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Apoplexy Now



by Miles Mathis

Probably the best critique of *Apocalypse Now* is that of Jean Baudrillard, from his book *Simulacra and Simulations*. I recommend it as interesting in both language and idea. That said, I no longer find it convincing. Though incisive, it isn't incisive enough to suit me. I just watched the film again after a break of more than a decade, and found my low opinion of it had fallen another dozen notches.

The problem with Baudrillard is that he was still writing to try to impress his fellow intellectuals and academics. To that end, he always seems too aware of his words, and too little aware of his facts and opinions. Certainly a reader is more aware of his words than his facts and opinions, since the latter crouch behind the former, never coming fully into the light. Even the late period Baudrillard wrote like a Frenchman who hadn't fully thrown off the haze of Deconstruction.

Like Baudrillard's writing, mine was born out of the philosophy department, and as a younger man I toyed with many styles, including several that were more flowery and indirect. I still allow myself to wax poetic occasionally in short bursts, as my readers know, but for the most part I now strive for a style of absolute clarity. I save my art for other times. Some will think I just got lazy, but it was a conscious choice. I've grown impatient over the years with academic writing—and journalistic writing, too, if it comes to that. What I most seek is content, and I never get what I want. All I read now seems like a shorter or longer diversion, a smaller or larger waste of my time. I want the truth. I want to know how things really are, and no one is telling me that. For that reason, among others, I am no longer interested in impressing other educated people, just for the sake of doing so. In short, I have lost all respect for the academy. I no longer care what they think of me and no longer sail on their river. I have portaged my boat to a cleaner and swifter and more direct path to the great ocean.

What Baudrillard only hints at or hits sideways is that *Apocalypse Now* was a military production. He tells you the film is “an extension of the war” :

The war became film, the film becomes war, the two are joined by their common hemorrhage into technology.

Yes, very true, but that could mean many things. As stated, it could just mean that Frances Ford Coppola has *successfully* brought the war to the screen, showing “the horror” of that technology. Of course, that isn't what Baudrillard intends, but you have to be a careful reader to know that. What begs

to be stated directly here is that the entire film was a government production, with Coppola as only the director. He and John Milius get the screenwriting credit, but it is as clear as daylight that both the film and the script came out of the Pentagon and Military Intelligence. Every scene has Intelligence written all over it. Where do you think Coppola got all the military equipment, the military and Intelligence lingo, and—most importantly—the military and Intelligence *ideology*? Whoever actually conceived of this film and wrote the bulk of it thinks and feels like military and Intelligence do. Or, I should say, *fails* to think and feel in the same way as military and Intelligence do. The film reeks of the shallow and half-educated, going to their own prior covert agents whenever they need a dose of “depth.”

Don't know what I mean by “their own prior agents”? Well, the film opens to the music of *The Doors*. We now know that Jim Morrison was the son of Admiral Morrison, who was in command at the Gulf of Tonkin false flag (which the NSA [now admits was a false flag](#)). Just as Tonkin was staged, Jim Morrison's career was staged by Intelligence. He was created and promoted by them, and his death was faked by them. That alone should sour you on the entire film, less than two minutes in.

Don't know what I mean by half-educated? The film should be called “Armageddon Now,” since that is obviously what they wanted, in context. “Apocalypse” means prophecy or revelation, and it normally refers to the prophecy in the gospel of John of the ultimate victory of good over evil. “Armageddon” is the End Times war of all wars, the gathering of armies in the Book of Revelation. Which fits the film better? To see what I mean, just imagine how inappropriate it would have been if they had named the movie *Parousia Now*. Parousia is the second coming of Christ, and ties into “Apocalypse” because the apocalypse is the prophecy of victory, which *includes* the second coming. In short, Christ is supposed to return during this End Times, and defeat the armies of evil at Armageddon. Since the film *Apocalypse Now* has almost nothing to do with any of that, and is not Christian by any stretch of the imagination, all three titles are wildly inappropriate, including—now that I think of it—*Armageddon Now*. I am not a Christian or a Jew, and even I can see that. I can also see that the title is more misdirection, since it is clear the military didn't just accidentally invert the Christian meaning of Apocalypse. Intelligence has inverted everything else in the last century, and this is just one more example to add to the list.

[In a short diversion, I want to show you what I found at the top of Wikipedia's page on the Apocalypse:

This article improperly uses one or more religious texts as primary sources without referring to secondary sources that critically analyze them. Please help improve this article by adding references to reliable secondary sources, with multiple points of view. (March 2014)

So according to the “scholars” at Wikipedia, it is *improper* to refer to primary sources without also referencing secondary sources that criticize them. I wonder, would that apply only to Christian primary sources, or would that also apply to all other sources? Would it apply to, say, mainstream science sources? If you were referring to a theory of Richard Feynman, say, on quantum dynamics, would it be improper to leave out secondary sources that criticize him? I encourage you to check the science pages to see if they follow their own rules there. Or, I will save you the time and just tell you: they don't. Not only do they not encourage criticism of mainstream science, they don't *allow* it. The science pages are all unilateral sales pitches for the current theories, and if anyone so much as adds a link to a secondary source that “critically analyzes” them, they are deleted immediately and permanently blacklisted. This equal-time rule they are pushing regarding “religious texts” is selectively enforced: if you agree with the status-quo, there is no need to publish an opposing opinion; but if you disagree, you need to provide your own refutation.]

But back to the film. It isn't that an otherwise lovely story is marred by small doses of propaganda. It is that the film is nothing but transparent propaganda frame by frame. Intelligence uses its own favorite actors, including Hopper, Brando, and Sheen, and as usual they stink the place up with their phony seriousness and bathos.* I admit that Robert Duvall is amusing in his role, but he is forced to prop up ridiculous scenes that no sane or insane person could accept as successful cinema. One of the most famous scenes is the choppers attacking the village to Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*. The first time I watched it I thought it was kind of thrilling, since just about anything set to that music is thrilling. You could be watching Ricky Gervais mow the lawn in his underwear to the *Ride of the Valkyries* and still get goosebumps. But if you make the mistake of letting your brain turn on, you remember you are watching our military trying to glorify their war crimes by setting it to music and filming it in Technicolor widescreen.

I will be told that Coppola is putting the horrors of war on film. How can he not make it cinematic? That is his job, after all. Problem is, he isn't making it look worse, he is making it look better. In real life, it wasn't thrilling—or shouldn't have been—it was just sickening. If Coppola were doing what he claimed he was doing, he shouldn't have filmed it beautiful and soaring, he should have filmed it ugly and silent. If he had to add a soundtrack, he should have added someone's fingernails on a chalkboard.

Coppola shouldn't have made Duvall's character crazy and charming and bulletproof, either; he should have made him crazy and *repulsive*. No colonel that ever lived was as likable as Robert Duvall.

So the film isn't just false, it is a whitewash. It is exactly what you would expect from a military production in the late 1970's. The whole surfing sub-plot comes off in the same way. It is both absurd and offensive to all intellect and feeling. It doesn't give a viewer the idea that the war is insane, it gives the viewer the idea the scriptwriters are clueless. It is obvious that someone on the writing staff had an interest in surfing and took the opportunity to work it into the film, whether it fit or not. And that is exactly what we find with a little research. John Milius “was influenced by the oral storytelling of the surfers of his time, who had a beatnik tradition.” Although real surfers thought beatniks were pussies, this line from Wikipedia is informative since it ties Milius to the whole Jan&Dean/Beach Boy theme, which was also a brainchild of Intelligence. This is how the military thought to connect to the young people of the time, with their usual mix of insincerity and cunning.

Remember, Milius was also involved in *Jeremiah Johnson*, possibly Robert Redford's worst film. Like *Apocalypse Now*, *Jeremiah Johnson* also retells history as a set of stupid impossibilities, with the sentiment upside down at every point. We are supposed to believe one girly white man can defeat an entire tribe of Natives—at times with his bare hands—and for some reason Milius believes the audience is interested in seeing such a thing. If the film had been written by the grandson of George Custer, it would not have been any more prejudiced or faux-heroic.

Of course Milius was blind to all that, saying Johnson was “the real breaking point where I knew – and it was almost overnight – that I had become a good writer with a voice.” Or that's what they told him at Langley, at least.

Milius' greatest success as a director was *Conan the Barbarian*. Any more questions about Milius?

The surfer theme doesn't just compromise the early scenes. The surfing character Lance makes it all the way through the film, though the audience is hoping he will be the first one picked off by Charlie. He waterskiis behind the PT boat, drops acid, paints his face, and generally annoys you from start to

finish with his sad attempts to emote and play crazy. Although the characters are traveling by open boat for weeks down a river in hundred-degree, 90%-humidity jungles, Lance somehow finds time to visit an invisible salon between scenes, where he gets his hair blown-dry and pouffed to perfection. Sheen's character visits the same salon, though perhaps less often.

Then we have the Playboy bunny sub-plot, which competes furiously with the surfer sub-plot for most inane idea in a major film. Although not quite as annoying or long-running as the surfer sub-plot, it is arguably more gratuitous. It is just an excuse to get a couple of big-breasted girls topless in a scene, but as interested as I normally am in such things, I couldn't be bothered. I honestly think this was the first time I have ever fast-forwarded through a female nude scene in a film. It was that painful to watch.

Then we get the spear through the chest of the boat's quartermaster, in a scene mysteriously lifted out of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.** But we get no attempt from the scriptwriters to tell us why these spear-chuckers are on the Cambodian border, why they think they can defeat machineguns, and how one of them managed to throw a spear with such velocity it cleanly penetrated this man's breastbone *from the back*. As usual, characters in movies have no bones in their bodies. Their ribcages are made of styrofoam.

In the liner notes for the movie, we are told these spear-chuckers are Montagnard warriors, or Degar. But the Degar were not cave-dwellers shooting arrows.



Like Natives in the US, they could be taught to shoot guns very quickly. In fact, since most Degar didn't like the Vietnamese, they were recruited by the US as allies.



So Coppola didn't even get the alliances right. The Degar wouldn't have been shooting at US gunboats. The Degar would have been shooting at Charlie, *with rifles supplied to them by us*.

Then we have the French plantation scene (in the extended version), in which the gorgeous French lady throws herself at the short, dirty, and sullen Sheen. Women are just like that, you know (in the minds of gay screenwriters who have never looked seriously at, approached, or dated a real woman, much less a real French woman).

When we finally get to Brando at last, we find he can't even be bothered to shave his head for the role. He has on an obvious skin-wig. This is just one clue of many how seriously he took the film. As for Hopper, he acts his usual manic self, but—as with the others—it isn't clear why he is so clean and coiffed in the middle of chaos. And why does he need five heavy cameras on him at all times? Wouldn't one camera be enough to tell us he is a photographer, since he *tells* Sheen he is a photographer when they first meet?

Then we are privileged to hear Brando recite from T. S. Eliot. I suppose I can't blame you for not knowing that is a red flag, but it is: the same sort of red flag as Jim Morrison. [T. S. Eliot was recruited by Military Intelligence](#) back in the 1920's, with Pound, Joyce, Hemingway, and all those people. Some of them were [outed by the CIA itself](#) back in the late 60's, and others were outed more recently by Frances Stoner Saunders. Intelligence has long wanted you thinking you are living in a Wasteland, to add to your confusion. They discovered early on you buy more that way. Happy people are shabby consumers.

But most of these problems are caviling compared to the film's overall reputation and PR, which is upside-down to reality as well. We have been sold the idea that the film is anti-war in some nebulous way, brought to us by a liberal Hollywood. Nothing could be further from the truth. The film pretends to be anti-war while being completely pro-war. As Baudrillard expresses fairly clearly, the film does not reverse the main lines of government propaganda from the 1960's: it underlines them and circles them, even adding a new layer of frosting. We do not get the idea by watching this film that our government or our citizens or Hollywood has learned anything from Vietnam. Conversely, we only see Coppola and his overseers and minions tarting up an old emptiness with new platitudes and feints.

The main plot of the search for Brando's Colonel Kurtz builds us up to expect a condemnation of the war from him at the end. His antagonism with top brass implies that, as does the “war is insane” theme throughout the film. But the film ends pretty much as it began, with a glorification of war posing as confused condemnation of it. Brando tells Sheen the story of the local people responding to vaccinations by chopping off the arms of the vaccinated children. Brando interprets that as courage in the face of necessity, although we can't really see how he got there. I guess the psychotic screenwriters

think mutilating your own children for no reason is an example of “doing what you have to do no matter the cost, with no regard for pain or loss,” but to any rational person it is just another example of insane uncivilized people responding insanely to insane “civilized” people. It is stupidity all round, with nothing much to be learned from it.

But what Sheen learns from it is both informative and decisive, since he finds a machete and chops Brando up with it. The natives then bow down to Sheen and offer him their weapons (arms).

No real condemnation of war or violence there, is there? No real closure on the question of Vietnam there, eh? Hopper sells Brando as some sort of seer, but once it comes time to have Brando say something deep or intelligent, the screenwriters can't come up with anything. Based on a few moments of rambling and mumbling, Sheen decides Brando isn't crazy, but decides to kill him anyway because Brando seems to want it.

We watched for three hours for that? If Brando wanted to be dead, why not put a gun to his own head and pull the trigger? Why go against the whole army for years, flee into the jungle, create an entire city, murder thousands of people for no apparent reason, put Sheen in a cage, chop the New Orleans guy's head off, then let Sheen out, nurse him back to health, order everyone to let Sheen grab a machete and not get in his way, etc?

For more confusion, we find that Brando wrote in his notebook, “Kill them all.” If Brando wanted to kill them all, why wouldn't he have just called in the airstrike himself, from the boat, telling Sheen to scam? Brando could have then gone out in a hail of napalm and Sheen could have escaped to tell Brando's story to his son, or whatever. Letting Sheen kill him with a machete risked the possibility one of his guards would kill Sheen before or after that, meaning Sheen wouldn't make it out alive to tell the story.

Beyond that, the “Kill them all” note completely negates any real opposition in goals between Brando and the top brass, since top brass also wanted to kill them all. If both Brando and top brass wanted to kill them all, how is *Apocalypse Now* supposed to be anti-war in any way?

After all is said and done, *Apocalypse Now* is just a flashbang that turns out to be all flash and no bang. Yes, we see some beautiful cinematography and a few spectacular sets, but in the end the millions spent by the military in bringing this film to the screen are used only to polish their own behind and spread further confusion. The last thing they want to do is make you think deeply about war, much less to condemn it. If anything, they want you to feel a rush of adrenaline and hear Wagner whenever you see attack choppers in formation. When they attack *your* village, I just hope you do.

*Remember, Sheen later played the President in the wretched *West Wing*, produced to keep the Democratic Party's old stories and heroes inflated.

**FYI, Conrad was also an Intelligence asset, which is exactly why he is being referenced throughout the film.

