Werner Herzog, and His Film Philosophy

Going into this assignment, I really didn’t know much about Herzog, other than the fact that he was a director, and has a funny voice. After watching ‘Burden of Dreams’, and ‘Werner Herzog Eats his Shoe,’ however, I now see that he really believes in the art of film, and his fellow movie creators. Watching these also helped me to see Herzog’s philosophy of film, which I believe to be “going all the way, and taking chances, as long as you believe in it.”

Herzog’s ‘Fitzcarraldo’, should have died many times. He first had problems with the location’s indigenous people, so he had to put production on hold for 13 months so he could find a new one. They find a new one, film for 5 weeks, with 40% filmed, his lead gets amebic dysentery, and has to fly home for treatment. His doctor tells him he cant return, so he is forced to drop out, and soon after the co-star, Mick Jagger, drops out for scheduling reasons. He finds a replacement, and starts filming all over again. More problems ensued as filming started all over again, and came to a head in the big scene in the film that encapsulates the entire idea of the film. Pulling Fitzcarraldo’s steam boat over the mountain. The engineer who designed the pulley system dropped out because of the 70% it would fail and people would die, but Herzog pushed on, because he knew this scene needed to happen to make the film. The boat ended up getting stuck on the hill, and sat there for months while they filmed the rest of the footage. At the very end of production, he finally got the help he needed, and the last shot captured was the boat being pulled up the mountain. The principal photography was finally concluded 4 years after pre-production began. Throughout the entire insane, frustrating ordeal, Herzog stuck through it because he believed in his film, and the story he was creating. He went on to make “Werner Herzog Eats his Shoe,” which is a mini-documentary on a little bet/publicity stunt Herzog did to help his friend whom he very much believed in, get his film released. He bet his friend if he would follow his dream and make his film, that he would eat his shoe. He told his friend to do anything he could to get it made, implying stealing if he needed to (which, Herzog did, he stole a camera to create his first 7 films.) In an interview with him I found online, he talked about how he always was producing films himself, and having to find backers and using his own money to get films made. At one point, he said he was ‘Living in a chicken coop and had nothing to eat anymore…” and that all he had left was a bottle of shampoo and conditioner and that he “traded it at the local market for four kilos of rice, and I ate rice for three of four weeks.” He also went on to say that he liked to hire mostly people who have worked “as bouncers in a sex club, or have been wardens in the lunatic asylum.” Because they have really seen the “raw, stark-naked quality of life.” He really believes in film, he believes in the process, the passion, the stories, the need to express and capture the images in one’s head. He wants people to understand that they don’t have to big a big budget, big named director to express all your ideas, you can do it with no funds, and low crew numbers as long as you have passion, and a dream. People asked him why he didn’t quit on ‘Fitzcarraldo’ when the problems continued to mount, and he said because “If I give up, I will be a man without a dream, and I don’t ever want to be without a dream.”