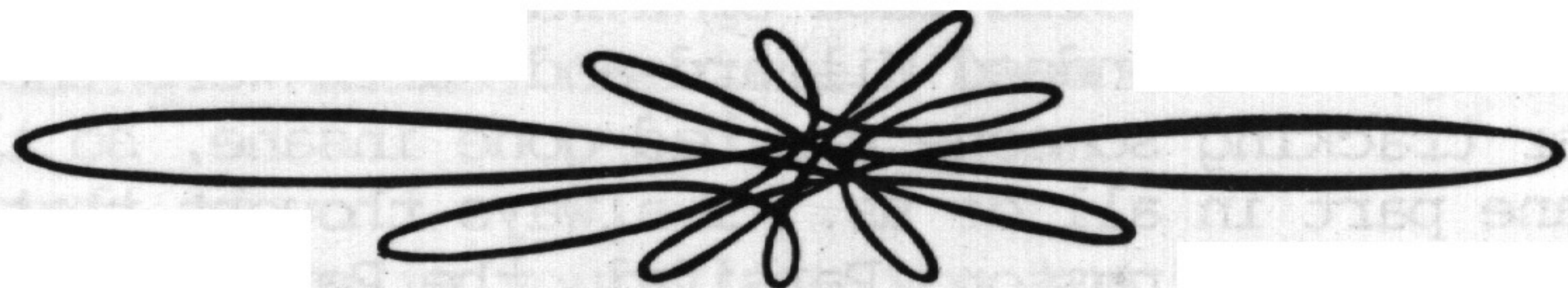


Document Citation

Title	A brief history of Apocalypse Now
Author(s)	Francis Ford Coppola
Source	<i>Cannes Film Festival</i>
Date	1979 May 19
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	4
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Apocalypse now, Coppola, Francis Ford, 1979

L'HISTOIRE D' "APOCALYPSE NOW"



A BRIEF HISTORY OF APOCALYPSE NOW

May 19, 1979

A BRIEF HISTORY OF APOCALYPSE NOW

My connection with APOCALYPSE NOW goes back to around when I heard John Milius tell some anecdotes about things going on in Viet Nam. I was preparing a film called THE RAIN PEOPLE and I knew very little about the war, truly. But I heard things that sounded almost like a fantasy and I listened very intently. Months later, George Lucas, who was then my young associate, came to me with an idea that he and John Milius wanted to do a Viet Nam film and that it was based on the stories that John had been telling. They told me that they needed something to hang it together and I suggested they base it on HEART OF DARKNESS. Use the metaphor of the boat and have the whole adventure move toward some mysterious Col. Kurtz. Warner Brothers paid John \$15,000 to do a draft. He and George went off together to work and six weeks later came this amazing screenplay called APOCALYPSE NOW, which was part zany comedy, part terrifying psychedelic-horror script. At that time Warner Brothers cancelled all of our projects and so myself, George, Milius and dozens of other young writers and directors were immediately out of work and I was bankrupt.

Over the ten years; or whatever it's been; the script survived. I always felt there was something about that movie, about the idea of a man going up a river about to confront another aspect of himself; that indeed Willard and Kurtz were the same man, and that he was going up the river tracking someone who had gone insane, so that when he met him, he was meeting that insane part in all of us. I always thought that was the most wonderful structure; it's Stanley and Livingston, Parsival, the Personal Quest, the classic metaphorical adventure.

I became involved in it after George said that he was too busy; ~~with what~~ ultimately became STAR WARS, to direct it. I think, although it had been George's film, he really wanted to go on to other things. And I, just one day on an airplane, made a decision to make APOCALYPSE NOW myself, thinking, my God, it would be a pleasure, so easy, just to take a good screenplay, just to get out there, get a good cast and just make a movie and not go through all the horror and agony that I had over the GODFATHER films, when I was always being fired and they didn't like my casting. So I thought this would be a snap.

I had originally been the guy who financed AMERICAN GRAFFITTI. In other words, I had gotten a bank loan of \$630,000, based on my GODFATHER money. But everyone around me said: are you crazy? Finance your own film, are you nuts? You'll go broke. A lawyer and a very nice man - I don't know him very well - Sidney Korshak sat me down and said: "Think of your family and of your children. You've made some money on GODFATHER. Put it away." I know his intentions were sincere, so I turned over the negative to Universal and the picture made \$85 million. So I reached the point in my life that I would really start to do whatever my best judgement told me to do and I decided to finance APOCALYPSE NOW myself, because I had missed the boat on GRAFFITTI. And I figured we were real professionals, I'll get in there, we'll get big stars - anyone would want to be in this project. We'll go out there, really make this film, it will be interesting and I'll

figure out an ending, because the script never had an ending.

The one thing that George and John left me with, as wonderful as the project was, was that they never left me with an ending, which is a little factor that becomes more important as the trip goes on.

At any rate, I started calling up my friends, and one by one, every actor that I asked wouldn't do it for a different reason. I mean, these were guys that I had made into stars. They didn't want to go away for so long in the jungle, or there wasn't enough money, or it wasn't clear as to what the roles were. They didn't ask me those questions when I made GODFATHER I or GODFATHER II. They just trusted me. What's happened? Why won't the actors whom I respect so much trust me anymore? Well, they were all into being movie stars. So, to make a long story short, I decided to go with other actors. I met young guys. I was impressed with the wonderful black actors. There were only two roles in the film and some cameos in the Do Lung Bridge scene, but there are some young American black actors that are great, terrific, nice guys and serious artists. Right now they are the best actors in the world in my opinion.

We cast some people, and I went out into the jungle, whereupon this easy movie that I was going to knock off turned into this living nightmare for a year and a half. And I began to realize that we were torn apart ... I mean, here we are, an enormous army of people having to, in some cases, build towns, because where we wanted to shoot there was nowhere to live and no electricity. So we were an engineering department. We were an air force because we had helicopters and a jet. We had a whole navy because it was about a boat going up the jungle. We were hitting storms and accidents and I had peoples lives in my hands because we were doing things with aircraft and helicopters that people could get killed doing. And all the time I knew one thing that no one else knew: I didn't have an ending.

So, at one point, I realized, this is your life, you are going up the river, this is your HEART OF DARKNESS, just give it your best shot. The mentality that made this film was Kurtz's mentality. The crew working on the film were following not some cohesive idea that they knew or some logical script, they were following some madman's ... exactly, and I didn't have the heart to tell them that I didn't know what I was doing. But I didn't have to ... they knew.

At any rate, it ultimately got done. And at the point of this screening today, here's where I am. I have for the first time an answer print, which is the first time I'm seeing the film as one piece of film with balanced color, to some extent, with all the opticals and with the dissolve now actually being in the film rather than just being lines, with some degree of finesse. Now what's left to come is to make the final cutting decisions. There may be scenes that get put back or I may trim some other scenes further. I may change certain scenes and especially there is a possible ending finesse.

The sound is the big area of the unfinished aspect of the work in progress. What I think we will have today (since this work is being done as we speak) is the sound track in the state it was two weeks ago when we had to commit to come to this screening.

The music is very unusual. It is all synthesized. It was composed by my father, Carmine Coppola, and myself and it makes use of seven synthesist artists/comp sers. We have

not yet mixed it but I believe by this screening there will be several examples of the music that will replace the temporary music that we've had in for the last year.

The narration is not a final narration. However, it is close to the kind of narration I am interested in. We have experimented with a hung-over, groggy voice and we have that version now in the film.

The sound effects and all the ambiance are part of an enormously complicated sound mix, which is being conceived in quintaphonic sound, which is to say three sound sources in the front and two in the rear, discreetly. Today there will be several examples of what that aspect of sound will be like.

I must say something about myself. I was, and probably am still, a theatre director. For me, an artist must have the opportunity to show audiences his film as close to the way he intends it and have the opportunity to judge how it affected his audience. In theatre these would be the out of town previews.

I am happy to be at Cannes to participate in the Festival, to show my film and use the screenings as one of my out of town previews.

FRANCIS COPPOLA