

**DUBLIN BUSINESS SCHOOL**

**RICHARD BOLGER**

**A critical look at the production problems caused by Francis Ford Coppola's decision to be both director and producer on *Apocalypse Now* in 1979.**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts degree (Film Studies Specialisation) at DBS School of Arts, Dublin.**

**Barnaby Taylor**

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Directed and  
Produced by  
**FRANCIS COPPOLA**

**Picture 1: Directed and Produced by Francis Coppola. First credit at the end of *Apocalypse Now* in 1979.**

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I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to anyone whom I have worked with in the film industry or whom I will work with. I based much of my decision in writing this dissertation with moving into the industry in mind.

Lastly, I would like to offer my regards and blessings to all of those who have supported me in any respect, mainly my parents Marie and Henry and my brother, Gavin, during my completion of this project.

Sincerely,

Richard Bolger

**Introduction:**

My dissertation concerns the problems caused to production by Francis Ford Coppola's decision to be both director and producer on *Apocalypse Now*. A decision that would drive him to the point of near insanity. A decision that placed unnecessary stress upon himself. A decision that forced him to work the role of ordinarily two separate people. A decision that had enormous bearing on the overall delivery of the film and the overall events leading up to and including the whole film's production completion and process. The main reason I had for writing this dissertation was that when I first discovered that he worked on the film in both the capacity of director and also producer, two wholly separate fields in terms of production, I wanted to discover how he went about doing it and whether or not he was successful in both capacities. I knew of course, starting my dissertation that it is hard to deny the fact that the film was a success, a much acclaimed piece of work by an undoubtedly talented director. My main concern was in discovering how he personally got on with dealing with these roles. The role of a producer and the role of a director are the two primary roles in film production. They deal with different specific elements of a production. In my dissertation I am going to highlight the problems, how he managed to deal or in some cases not deal with the problems that inevitably occur during the production of any film. Problems that occurred on *Apocalypse Now* in many ways have been highlighted and discussed before but what I want to explore and critically analyse is how his taking on of both of the roles as director and producer led to the unravelling of many of these problems. I personally believe that a director cannot also be a producer on the film he is directing simply because he will complicate budgets, scheduling, casting and the delivery of the project. *Apocalypse Now*, 1979 was a success however in my dissertation I will address how it almost was not due to Coppola's decisions. I will also try to address the point of how it may have been a smoother process had he decided to only take on the position of director and work with a producer who he could trust to give him everything he needed. So much has been said about *Apocalypse Now*, but hopefully my research will show that so much more needs to be said about a production that went on for over two years.

**Differences between a producer and a director:**

'A producer is basically the one who initiates, coordinates, supervises and controls all creative, financial, technological and administrative aspects of a motion picture.'<sup>1</sup> This was the requirement for Francis as a producer on *Apocalypse Now*. The job responsibilities of a director as part of a Production Team are to 'select and hire a production designer, select 1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Director and Script Supervisor, cast the film, select locations, establish the look of the film, approve the wardrobe, sets and props as well as sign off on a final budget.'<sup>2</sup> He was indeed taking on a lot by doing both key roles on the film. He did however have Tom Sternberg, Gary Frederickson and Fred Roos also working on board the project as 'producers'. But as the project became more and more about Francis's vision and how he only wanted to do it his way, they effectively turned into yes men who were as much to blame as Francis was for allowing him to go so over schedule and over budget.

**The Initial Idea for Apocalypse Now:**

'The idea for *Apocalypse Now* was originally developed by screenwriter John Milius and director George Lucas as part of a financing deal between Warner Brothers and American Zoetrope, a production company founded by Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola.'<sup>3</sup> The financing deal never went through because Warner Brothers decided to cancel and because of this Lucas pulled out of the project. He had also been working on pre-production for both *American Graffiti* and *Star Wars*. He would go on to make *American Graffiti* in 1973 and he would begin his *Star Wars* quest in 1977. Coppola was busy himself. At the time that the deal between Warner Brothers and American Zoetrope got cancelled he was heavily involved in the development of the *Godfather* (1972) and the *Godfather Two* (1974). Also in 1974, he released *The Conversation* starring Gene Hackman. Coppola could simply not get *Apocalypse Now* out of his head. So he started to consider the possibility of himself directing it. He also decided to take on the feat of producer as well, financing the film mainly through his own input of cash due to the fact

that he did not want studio support. Many studios at the time felt however that it was too close to the actual event and felt it in ill-taste to take it on. American Zoetrope provided much of his needed support in doing the project his way. His team there helped him see out his vision. 'Lucas and his producer Gary Kurtz had envisioned shooting the project on 16mm for under \$3 million.' They felt this was achievable however Coppola decided to tackle the project his way which in many ways was the main reason why the film was so over budget and took so long over schedule to complete. Michael Schumacher discusses in his book *Francis Ford Coppola: A Filmmakers Life* that "Francis Coppola became involved with *Apocalypse Now* as Milius was writing the script in 1969. He originally intended to produce the film for Lucas and Milius, as part of a contract between American Zoetrope (Coppola's production company) and Warner Brothers.<sup>14</sup> Now, he was not only directing it but he was producing it as well.

### **Personal Life:**

Coppola's personal life was suffering as the production dragged on. His relations with his wife, predominately and his family suffered during the production. Their successful happy family life was at risk as well as their financial standing. The Coppola's enjoyed 'possessions and a lifestyle that accompanied great wealth'<sup>15</sup> but Eleanor was struggling seeing Francis day by day growing ever more concerned with the project. It was not only his money that was riding on the film but also his reputation as a filmmaker as word back home was beginning to spread of a production in crisis. 'To protect its investment further, United Artists took out a \$15 million life-insurance policy on Coppola, leading the director to remark that he was now worth more dead than alive.'<sup>16</sup> United Artists were very concerned about Francis's ability to deliver the project as months and months would pass without them being able to see anything. Eleanor recalls his frustration. 'Francis is feeling angry and trapped. The art department has made their art without sparing expense. What they have made is extraordinary, but it is so complete and detailed there is no way Francis can get it all on camera.'<sup>17</sup> Money was being spent without

thought and with no clear end in sight in terms of the project's ending; the financial cost of this production became a more and more pressing issue. United Artists wanted a five-minute piece to run of documentary footage as to show how the film was progressing. Francis did not want this because he knew the production was having problems and he did not want people he did not know arriving onto the set observing proceedings. So, he assigned his Eleanor to shoot the piece. This led to problems between himself and herself which added to his numerous problems already of the script being up in the air, his recasting of Willard and his dismay of landing a significant star to play Colonel Kurtz. All of this being before Martin Sheen suffered his heart attack and Hurricane Olga hit.

#### **American Zoetrope:**

American Zoetrope was a studio founded by Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas. The film studio was founded on December 12, 1969. It was a company dedicated to making films outside of the Hollywood system. Francis and George wanted to adopt digital technology into mainstream productions. In the earlier stages of the initial project development, when George Lucas was originally set to direct the film, he wanted to shoot the film in the Philippines. He had directed films with the studio before. The first film the studio made was *THX 1138* directed by George Lucas in 1971. Four films including *THX 1138* were made before *Apocalypse Now* in 1979. Two were directed by George Lucas. *THX 1138* in 1971 and *American Graffiti* in 1973. Francis Ford Coppola directed *The Conversation* in 1974. Lucas' interest deteriorated, however, Francis's interest remained and he had an ever growing desire to adapt Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* that was published in 1902. Orson Welles had previously attempted to develop the novel into a film; however his attempts never amounted to the level of film production on the project due to his inability to secure the necessary funds to make it happen. *Apocalypse Now* also struggled to get funding and with Zoetrope Studios behind it, Francis may very well have never been able to develop the project. The studio was at the time of the film's early stages of its early pre-production, establishing itself as

a substantial emerging studio that was trying to break away from the studio driven production being made in Los Angeles. However, it did not have the same financing behind as some of the other studios like Universal or Columbia had at the time. He could not get the kind of money he felt was needed the way he was used to with projects like *The Godfather*. So, one of the principal ideas he had in setting up this studio was that 'He also felt that if he stayed on Los Angeles he wouldn't be able to produce the inexpensive, independent films he had in mind. So he and a fellow film student, George Lucas, and their families, moved up to San Francisco to start American Zoetrope.'<sup>8</sup>

### **Budget and Initial Casting:**

According to Gary Frederickson, the budget was estimated to be between \$12-14 million. American Zoetrope assembled \$8 million from distribution outside the United States and \$7.5 million from United Artists who assumed that the film would star Marlon Brando, Steve McQueen and Gene Hackman. Pre-production on *Apocalypse Now* was a complicated process and experience for Coppola that unlimited did not help his nerves going into production. Francis felt that he would have no problem casting big named stars. He had previously worked with James Caan and Robert Duvall on *Rain People* in 1969, Gene Hackman and Harrison Ford on *The Conversation* in 1974 and Al Pacino and Marlon Brando on *The Godfather* in 1972. The film needed big name stars in the film in the leading role to drive on the box-office potential of the film, especially the role of Captain Willard and Colonel Kurtz. He was in touch with every big name actor in Hollywood over his two principal roles. Francis began his casting of these two roles in May and by November he was nowhere. It was not due to his lack of trying, but that of financial holdups in him being able to sign on who he really wanted. 'Virtually every major star had been approached and, to Coppola's mounting concern, the actors had other things to do, weren't interested, or wanted too much money to appear in the picture.'<sup>9</sup>

**Further Casting:**

Steve McQueen was approached over the role of Willard. He was a fan of the script and was interested in getting involved however, he did not want to play Willard, but he wanted to play Kurtz. He wanted the same money to play Kurtz as he was offered to play Willard even though the difference in screen time and on set work was far less. Coppola wanted him but was not willing to pay him \$3 million dollars to play Kurtz for a month's work. James Caan was offered the role of Captain Willard, this being another matter of financial difficulty. Francis offered him the role of Willard for a fee of \$1.25 million dollars; however Caan wanted minimum of \$2 million due to the length of time in the jungle 'citing his wife's pregnancy and her reluctance to have her baby in the Philippines, where the film was to be shot.'<sup>10</sup> Coppola could have casted Caan if he had thought as a producer and agreed to working around his situation. Coppola only saw his financial greed as the sole problem in Caan's getting involved. In terms of the casting of Brando fellow cast-members, he casted Dennis Hooper (as the photojournalist), Laurence Fishburne (a very much unknown at that point in his career), Robert Duvall (as a lieutenant with a large interest in surfing), Harrison Ford (as Colonel Lucas) and Sam Bottoms (as the young gunner on board the Navy PBR) as the films supporting cast. Coppola decided to originally cast Harvey Keitel on as Captain Willard. He replaced Keitel after a month; the reason for this being that his editor Walter Murch felt that "Martin Sheen was more believable as an observer." Sheen however could not even of imagined the surrounding he would find himself in. He could have worked it out with James Caan but Francis was rash and desperate and when you are in this situation with an actor, you are not in control and this and the way he dealt with the casting of actors eventually led him to having to agree to Marlon Brando's terms which are a complete no-no as a producer. As a director, this also put Brando in control on set as he knew Francis would play by his rules.

### **Brando Interested again – Film in Crisis:**

Jack Nicholson was not interested in either of the roles, Robert Redford was against the idea of a long period of shooting of location and Al Pacino like the script and also the role of Willard, but like Redford did not fancy four or five months in the jungle with an as of yet anyway near finalized cast. He even tried to convince Pacino while he was in New York to play the role of Kurtz, but it was to no avail as Al was not willing to make a commitment to an unfinished script and a project that he felt had problems ahead. 'The New York trip only added to Coppola's feeling of helplessness. He was scheduled to begin production within a couple of months, sets were being built half a world away, and he had yet to sign the two leads for his movie.'<sup>11</sup> He had been in touch with Brando earlier on but talks had broken down because Brando did not want to discuss it any further. Shortly before Francis was to take off to the Philippines with his wife and three children, Brando's people called and he had reconsidered the project and wanted to discuss it again. 'His fortunes had sunk to such a level that Coppola had to fight for his casting of Brando in the pivotal role of Don Corleone in *The Godfather*. This and the shocking bleakness of *Last Tango in Paris* re-established him as a major international star, who demanded and got \$3.5 million for four weeks' work on location.'<sup>12</sup> Brando caused various problems in pre-production and during the production that his casting caused both negative and positive promotion for the film. On the negative side, it highlighted that the film was in crisis, problems were emerging before the production team had even arrived in the its location but, somehow this turned into a positive and meant that the world's media were talking about the film and in doing so made its release a highly anticipated event. This publicity all sprung from Francis's press conference at the Cannes Film Festival in 1975.

### **Location for the shoot and President Marcos:**

The next issue Francis faced was getting a location for the shoot of the film. His people (Fred Roos and Dean Tavoularis had been down in Australia promoting *The Godfather II* and while they were there they had been out location shooting for Francis. They found that Queensland had a jungle type element and that it would be ideal to replicate

surrounding similar to that of Vietnam. Francis came down to finalise the deal. Talks broke down over Francis wanting to use the Australian army's troops and helicopters. The Australian government replying that's its army 'was not a film-extra agency'.<sup>13</sup> Talks did not improve with the unions when he promised to hire Australians as part of his production crew. So, he turned his thoughts to The Philippines and trying to secure a deal with the countries president Ferdinand Marcos. President Ferdinand Marcos was interested in getting money from America because the value of the dollar was so great against his nation's currency. The deal included that Coppola would be offered the services of his nation's air force, they would receive the necessary security required and the government would cooperate with the production to the best of its abilities. President Marcos also had a keen interest in cinema. 'Marcos and his all singing, all dancing wife, Imelda, combined the role of oppressive dictator with that of patron of the arts, specifically cinema. For years, until he was deposed, he hosted the annual Philippines Film Festival.'<sup>14</sup> This all sounded like a good idea at the time but with everything else of Coppola minds, mainly the script, his lack of actors cast and the financial complications of the film, he did not stop and consider the full ramifications of shooting in the Philippines. Michael Schumacher mentions how

'The Philippines presented a full-slate of problems, from contending with the cultural differences on a day-today basis to trying to make a movie under strange and occasionally dangerous working conditions that included oppressive heat, constant dampness, guerrilla warfare being waged nearby, poisonous snakes, and an assortments of insects not usually seen by city slickers.'<sup>15</sup>

### **Financing deal:**

He had agreed to pay the Philippines government a fee for services used before he had secured his distribution deal with United Artists. He had struggled to get the budget of \$12-\$15 million he had intended to make his epic for. He had already investment a \$1 million of his money into the film's pre-production. A month before heading out to the

Philippines he had only managed to secure \$7 million from foreign distributors, he still needed another seven to make the project go ahead. United Artists ended up helping him out by giving him a deal worth \$7.5 million for the distribution rights to the film in the United States. So with this positive news as well as his now locked in location all he needed was to cast Willard and Kurtz.

### **Martin Sheen:**

'Captain B. L. Willard (Martin Sheen) is a U.S. Army intelligence officer in Saigon who is assigned to make a journey to Cambodia to "terminate with extreme prejudice" the freelancing command of Colonel Walter E. Kurtz (Marlon Brando).'<sup>16</sup> Sheen suffered a heart attack during production. His alcoholism finally getting the better of him meant that production had to be shut down. It was feared after this, that the film was over and that Sheen would not be back. Thankfully for Coppola, Sheen was back on the scene a few weeks later. Sheen knew that if people discovered that he had heart problems he would find it very hard to get work like this again. So, for the sake of his career as well as Francis's he returned. They had shot so much of him by the stage he had suffered his heart attack that Francis did not have the financial luxury of either being able to recast or reshoot. While Martin recovered, Francis used the time to shoot anything he could with a stand in for Martin Sheen using clever angles to never show his face. Some of Coppola's crew did not return due to the chaotic nature of production. The crew who stayed, due to several accounts enjoyed themselves immensely due to the lengthy periods of downtime they experienced because Francis could not do much without Sheen as Willard. If he wanted to change a part of the script, he needed him there if he was required to say any lines or act in any way towards camera.

### **Rawness of the Subject Matter:**

Phillip DiMare remarks in his definitive book on *Movies in America History* that:

'In 1975, Francis Ford Coppola began work on *Apocalypse Now*, his epic Vietnam War film. The wounds of America's conflict in Southeast Asia,

suffered in the face of what was considered a shameful defeat, were still raw at the time. Because of this, American filmmakers were reluctant to use this war as a setting for combat pictures. Indeed, so controversial had American involvement in Vietnam been that this conflict seemed off-limits even as a basis for a cinematic antiwar statement.<sup>17</sup>

This remark from DiMare highlights and shows the bravery of Coppola as a filmmaker's decision to make the picture in any sense at the time. The film could have backfired on him completely. The American cinema paying audience could have rightly been appalled by his decision to make a film about a subject where so many died so soon after they did. It being somewhat 'off-limits' may have been one of the reason why Francis became so obsessed with seeing it through. For his entire career, he had also gone his own way and I feel that through *Apocalypse Now* he wanted to make a statement highlighting how far he was willing and able to demonstrate that.

### **Crew grew reckless:**

Crew members began to lose their minds as Coppola project seemed to start taking over their sub-conscious. Dean Tavoularis, who was in charge of production design on *Apocalypse Now* remarked "I was living in the house of death I was making... It became such a low level in my life that somehow putting blood on staircases and rolling heads down steps seemed natural to me."<sup>18</sup> The crew was suffering and once that happens problems emerge. 'The making of *Apocalypse Now* was beginning to take a huge toll, not only on Coppola, who suffered from both nightmares and sleepless nights throughout the filming, but on just about everyone associated with the production. Some of the cast and crew used drugs, particularly marijuana, to ease the tension, while others retreated to local bars, where they got drunk and occasionally fought and tossed around furniture.'<sup>19</sup> The situation was at times getting out of control. Eleanor mentions in her book how in the script, it said that the scene require 'burning bodies.' The property master than went off and found dead carcasses for the scene claiming that 'the script says 'a pile of burning

bodies'; it doesn't say a pile of burning dummies.<sup>20</sup> This being a firsthand conversation that she had documented in her book highlights a production out of control. Chaos was everywhere, Francis writing the script as he went along, vast amounts of the crew experiencing various types of tropical diseases, vast amounts of the crew partying it up every other night, President Marcos recalling his helicopters for his own war that Coppola used for combat sequences and all of this was before Marlon Brando arrived.

**Brando's arrival on set and time on it:**

He ended up casting Brando as Colonel Kurtz paying him a \$1 million a week. Coppola could never have expected what was to arrive however. Brando arrived on set close to three hundred pounds, extremely overweight, extremely underprepared and with a newfound self-consciousness in his own ability to perform. 'Brando spent a week arguing with Coppola over the script. When he finally did read *Hearts of Darkness*, he shaved his head and adopted the name "Kurtz". Since he insisted on using the name "Colonel Leighley" previously, dialogue for scenes that had been filmed earlier had to be re-recorded.'<sup>21</sup> These being only the major problems to emerge from pre-production, he also had hundreds of minor problems that emerged on the transitional phase from pre-production into production. Coppola began production without a finalized script. He openly admitted many times that he did not know how to end the film. He did not know where he wanted to take Colonel Kurtz to. Brando's arrival on set led to further growing concerns Francis was having over the production due to his concerns affecting his ability to write and create freely the way he was normally used to. He felt that he would be able to manage Brando the same way he had done so before so effectively on *The Godfather*.



**Picture 2: Francis discussing the project with Marlon Brando. Brando arrived on set without reading Joseph Cotton's novella *Hearts of Darkness*.**

On Brando's first day of filming, his ankle got twisted and he was unable to work. He only had Brando for a finite amount of time; four weeks in total. Brando spent the first of those four weeks preparing and trying to find and discover his character through lengthy conversation with the director Francis Ford Coppola. Francis also being the producer on the film meant that shooting schedules got disturbed due to his ever costing time he had to spend one to one with Brando. Coppola trusted Brando however; he felt that if he took the time with his star that he may extract a performance from him similar to the one he had got from him in *The Godfather*. During the *Godfather*, Marlon Brando really helped Francis find the character within the story and helped him in the process of creating the film historical ending. Coppola hoped for this; however time had passed since they had last worked together on *The Godfather* and Brando was a different person by this stage. He was overweight, benign towards the project, even though he was well

aware of how much financially Francis had put towards the project and also he had not arrived on set with any sense of the character he was to play. This became another reason that production was stalled and drawn out. Brando later confessed "I was good at bullshitting Francis and persuading him to think my way... but what I'd really wanted from the beginning was to find a way to make my part my part smaller so that I wouldn't have to work as hard." Marlon Brando arrived on set on August 31<sup>st</sup>, on schedule. He left the production on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October. His time was brief and what Coppola was able to get from his overweight star was not exactly what he would have hope for but as Michael Schumacher notes 'Brando's performance had formed the outer wall of the film's final third: it was now up to Coppola to build his ending around the structure Brando had given him.'<sup>22</sup>

#### **Francis's nervous breakdown:**

One of the problems with Coppola being both the director and producer on *Apocalypse Now* was due to the high pressure and demands the film carried he ended up suffering a nervous breakdown. He placed too much overbearing work upon himself. He declared on various times during the process of filming that he was going to commit suicide. He knew he faced absolute financial ruin if he could not complete the film which at many times looked like it was going to happen. Remembering how he set out to shoot the film in fourteen weeks and it then ended up taking almost two years to make, one can understand how the budget for the film got so out of control. He wrote numerous versions of the script. He was never really sure of what he wanted for his ending. Brando had arrived allegedly under the assumption that he was going to play a general, however seeing as he never read the source material; he probably did not foresee the gigantic production problem of arriving on set overweight. To put it simply, the wardrobe department never imagined having or even being asked to fit someone his size on the entire production. Due to this, also his seemingly unending conversations with Coppola about his character Colonel Kurtz, what it meant for production was that over nine hundred people cast and crew sat around waiting while the powers that be deliberated in

private as to how to direct and shape this potentially disaster in the making. The production was shut down for a week whilst they worked things out.

**Trouble finding further funding he needed:**

Another problem he encountered as a producer on the film was his inability to secure further funding from different types of investors as well as the support of their services. 'Coppola was able to secure advances from U.S and foreign distributors to cover the film's budget, but other problems cropped up immediately. Horrified by the script, the U.S Defense Department refused to cooperate with Coppola.'<sup>23</sup> He wanted to get the U.S Defense on board for two reasons, one he wanted to recreate battle sequences using their helicopters and he also wanted to model all of the American soldiers outfits and weaponry in his film based on their real life outfits and weaponry. Primarily he wanted their air services to take part so that he could achieve the battle scenes his way and not have to deal with President Marcos of the Philippines who proved more and more difficult as he himself was fighting his own war at the time. Francis had not secure extra financing he needed to pay the American Aviation Forces for their skilled expertises due to the fact the he was financially consumed by the production. All of his money was tied up in it. There was no money to do it his way so that was why he had to take President Marcos helicopters in the end because he unfortunately had no other choice. He had so much faith in the project but at times he lost sight of the whole picture and due to this ended up spending unnecessary amounts of money on production values he did not require.



**Picture 3: Martin Sheen going to a dark place in the film's opening sequence.**

**Martin Sheen famous opening sequence shot in the hotel room:**

'Francis shot the scene in the hotel room. He let Marty get a little drunk, as the character is really supposed to be. He and Marty both knew they were taking a chance.'<sup>24</sup> Martin Sheen at the time was struggling with an alcohol addiction and this would be an issue a producer would flag with a director. By allowing Martin Sheen to drink alcohol, he was taking a big risk that he would be able to perform and also one as a producer would fear that not only might it affect his ability to work on the day but his ability to work on days following. Actors who get comfortable with working with a director a certain way, might request that comfort to be present more and more. As a director, all Francis was seeing was how it would help get magic from Martin but, if he had thought as a producer, he would of seen the implications it may of caused. By allowing this to happen purely from a directing position is not of primary concern, he did not think of how it may affect the whole production. Martin later suffered a heart attack and this day of shooting in the hotel room has been sighted on numerous times as one of the principal days on the

shoot for Martin that lead up to his subsequent heart attack. This scene in the end was a success but it could of very easily not of been. It ended up being one of the very first scenes in the film.

**Specific incidents of madness on the set:**

Certain incidents recorded in Eleanor Coppola Notes: On the Making of *Apocalypse Now* show the extent of how even minor minuet problems were occurring on day to day basis. Examples of which being how she recalls remembering some young extras discussing how they were receiving '\$25 a day and they hadn't done anything, just wait around... Three hundred extras went back on buses.'<sup>25</sup> This may of not seemed like the biggest problem on a film of the magnitude of a Vietnam war epic, but simply put it meant that the production had spent \$7500 on extras and not a single one of them had been captured on film. This does not even account for the overall cost of getting them there, getting them in costume and feeding them. The \$7500 is probably only a fraction of what it actually cost to have three hundred on set when one really think about it from a production point of view. This being an instant where Francis was unable to think of the production from the viewpoint of a producer. Another example being how she recalls another moment of madness when 'The Italian crew ordered about \$700 worth of groceries from Rome. It came yesterday and the shipping and duty amounted to \$8000.'<sup>26</sup> The film was paying for this, as a producer, the budget and how it is spent is one of your principal concerns and frivolous spending such as this has to be cleared. It never was as Francis had so much more pressing matters on his mind that incidents such as this went unnoticed.



**Picture 4: Francis demonstrating how the whole production was getting the better of his sanity.**

**Hurricane Olga:**

Hurricane Olga forced reared its ugly presence on the production on May 19<sup>th</sup>. It was nothing to worry about at first, but on May 21<sup>st</sup> the typhoon starting heading towards the production. The days following it started to grow stronger and stronger and by May 30<sup>th</sup> it was destroying sets causing unending amounts of damage. By early June, production had to be shut down as sets had to be rebuilt. All of this was costing money. One of course cannot plan for unexpected weather changes but this was an example from production where Francis became even more reckless than ever before because there was nothing he could do about it. 'Typhoons that May destroyed sets and forced the production to close. Coppola returned to San Francisco with only eight minutes of film, already \$3 million over budget. Back in the Philippines that September, he was spending \$150,000 a day on the production. And that was before Brando arrived.'<sup>27</sup>

### **Script's ending and Walter Murch:**

Eleanor goes on to tell how 'He said he just realized that there was no simple right answer to the script. Just as there was no right answer as to why we were in Vietnam.'<sup>28</sup> The script was always a problematic issue on the production. The ending was something Francis was constantly battling with as a director. He had to do with what he could with the performance Brando gave him. His script placed in the context of the Vietnam War made it even more problematic as he was developing the idea from Joseph Conrad's novel and incorporate the novel ideology towards a conclusion he could not see, very similarly to how in many ways U.S forces must of felt in Vietnam. The ending is something I personally believe was an issue that was not helped by his ever growing financial worries, his overall worries about how and where the production was going and whether or not it would ever materialise as a finished film. The film in many ways was held together by Walter Murch's undoubted talent as an editor. 'Coppola's professed panic at having no conception of how to end his film, either suggests chutzpah or underlines the importance of working with a great editor.'<sup>29</sup> Walter Murch became the film's savior and one has to imagine that Coppola would agree with this statement. Post-production of the project was never as chaotic as the shoot had been. Getting Murch on board the project and keeping him on it for such a large period of time was an incredible achievement as both producer and director. Schumacher describes the process in his biography on Francis, stating that 'Never had the cost of postproduction become as high for Coppola... He needed the kind of state-of-the art technology that came with a high price tag.'<sup>30</sup> To understand the magnitude and how far the project had gone over and how much they had shot. 'In June 1977, after sixteen months on again, off again location photography, the crew of *Apocalypse Now* at last decamped from the Philippines. As Richard Marks supervised the editing of some 1.1 million feet of film – eight times the norm,<sup>31</sup> that being the equivalent of 180 miles of film. One could say that never before, has an individual deserved an Academy Awards for Best Sound in 1980 as much as Walter Murch did. He somehow managed to put a sound to the film that literally fills the room every time you experience it.

**Conclusion:**

In concluding my dissertation, I want to turn to Tom Shone's *Blockbusters*. Here, in a statement that I believe acts as a perfect summary, Shone writes 'Toxic to all who touch it at the time, and leaving many careers in fallout, but exerting a mesmeric, winking glow that increases with years. Every great film epoch has to have a film like this – the Seventies had *Apocalypse Now*.'<sup>32</sup> This statement perfectly sums up the importance of this film. Everyone discouraged Francis from making this film, his friends, his peers, the industry, at times even his own family but he prevailed because as a filmmaker that is what you have to do from time to time. I want to try and explain how I felt the research into this film went. A film of unending tales of disarray in many ways, I feel in many ways like I got a sense of what Francis was going through. Everyone involved with the project remembers it as an often out of control production but through all of the production problems, delays and setbacks he was still able to pull his vision through. 'Both supporters and detractors of Coppola's work acknowledge that the film contributed greatly to the belief, widely held across much of America, that service in Vietnam had uniquely bizarre and nihilistic qualities that had been absent in other wars.'<sup>33</sup> One would imagine that he would never have taken on the project if he was aware of what was to happen. Some of the most often highlighted and discussed moments from production being Marlon Brando's arrival and presence on set, Martin Sheen struggling with his alcohol problems that would lead to him suffering a heart attack, to Hurricane Olga disrupting the production and forcing him to close down. These are to name but a few but he encountered problems at every single stage in the production from development, the shoot itself to establishing a cut of a film where once shot he still did not know where he wanted to bring the script. He embodied the whole essence of the final finished film. His money, time and unrelenting effort to get the whole complete finished film shows how he was somehow able to walk the tightrope of being both the film's director and producer and create one of the finest War films in the history of American cinema. He was at the time of the creation of the film development a highly acclaimed and esteemed director. This however did not entitle him to massive financing and his role as producer on the film meant that he had

to raise the money himself one way or another. He had everything he owned in life riding on the success of the film. Coppola himself declaring that 'Of course, not everyone acknowledged it was made largely with my own money... The general prediction was that *Apocalypse Now* wasn't any good and that it would fail, that I would lose all of my money and my house, and that I was a fool to have done it.'<sup>34</sup> If it had been an ultimate disaster the film would never have been distributed, his career would have been in tatters and his limited power that he grew to discover while working on *Apocalypse Now* would have been gone forever. The film went on to make over \$70 million at the box-office and it was nominated for eight Academy Awards, only winning two for Best Cinematography and Best Sound. This is a remarkable achievement when you take into account all of the problems Francis had to deal with. His 2001 release of *Apocalypse Now Redux* includes another 50 minutes of footage displaying more of the director's overall vision for the final product.

The legacy of the film lives on today through both *Apocalypse Now's* release and *Apocalypse Now Redux's* release. However, Francis's career did not remain at the level it was at pre-the film being made, as he would have hoped. Stanley Kauffman, one of Francis's harshest critics said following the subsequent years following *Apocalypse Now's* release that 'Since then, he has not only not developed, he has lost identity. It's as if the strain of *Apocalypse Now* left him stranded, grasping but not reaching.'<sup>35</sup> He was never the same following the completion of the film; he was not the same filmmaker or man who developed the film. He went on to direct *The Outsiders* based on S.E Hinton's famous teen novel in 1983 and he ended up going back to *The Godfather* for a third time. The third being the most notorious low point of the trilogy. Since *Apocalypse Now*, he had directed and produced many films, most notably *Rumble Fish* in 1983, *Gardens of Stone* in 1987, *The Godfather Part III*, *Dracula* in 1992 and *Jack* in 1996. However, he was never entrusted the same level of control he was on *Apocalypse Now*. He has in recent years moved more into the role of a producer. He emerged and survived as part of the group of newly talented directors known as New Hollywood whose members

included the likes of Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese and Brian De Palma. I will end this by posing a question from Michael Schumacher biography on Coppola, 'Was the failure of Zoetrope, along with his highly publicized financial problems, the driving force behind his decision to abandon his risky, yet decisively creative, autueristic endeavors?'<sup>36</sup> I sadly however, believe it was. He made a groundbreaking film in the history of American cinema. Two years, he was forced to sell his production company American Zoetrope. His endeavors with American Zoetrope did not pan out as he had hoped. His career has never returned to its height of the *Godfather's* days but in making *Apocalypse Now* and considering all of its problems, his achievement in both directing and producing and delivering a beautiful imagined highly creative piece of a subject no-one encouraged him to pursue is testament to the success of the main man behind *Apocalypse Now*.



**Picture 5: Directed and Produced By Francis Ford Coppola. The first credit at the end of *Apocalypse Now Redux* in 2001.**

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<sup>1</sup> **Endnotes:** Honthaner, Eve, *The Complete Film Production Handbook* Fourth Edition (Focal Press, Oxford, 2010). p. 2. For further reading of the duties on a film production and whose role they are assigned to see pp. 1-8.

<sup>2</sup> Honthaner, Eve, *The Complete Film Production Handbook* Third Edition (Focal Press, Oxford, 2010). pp. 2-3. For further reading of the job responsibilities of a production team see pp. 2-6.

<sup>3</sup> Eagan, Daniel, *America's Film Legacy: The Authorative Guide to the Landmark Movies in the National Film Registry* (New York, The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2010). p. 756.

<sup>4</sup> Lev, Peter, *American Films of the '70s: Conflicting Visions* (University of Texas Press, Texas, 2000). p. 124

<sup>5</sup> Schumacher, Michael, *Francis Ford Coppola: A Filmmaker's Life* (Bloomsbury, London, 1999). p. 236.

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- <sup>6</sup> Schumacher, Michael, p. 236.
- <sup>7</sup> Coppola, Eleanor, *Notes on The Making of Apocalypse Now* (Faber and Faber, London, 1995). p. 122
- <sup>8</sup> Phillips, Gene, *Godfather: The intimate Francis Ford Coppola* (University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 2004). p. x.
- <sup>9</sup> Schumacher, Michael, p. 198.
- <sup>10</sup> Schumacher, Michael, p. 198.
- <sup>11</sup> Schumacher, Michael, p. 198.
- <sup>12</sup> French, Karl, *Apocalypse Now: The Ultimate A-Z* (Bloomsbury, London, 1998). p. 18.
- <sup>13</sup> Schumacher, Michael, p. 199.
- <sup>14</sup> French, Karl, p. 155.
- <sup>15</sup> Schumacher, Michael, p. 200.
- <sup>16</sup> Miller, Stephen, *The Seventies Now: Culture As Surveillance* (Duke University Press, North Carolina, 1999). p. 102. For further reading on the narrative of *Apocalypse Now* read pp. 102-105.
- <sup>17</sup> DiMare, Philip, *Movies in American History: An Encyclopedia* (ABC CLIO, California, 2011). p. 1111.
- <sup>18</sup> Schumacher, Michael, p. 218.
- <sup>19</sup> Schumacher, Michael, p. 218.
- <sup>20</sup> Coppola, Eleanor, p. 126.
- <sup>21</sup> Eagan, Daniel, p. 757.
- <sup>22</sup> Schumacher, Michael, p. 222.
- <sup>23</sup> Kevin Hillstrom and Laurie Collier Hillstrom, *The Vietnam Experience: A Concise Encyclopaedia of American Literature, Songs and Films* (Greenwood Press, Westport, CT United States of America, 1998). p. 8.
- <sup>24</sup> Coppola, Eleanor, p. 103.
- <sup>25</sup> Coppola, Eleanor, p. 71.
- <sup>26</sup> Coppola, Eleanor, p. 58.
- <sup>27</sup> Eagan, Daniel, p. 757.
- <sup>28</sup> Coppola, Eleanor, p. 130
- <sup>29</sup> French, Karl, p. 72.
- <sup>30</sup> Schumacher, p. 243. For further reading on the complicated process of *Apocalypse Now's* post-production see pp. 242-248.
- <sup>31</sup> Francis Ford Coppola, Gene D. Phillips, Rodney Hill, *Francis Ford Coppola: Interviews* (University Press of Mississippi, Mississippi, 2004). p. 49.
- <sup>32</sup> Shone, Tom, *Blockbuster: How Hollywood Learned To Stop Worrying and Love The Summer* (Free Press, New York, 2004). p. 118.
- <sup>33</sup> Kevin Hillstrom and Laurie Collier Hillstrom, p. 8.
- <sup>34</sup> Schumacher, Michael, p. 280.
- <sup>35</sup> Schumacher, Michael, p. 408.
- <sup>36</sup> Schumacher, Michael, p. 481.