentlemen, Werner Herzog.

**(applause)**