

Document Citation

Title	Francis Ford Coppola: a profile
Author(s)	Susan Braudy
Source	<i>Atlantic, The</i>
Date	1976 Aug
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	66-73
No. of Pages	8
Subjects	Coppola, Francis Ford (1939), Detroit, Michigan, United States
Film Subjects	Apocalypse now, Coppola, Francis Ford, 1979

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA

A profile

by Susan Braudy

Atlantic Monthly
Aug. 1976

At thirty-seven, Francis Ford Coppola is Hollywood's hottest producer/director. His *Godfather* films were commercial and artistic triumphs, *The Conversation* and *American Graffiti* both widely admired by serious film critics. Coppola's latest venture, hampered by weather and star problems, may prove financially to be just what its title promises, *Apocalypse Now*.



At dusk in San Francisco, a bearded man with a toothy smile is kneeling on the sidewalk, his hands clasped above his head, praying to a glass skyscraper: "Please don't let me be a failure. I want to make money for you on this movie." He lowers his head dramatically to his chest. "I feel so awful. Maybe I should forget it and make a low-budget picture, something warm. Why are my films so cold?" Francis Ford Coppola looks over his shoulder at me. I am impressed. But Coppola doesn't attract any attention from passers-by here in North Beach, where men with shaved heads preach Zen in front of coed massage parlors.

He is praying to the Transamerica Corporation—the conglomerate that owns United Artists—with which he has just verbally closed a \$10 million deal, selling them the North American distribution rights to his new film, *Apocalypse Now*, about the United States' involvement in Vietnam. A few months earlier, he had tentatively sold foreign distribution rights to the unmade film to several European distributors.

"I just may have clinched the deal of my lifetime. We could have"—and his voice lowers with respect at the mention of so much money—"some \$20 million to play with. I'll still control my whole movie. If it goes like *Godfather*, it could mean 10 to 15 million dollars for us. Those United Artist guys were toasting me and eating pasta. I should feel like a big success. No director ever did this before. But I'm so dead I want to hire a director to go shoot the movie. My wife tells me I put myself in these tight spots to justify my anxiety."

Behind the thick round glasses, the dark, child-like eyes look terrified. Then, still kneeling, he raises his fist at the glass skyscraper and laughs a theater villain's laugh. He shouts, "I will do good with this picture. Someday I won't just own *this*," and he points behind him to his wedding-cake Vic-

torian office building, "but I'll own you too." He is now waving his fist. "You guys won't own a piece of my picture. I'll own you instead."

At thirty-seven, Francis Ford Coppola is Hollywood's hottest filmmaker, largely because of the triumphs of his epic *Godfather* films, parts I and II. The more offbeat, lower-budget films that he has both written and directed, such as *The Rain People* and *The Conversation*, have been chewed over respectfully by the critics, but he has yet to write and direct the art film that would establish him as a major auteur-director. Vincent Canby of the *New York Times* says, "What he does best is the absolutely straightforward genre movie, with terrific craft. When he tries these more intellectual weighty films, he falls apart." Pauline Kael of *The New Yorker* is more enthusiastic, comparing Coppola's *Godfathers* to the works of Jean Renoir and Dickens. Of *Godfather I* she writes, "If ever there was a great example of how the best popular movies come out of a merger of commerce and art, 'The Godfather' is it."

Coppola has also used his money and power to become San Francisco's most overworked mogul, with about \$10 million in local real estate bought with the profits from his production of *American Graffiti* and the two *Godfathers*. He poured some quarter of a million dollars into San Francisco's *City Magazine* before he closed it last winter. Coppola also owns an FM radio station, the Little Fox Theater, several buildings filled with filmmaking equipment, a vineyard, an airplane, and a mansion.

The artist-mogul's trophies include five Academy Awards: for writing the screenplay of *Patton* with Edmund North, for adapting the screenplays of both *Godfathers* with Mario Puzo, and for directing and producing *Godfather II*. He was nominated for Oscars for producing *American Graffiti* and for writing and producing *The Conversation*. He has been honored by the Directors' Guild for both *Godfathers* and by film festivals all over the world; the Cannes Festival gave him their Golden Palm for *The Conversation*. "He is the most decorated member of our unit," wisecracks director-writer John Milius, a former protégé who wrote the original screenplay of *Apocalypse Now*. "When Francis walks into a room, you hear and see nothing but clanking, shining Oscars."

Coppola's ambitious movie industry friends are openly ambivalent about and competitive with him. His promises often seem a puzzlement. Quix-

otic in his generosity, like the Don in *The Godfather*, he seems to want to help other writers and directors make movies so as to earn their loyalty and gratitude. But as George Lucas, who directed *American Graffiti*, once said, "Whatever Francis does for you always winds up benefiting Francis the most." Says one writer who asked not to be named, "No matter how mad I get at him, no matter how many times he's sweet-talked me to get things his way, he can always con me again. Sometimes I believe he's warm and wonderful. Other times I think he's a shit. He's a warm, wonderful shit."

Carroll Ballard, a talented filmmaker who has made award-winning children's films, was Coppola's main rival at film school. Today he lives outside San Francisco in a house borrowed from Francis, writing and rewriting the script of *The Black Stallion*, a film that Coppola had promised to bankroll. Coppola has not picked up the option on the script this year, but he assures Ballard eloquently and passionately that the movie will be made once the script is up to par. Some sour Coppola-watchers think *The Black Stallion* will never be made, that Coppola keeps Ballard around in San Francisco at least in part to keep an eye on his old competitor and make sure that Ballard doesn't surpass him. Ballard disagrees. "Sure I worry, what if Francis changes his mind. But the way I figure it, this is my last shot at making a feature. And I think that Francis is a person of good will."

Coppola may not make *The Black Stallion* for a while because of his current financial and production problems with *Apocalypse Now*. His plans for this big-budget movie have been changing for the past year and a half. The movie was supposed to be the cornerstone of Coppola Company, his own studio outside Hollywood. Coppola's obsession is to become an independent filmmaker on a grand scale. First he had planned to distribute the movie himself in this country through Cinema-5, a small, arty distribution company in which he owns shares. Then he decided to sell domestic distribution rights to United Artists and retain control of his film. He even made a murky deal with President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, who Coppola hoped would authorize the bombing, by Philippine air force planes, of "Vietnamese" villages constructed by Coppola's movie crews on one of the Philippine islands.

Last spring Coppola's money problems got worse. He had invested about a million dollars of

Susan Braudy is an editor of *Ms.* magazine and the author of *Between Marriage and Divorce*.

his own money in pre-production expenses of *Apocalypse*. By the terms of his contracts he couldn't touch the millions he had raised from foreign distributors until he had signed internationally known movie stars. But there is only a handful of such people, and none of them wanted to work in the jungle for six months. They are also expensive. Steve McQueen turned down a record \$3 million offer because he didn't want to be away from his family for so long, and because he had heard that Coppola was getting \$3 million as director. Then Marlon Brando declined. James Caan demanded \$2 million. Al Pacino sighed and said no. "You know I'd just be miserable in the jungle," he told Coppola. And Robert Redford told him he had promised his family that he wouldn't work for a while.

So Coppola pitched yet another deal to United Artists, asking them to buy his entire picture and bail him out. No movie stars meant no international distribution money. Then Coppola had another idea. "Who needs stars?" To his art director, who was telephoning in a progress report from the Philippines, he shouted cheerfully, "Don't be depressed. I'll make this film. I'll cast a lot of unknowns, young Al Pacinos, and sign them on with me as a repertory company, a studio in San Francisco. They'll take acting classes and do theater too for five years. We'll use them to build a talent pool. The studios don't encourage or build talent. Anyway, it'll be a better movie. The war was fought by children. Redford and McQueen are too old." A few weeks later, Francis bought a full-page ad in *Variety* to announce his cast. Brando (who had had a change of heart) was the only star. Other actors included Harvey Keitel of *Mean Streets* and Robert Duvall of *Godfather*.

Disasters plagued *Apocalypse* in the Philippines. First Coppola learned that Brando would not appear for his scenes until the fall. When Harvey Keitel objected to the delays in shooting caused by Brando's schedule, Coppola fired him. A shaken Keitel, wearing a military crewcut and a tropical suntan, said he had feared that his long-term contract with Coppola—also now severed—would have made him too dependent on Coppola's whim in coming years. The film was shut down a second time in early June when a typhoon destroyed most of the Vietnamese sets that Coppola's crews had constructed. Part of the crew was stranded for three days during the raging storm. Then Coppola and Fred Roos sent the cast home while they stayed on to supervise the reconstruction of the sets. *Variety* reported that Francis, perhaps taking his cue from a Hollywood disaster film, had kept

his cameras rolling during the start of the typhoon because he wanted footage of a storm sequence.

A*pocalypse Now* is the story of an army officer who is assigned to go up a river in Vietnam and "terminate with extreme prejudice"—kill—a squadron of Americans who have been isolated in the jungle and are shooting at American planes. It is based in part on themes from "The Heart of Darkness" by Joseph Conrad. John Milius wrote the screenplay in 1967 for another of Francis' movie companies, the ill-fated American Zoetrope (named after a nineteenth-century optical toy). Originally George Lucas had planned to direct on a low budget, in 16-millimeter, to make the picture look like the evening news.

At lunchtime Francis Ford Coppola is thumbing through an Army textbook on ballistics behind the sixteen-foot desk in his oak-paneled office above San Francisco's bay and rooftops. His curved desk contains a microfiche machine, a stereo set, a tape recorder, and an original Edison phonograph. He makes the sounds of bullets by whistling through his teeth. He has been at his typewriter since 6 A.M. rewriting the script of *Apocalypse*, adding Conrad's theme of a man journeying into the jungle and into the more savage parts of himself. In a corner directly under the round green cupola atop the building sits Fred Roos, once one of Hollywood's best casting directors and more recently the producer of *Godfather II* and *Apocalypse*. He is reading Francis' latest version of the script. Francis writes scripts over and over, roughing in some sections and polishing others. "Read," he commands his producer, "you're supposed to be reading."

Fred stands up, twisting the script into a cone. "Francis, I'm having a hard time following it." Coppola grabs the script from his hands and smooths it out on his desk. "These last five pages are crucial." He's talking fast, selling the script to hide his upset. "The jungle will look psychedelic, fluorescent blues, yellows, and greens. I mean the war is essentially a Los Angeles export, like acid rock. Like in 'Heart of Darkness,' Kurtz has gone savage, but there's this greatness in him. We are all as much products of this primitive earth as a tree or a native whooping around. The horror that Kurtz talks about is never resolved. As Willard goes deeper into the jungle, he realizes that the civilization that has sent him is more savage in ways than the jungle. I mean, we created that war."

At this point Dennis Jacobs, a classmate of Coppola's from film-school days, bursts into the office.

He is a brilliant eccentric who quotes Nietzsche and lives with a trunkful of original screenplays in a men-only hotel on the block between Coppola's office and his *City Magazine*, theater, and film studio complex. He is only a little more unkempt-looking than Francis. Jacobs offers Coppola a psychiatrist's book about fighting in Vietnam. "It has some great dialogue you can steal," he sputters. Coppola takes the book and hands Jacobs a script. "You read the ending," he tells Jacobs. He twirls a page into his typewriter. "Tonight I write all night . . . I got problems. I'm too good at adapting other people's scripts. Better than writing my own. I don't want to be known as an adapter of other people's work."

Coppola's personal power includes his ability to sell himself and to speak directly and disarmingly. "I was the first film-school graduate to make movies," he says. "I am a very successful amateur. I know more about every aspect of filmmaking, from photography to music—including writing and acting—than any other filmmaker in the world, and that's not a boast. Of course I still have to write my best film."

Coppola gracefully forgets to mention one of his strongest suits in an industry in which artists need to be businessmen to launch their products, to fight for budgets, stars, and locations. Francis Coppola is a master salesman who can usually induce anybody to do nearly anything. In order to persuade Robert Evans to hire Marlon Brando for *The Godfather* (Evans had said he would rather quit as Paramount's chief executive than hire Brando), Francis "came on like stereo, singing, dancing, reciting lines, jumping around the room. We were all speechless," Coppola's producer Al Ruddy recalls. By the time Coppola had finished shooting *The Godfather*, despite weekly attempts to fire him, he had succeeded in raising his studio budget from \$2.5 million to \$6 million.

After lunch, Francis' wife, Eleanor Neil Coppola, a graphic artist, comes to the office with Francis' parents, Carmine and Italia Coppola. Italia Coppola is a vivacious woman with a black pageboy haircut. She describes *her* father. "Francesco Pennino," she spells the name out with a sharp eye on my pencil and notebook. "He's Francie's grandfather. My mother's father didn't want her to marry a musician. He was sure she'd starve. So," and Mrs. Coppola glares triumphantly, "he became one of the biggest musicians in all of Italy."

Francis is playing *The Ride of the Valkyrie* for his

father. He is planning to have a war-loving officer in *Apocalypse Now* broadcast this Wagner piece to scare the enemy while his helicopters charge into battle. "Dad, you like it? It'll make movie history." Carmine doesn't like the orchestra, but he begins to tell about *his* career as a flutist, about his audition with the great Toscanini.

Mrs. Coppola is speaking of her mother and father. "If only they could be alive to see all this," she gestures around the room. "All what?" I ask, a little confused. "All this success." She manages a stage whisper above the blaring Wagner. "I have a letter he wrote me when he was nine." She nods at Francis, who is leading a trumpet finale. "'Dear Mommy, I want to be rich and famous. I'm so discouraged. I don't think it will come true.'"

Francis Ford Coppola was born April 7, 1939, in Detroit. The family moved thirty times after that because of Carmine Coppola's career problems. When Carmine received the Academy Award for writing some of the music in *Godfather II*, Francis won a major victory. Not only had he reversed his family's fortunes with his own success, but he'd forced the world to recognize his father. "After I'd spent a lifetime with a frustrated and often unemployed man who hated anybody who was successful, to see him get an Oscar, it added twenty years to his lifetime."

As a child Francis Coppola was often isolated and sickly. At nine he was bedridden for a year with polio. He says his legs are short as a result. He made up puppet shows to entertain other kids, and he adored his older brother, August, now a professor of comparative literature, whom Francis always saw as handsomer and smarter.

At Hofstra on a drama scholarship, Coppola merged the drama club with the film society, controlled a \$30,000-a-year budget, and instituted the practice of a student (himself) directing plays. Then at UCLA film school, where he studied from 1960 to 1962, Coppola became the first student to win a writing award for a film script.

After film school, Coppola was hired by Roger Corman to do an English translation of a Russian space picture. Later, as Corman's assistant on location in Europe, Coppola persuaded Corman to let him direct a "two-week cheapie," a horror script entitled *Dementia 13* that called for some nudity, racy for those days. He hired Eleanor Neil as art director, and they were soon married.

Then he bought a novel, *You're a Big Boy Now* by David Benedictus, and wrote a script based on it to fulfill his contract with Seven Arts. When the

time came to find a director for the film, the story of a teen-age boy looking for adventure in New York, Coppola volunteered for the job. "Why?" asked studio executives. "Because I own the book," he replied. So at age twenty-seven, he persuaded a Hollywood studio to cough up nearly one million dollars for his hectic twenty-nine days of shooting. The movie, released in 1967, was hailed by Joseph Morgenstern of *Newsweek* as the best first movie made "since [Orson] Welles was a boy wonder or [Stanley] Kubrick a kid."

Coppola had called Geraldine Page, Rip Torn, and Julie Harris without introduction, persuaded them to work on the movie with him, and forced the budget up from \$250,000 to one million dollars. The film earned him his Master of Arts degree from UCLA.

In late 1967 Coppola was having trouble writing *The Conversation*, so he accepted an offer from Warner Brothers to direct a film version of the musical *Finian's Rainbow*, starring Fred Astaire and Petula Clark. The film lost money, and Coppola is unhappy with it. "It was basically a cheat. The score was great, but we improvised dance numbers. We were competing with *Funny Girl*; they rehearsed musical numbers for two months. The studio also refused to let me shoot on location in Kentucky. I had to work on back lots."

Before the movie was released, Coppola, exhausted, without studio funds or backing, flew to New York with Dennis Jacobs and George Lucas, bought some Aeroflex cameras, and started shooting *The Rain People*, a script he had been working on since college. "I hated *Finian's* and I was scared that I was incapable of writing an original script and directing it. So I forced my hand, invested my own money, and got studio backing once we'd started."

The Rain People is the story of a pregnant housewife, played by Shirley Knight, who leaves her husband to go on a frantic cross-country escape. It is Coppola's favorite of his own films, and one he muses about rewriting someday. He started shooting in February 1968, and spent \$750,000, working out of the backs of trucks on roads around the West for eighteen weeks.

The stop-action technique, which Coppola was to use later in *The Conversation*, works beautifully in *The Rain People* in an early scene in which Knight, wearing a slip, sits on a bed in a motel room, turns on an automatic coffee machine, and just listens to it boil. Split-second flashbacks evoke each character's obsessive thoughts. We see Knight

remembering a love-tussle with her husband. It is a startling use of cinema.

Coppola is known as a director of actors. He assumes that the actor portraying a character is the expert on that character, and he waits patiently through rehearsals for the performance that he is confident will emerge. He often writes a rehearsal script that he goes over with the actors for weeks in advance of shooting.

"Often the actor will show me where a script is wrong," he says. "I tell him or her to knock something off a table, and the actor will say [the] character can't do that. The director tries to trick the actor to come around to his way of thinking. But the actor is manipulating the character, not interpreting the scene. So usually the director is wrong."

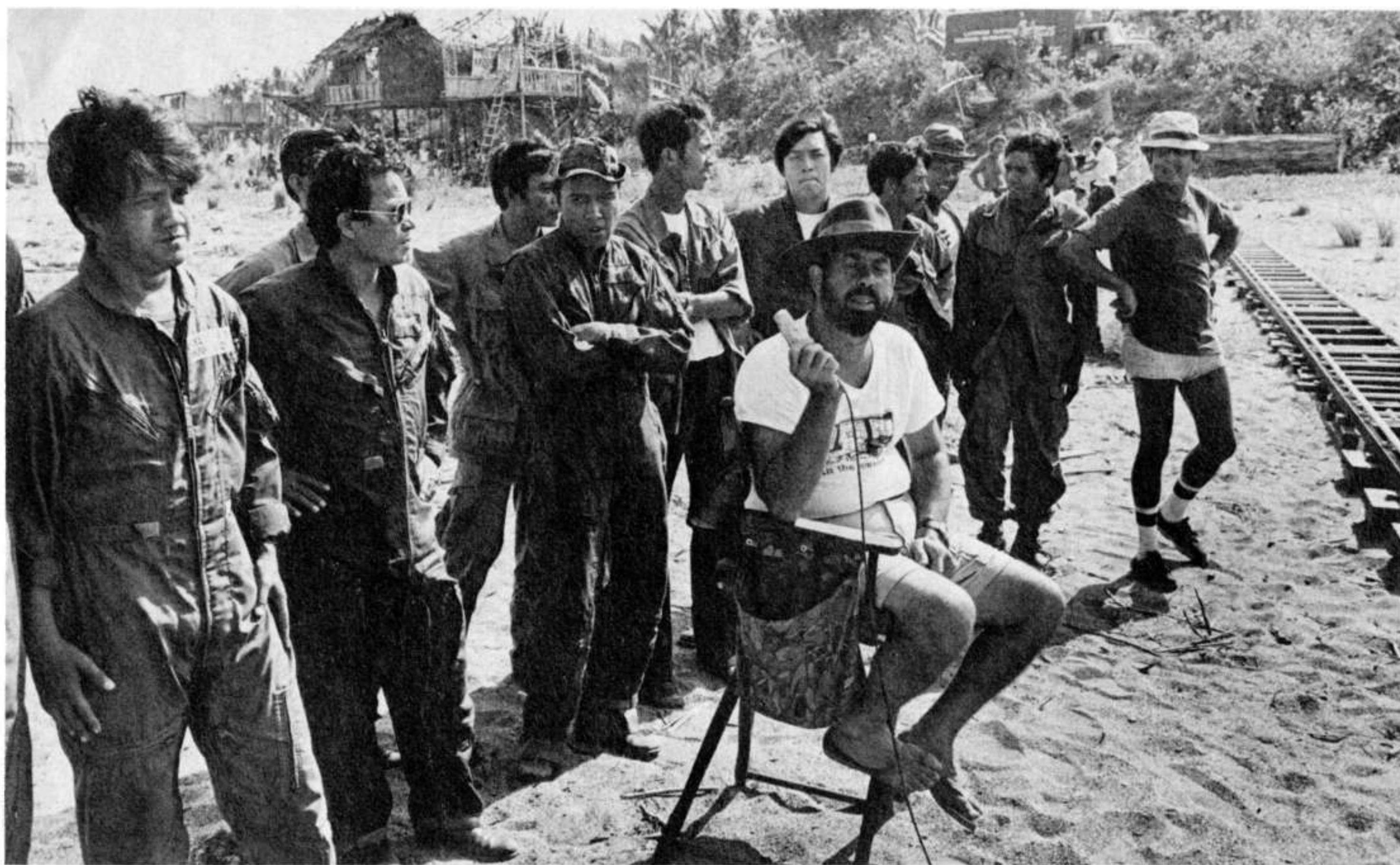
While Francis and the crew were shooting *The Rain People* in Ogallala, Nebraska, he decided to set up an independent film studio. He called it American Zoetrope. Warner Brothers advanced him \$400,000 to get projects going. In 1969, he filled an old warehouse in San Francisco with sound mixers, a projection room, editing tables, a dubbing stage, and excited film-school graduates like John Milius, Dennis Jacobs, and George Lucas. Lucas wrote and directed *THX-1138*, a science fiction film shot on location in San Francisco. Francis was rewriting *The Conversation* at the time. "I'm sticking my neck out to get outside the power structure," he told touring journalists. "I've sunk all my money into this operation. In a couple years, we'll be far more important than any two Hollywood studios."

Someday Coppola may get his kingdom, but American Zoetrope wasn't it. After Warner executives saw Lucas' esoteric and mechanistic *THX*, they withdrew their support and left Francis with a \$.5 million debt and a deep depression.

When Paramount called to ask Coppola to adapt and direct Mario Puzo's novel *The Godfather*, he turned to George Lucas and asked, "What should I do?" "Take it," advised Lucas. "We're broke."

Francis was not Paramount's first choice; the studio had been turned down by Richard Lester and Costa-Gavras. Puzo's book was not yet a best seller. Francis was chosen because he was known as a director who could write (*Patton*). He used inexpensive production techniques, such as location shooting, and he had the additional asset of being an Italian-American.

"Directing any large movie," he says, "is like



Coppola on set of *Apocalypse Now* in the Philippines

running in front of a speeding locomotive. And *Godfather* was worse than most."

From location in Manhattan and Sicily rumors of Marlon Brando's uncooperativeness and Coppola's ineptness reached the industry. Coppola remembers the crew's snide asides as he worked through scenes with Brando and Al Pacino, sometimes requiring as many as fifty camera setups. Gordon Willis, the film's brilliant cinematographer, led the jeerers. Coppola says, "I agreed with Gordy on how both *Godfathers* should look—no zoom shots, and grainy like old period photographs. But he hates and misuses actors. He wants them to hit marks [bits of tape put on the ground during rehearsal to show their movements]. I said no. They're not mechanics, they're artists. I was their protector. Gordy acted like a football player stuck with a bunch of fag actors. I was in the middle."

Willis and Coppola worked together more amicably on *Godfather II*. "He realized I have my own way of working. I'm not one of those Joe Dynamite fast Sidney Lumet type directors who goes: 'Hey, let's light that. I want a second camera over here. Al, you're in this scene. We're going to be out of here by lunch. Ready, quiet, let's go. We'll do it again in two minutes.'" Coppola has been jumping into the air, moving chairs, pushing unseen people into position, and gesturing like a traffic cop. "This stuff gives the crew an illusion of competence, energy, thrust." He spins on one heel,

and pushes an elbow forward in a semi-obscene street gesture.

Robert Towne, who wrote *Shampoo* and *Chinatown*, reports, "Francis may give the appearance of being a bumbler, a romantic mess, but he's in control. He has no secret. He's just a guy who makes more and better choices than anybody [else]. He gets to be creative as a writer, in casting, in shooting, and in editing."

On location, where each day's work costs thousands of dollars, Coppola often doesn't have his final script ready. But he does have a thick loose-leaf notebook in which he has worked out dialogue for each scene and notes on what he wants to accomplish. When working on location, Coppola wakes up an hour earlier than anybody else and wanders around the set taking pictures with a Polaroid camera. Then he has breakfast with the assistant director and the cinematographer, and tells them how he plans to shoot the day's scenes. At about 7 A.M., while the crew is still asleep, he meets with the actors for an hour and a half. They are not yet in costume or makeup. Coppola asks for their advice. They start speaking their lines quietly. Then, say, Al Pacino might stick his head out into a hallway, and Coppola will say, "That's terrific. Do more of that."

Coppola says, "When I see a moment starting to happen I identify it and say 'fantastic, but forget it

for now.' I'd rather have it happen up on the screen."

Then he sends the actors into makeup. Meanwhile the crew arrives and spends two hours setting up; no one has been kept waiting so far. "It's bad to keep actors waiting," Francis sighs. "They get cranky, girls come and see them, and they drive cars too fast." Coppola likes to have a duplicate set available where actors can rehearse or at least stay in character while the crew is working or when they are not needed in a scene that is being shot.

Coppola usually shoots with only one camera, determined to get the one exactly right shot each time. In an expensive and complex scene, though, such as the one in *Apocalypse* that employs forty attack helicopters, he will cover himself with six cameras. He usually shoots take after take, more than most directors, reshooting scenes to get an actor's best performance. "It's hard when you have an actor like, say, Robert Duvall, who peaks in the second run-through, playing with Donald Pleasance, who gets better as he rehearses. The director has to optimize circumstances," says Coppola.

Editing is chaotic, creative, and agonizing for him, because he prints so much film that he leaves himself too many options for the story line. "What you select in editing is part of the writing process," he maintains. He kept changing the story line of *The Conversation* until it was released. Most directors are secretive and protective about their rough cuts, but Francis asks for responses and *then* gets depressed over criticism.

Coppola's friends agree that he could not live his roller-coaster life without the soothing influence of his wife. A slim woman who looks younger than her thirty-nine years, Eleanor Coppola makes a quiet point of her independent artistic life and is indifferent to fluctuations in their wealth. She shuns reporters who want to ask her what Francis' favorite recipe is. Francis videotaped the birth of their youngest child, Sophia, now four and a half. She and the other two Coppola children—Roman, age ten, and Gian-Carlo, eleven—appeared in the baptism scene in *Godfather I*. Their imposing thirty-room house is filled with modern art, reflecting Eleanor's taste, as well as Oscars, framed awards, and gadgets, reflecting Francis'. A projection room is furnished with comfortable sofas, armchairs, a Moog synthesizer, a harpsichord, and a video projector. In the giant red kitchen, Eleanor and Francis drink wine and chat with dinner guests while they drop balls of gnocchi dough into briskly boiling water.

Francis reigns over dinner and shows off his latest acquisitions—a Questar telescope and several signed first editions of Joseph Conrad's novels. He tells stories of his meeting with Fidel Castro in Cuba and talks about an unmailed letter to Fidel: "I love you. We are similar. I am heavy, and so are you, no I am fat. We have the same initials. We both have beards. We both have power and want to use it for good purposes. . . ." He then persuades his son Roman to recite a Baudelaire poem, which the boy does in perfect singsong French. "Ahh, throw the kid off the picture," Coppola growls proudly.

For several months this past winter Eleanor Coppola was the active publisher of *City Magazine*. A year ago, when Francis took over the expiring magazine in which he'd invested some \$70,000, he proclaimed in a lead editorial that he would use the magazine to improve life in San Francisco. The editorial antagonized some San Franciscans who muttered about the temerity of this flashy carpetbagger from movieland. At first Francis enjoyed playing media mogul, doubling the magazine's size and budget. His deficit, however, grew to \$30,000 an issue, and Coppola soon realized that he was spending something more valuable than money—his time. So after reluctantly firing several successive editors, he hired the talented, erratic Warren Hinkle, former editor of *Ramparts*, to run the show. Hinkle, media observers joked, was the only man who could spend money faster than Coppola could make it.

When, under Hinkle's editorship, the magazine's losses continued to mount, Francis came up with what he thought a better plan. He would cut expenses by making his wife publisher, pruning the magazine's staff, and concentrating on cheaper local stories. Eleanor Coppola's primary job was to hold Warren Hinkle's losses to \$15,000 an issue. "I'd hate to see it die," she said of the magazine, aware of rumors. "But I'm holding Warren accountable. No more overtime. You can't pull a magazine out of your sleeve on Friday night."

When Francis flew into San Francisco last February in the midst of trying to keep his *Apocalypse* deal moving, he told his wife to issue a statement that he was folding the magazine. Then he left San Francisco without facing hurt and disgruntled editorial staffers. "There isn't enough local talent in San Francisco to keep a magazine like that going," he said.

The *City Magazine* story illustrates part of Francis' win-lose philosophy. He often asserts, "I don't just lose. I go under." He had invested several hundred thousand dollars and a great deal of

time in this venture. And each time he faced apparent defeat, Coppola produced a new plan that he touted as "just the brilliant move we need to make."

Francis Coppola would not have been surprised if his plans for *City Magazine* had worked out. He believes that God and fate are behind him and his plans for his life. He even anticipates "licking death." "I think if you've lived the way you wanted," he says, "expressed something from your heart, realized your fantasies—then you can have a happy death. I don't fear death. I haven't met my date with myself to make a movie from my heart. I've got my name in the paper, a big car, and a big house, but those are my parents' dreams. For myself, I've made two personal movies, *Rain People* and *The Conversation*, and each is a small step."

Coppola's next personal movie will be *Tucker*, a script he has been working on for fifteen years. Preston Tucker was an American inventor who made a futuristic car in the 1940s. It had a third headlight that turned with the wheels and many advanced safety devices. "American products used to be the best in the world. *Tucker* is about that period in American history when making the best car became irrelevant. Detroit destroyed Tucker. Car companies preferred making profits." Coppola's voice sounds tired. He has been talking animatedly for three hours, lying on his office couch.

In his office, in his swank co-op at the Sherry-Netherland Hotel in Manhattan, and even in his house, he looks like a rumpled graduate student surrounded by the accouterments of his parents' wealth. He talks about Preston Tucker. "I like him because he feels human, the lovable American con man, the used-car salesman with his heart in the right place. In his way he was a charlatan. He wore those brown and white pointy shoes, and he was handsome and good with the ladies. He talked fast. He was a little stinky. Some people say I identify with him because he was a con man who was talented. Do you think I am a con man?"

I look at Coppola, one cushion in his lap, his worn Root shoes on one arm of his sumptuous couch. He suddenly looks to me like a rich executive disguised as a kid. I struggle to answer his question fairly, wondering if he isn't in fact conning me into exonerating him: "A con man is a manipulative person who doesn't always tell the truth and who doesn't have a product. You have a product." Coppola nods and pounds on his cushion, applauding my answer, but his voice is neutral: "Yeah, right, right, I have a product." □

Atlantic Aug. 76