



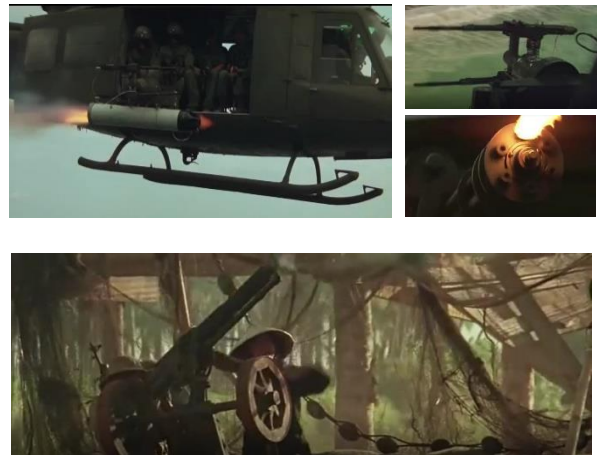
America's Superpower Criticized: The Vietnam War (2)
APOCALYPSE NOW, by Francis Ford COPPOLA (1979)

"The Ride of the Valkyries" (2:54)

The context: The Paris Agreement of January 1973 officially ended the Vietnam War: the United States withdrew. From 1973 to 1975, the Viet Cong took up arms again and won the war, damaging the image of the American superpower. Indeed, despite their technical superiority, the Americans have also lost the war of images. The nature of the fighting (guerrilla warfare and attacks), the landscape (jungle), the elusiveness of the enemy causing many blunders (3 million Vietnamese killed). Controversed weaponry such as napalm, or Agent Orange (defoliant) have turned world opinion against the war. A vast anti-war movement created a rift in American opinion : the boxer Muhammad Ali refused to go to the war in 1966 and was sentenced to 5 years in prison. Demonstrations multiplied, including "Give Peace A Chance" which brought together a million people in Washington on November 15, 1969. The 60,000 dead and 150,000 wounded Americans of this war remain the subject of controversy.

The synopsis: in 1979, Francis Ford Coppola created a scandal by presenting *Apocalypse Now* at the Cannes Film Festival. During the Vietnam War, the Secret Service orders Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) to track down and execute Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando) who has lost his mind and is conducting savage operations on the Cambodian border. Willard was drafted into the combat units to sail up the Mekong River and discovered their methods of guerrilla warfare against the Viet Cong, notably during an attack on a village by helicopters to the sound of the "Ride of the Valkyries". This scene has remained an iconic moment of socially engaged cinema. Despite the controversy, the film won worldwide awards: the Palme d'Or and the Critics' Prize at Cannes in 1979, the Oscar for Photography and Sound in 1980, two Golden Globes that same year, seven other awards in 1981...

1. The United States responsible for a "dirty war": Coppola is a socially committed filmmaker



1. How do we see America's military might?

2. Who is systematically filmed from a low angle (contre-plongée) and for what reason(s)?.....

3. Who is systematically filmed from above and for what reason(s)?.....

4. What does this say about the disproportion of the forces involved?

5. What does the director want the viewer to feel?.....

6. Which cinematographic means are used to highlight the weaponry? Check the ones you've noticed:

- Close-ups (gros-plans)
- Repeated Shots (plans répétés)
- Fade in chained frames (images enchaînées en fondu)
- Shot / Reverse Shot (champ/ contre-champ)
- Computer-generated images (images de synthèse)
- Sequence shot (uncut image) (plan-séquence)
- Wide shot (plan large)

2. A Negative Image of American Soldiers: Coppola Creates Controversy



1. How is the physical relationship between men and their weapons expressed?
2. How can such a relationship be qualified?.....
3. How do we see they are happy to kill people?.....
4. How is the soldiers' youth expressed in their attitudes?
5. In the end, who is Coppola criticizing: the soldiers or the U.S. government? Explain.....

1. A mythical scene: "My film is not about Vietnam, it is Vietnam" (Coppola)

1. What impact does music seem to have on soldiers?.....
2. What impact does it have on the viewer? What for?.....
3. Depending on how you feel about the stage, why does Coppola choose this opera?
4. After reading the box on the right, add another reason for this choice....
5. What are helicopters a metaphor for?
6. An opera is a work of culture. What is the paradox of its use here?
7. How does the director go about saturating the spectator's senses? What is he trying to show??

RIDE OF THE VALKYRIES

The most popular aria from Richard Wagner's opera *Die Walküre* (1870), it opens Act III. A monumental musical ensemble in 4 parts forming the cycle of *The Ring of the Nibelung*, the opera is largely inspired by Norse mythology. The Valkyries, servants of the god Odin, descend on the battlefields to take the souls of dead warriors to Valhalla (paradise for the brave).



The massacre perpetrated by American soldiers in the village of My Lai on May 16, 1968 (500 dead) inspired Francis Ford Coppola for the scene of the helicopter attack.

Elaboration of the lesson

What are the takeaways from this analysis? Write a text of about ten lines that could be a sub-part of a composition. To help you, here are the elements of a plan:

1. The brutality of a "dirty war" turns public opinion on its head because.....
2. A controversial film that causes a tremendous scandal because...
3. Coppola's Assessment: A mythical scene that embodies the fail of the American superpower because...