Chapter 3

The film Burden of Dreams by Werner Herzog is a documentary film about Herzog completing his film Fitzcarraldo in the jungles of South America. Herzog can best describe what his philosophy of film and attitude towards getting this film done with two statements, “If I abandon this project I would be a man without dreams.” And, “I live my life or I end my life with this project.”

These statements relate to guerilla film making in that Herzog was willing to what it took to get the shot, and he proved it. A few examples of this were his film crew’s presence caused conflict in the area. Tribal factions were at war with one another and Herzog was in the middle taking sides simply so he could secure a location for his shoot. It brought out media attention and rumors spread about what Herzog was there. At some point, he was accused of smuggling arms. Interjecting into political affairs just to get the location is guerilla filmmaking.

Another example is contaminating with Western culture. Once Herzog was set up with a base camp, it was separated into two camps, one the natives and their food supply and two, the film crew. Herzog did not want to interfere with the natives’ way of life. This is impossible though. As the camps went on, people began to get bored. The men needed a release. Herzog brought in women to service those needs. In his eyes it had to be done to keep the workers happy.

Doing what was necessary to get the production done was something Herzog believed in. When he and his crew were thousands of miles into the jungle, they flew out supplies to their location. People though he was crazy filming way out there and the logistics to fly those supplies had to take a toll on the budget. The organization of set was running a small city, food, housing, film, set location, wardrobe, props, translators, etc.

To me, this was more life imitating art. The story of just how this film was put together was just as interesting as the film itself. If only more directors filmed the making of their films. This isn’t how most conventional filmmakers create though I believe. Most would not attempt to do the feats Herzog did. There is a part of the film a ship is carried through the jungle over a mountain to get to another river. Convention says you only need a few shots to shoe the boat being carried. Then you cut to the boat back in the water. Herzog not only had the boat actually carried up the slope he purchased another boat to be waiting in another river. In my opinion it’s all jungle, the audience isn’t going to know if you’re in the same river or in a different one. To me it was just a waste on the budget.

I just believe other filmmakers would be more conservative and get the most for their money. This was an example of big budget guerilla filmmaking. Just throw money at it till you get the desired effect. I prefer directors who do more with less or even who use the money in postproduction. I do enjoy Herzog’s attitude though. He knew what he wanted his film to look like.

Archetypes

The film out of the 12 that I watched that I most identified with is The Intouchables and Born on the 4th of July. Intouchables brought a real modern look on what its like to be disabled. There were other films that had windows to it. Several of the films showed what it was like to be in the VA Hospital system during Vietnam. Which is great but times have come a long way since then in terms of health care. I would like to showcase these updated changes. Lt. Dan in Forrest Gump summed up my anger with god in his scene during the hurricane. To capture that emotion will be difficult to do, even without the hurricane. My Left Foot embodied what it is to capture a scene with just facial expression using no words. Coming Home had a strong leading man that I hope to write for but needs to be vulnerable as Ron from Born on the 4th of July. Still if I had to go with one film, Intouchables and Born on the 4th of July gets my vote.

Breaking down the archetypes of that film is as follows. (Intouchables)

* Hero- This would be Driss and Phillipe
* Mentor- Philippe
* Threshold Guardian- there was no menacing face that stood against Driss except for Magalie. Driss sought after her but, she shut him down every time.
* Herald- this would be Philippe’s disability that Driss had to face every time something new to Driss faced while caring for him.
* Shadow- The dark side to Driss is the family he left behind and that life calling back to him.
* Ally- Yvonne fits this bill as she is Driss’s companion while in the house.
* Trickster- Driss is trickster for Philippe. He wants Driss to change for the better.

In my story the hero isn’t Driss. It’s the character that represents me, and the journey he goes on. I don’t have a caregiver to partner my story with. All I have is the mind and the will the Marines gave me. Can that be a character?

For Born on the 4th of July, this theme is most like what I am going for. It is about a Marine who is hurt while on active duty. Where my story differs is that my story doesn’t follow a combat injury but rather peacetime. Also, my story doesn’t end up with my character going to public office, instead running around with a drinking club with a running problem. He gets injured and the world stateside becomes his Shadow. His Mentor would be William Dafoe’s character for a short time guiding him haphazardly through his injury. Most importantly though is Ron’s mind that act as most of the archetypes. That’s the part of the story I relate to, it’s the battle in the mind that forces his character to evaluate and keeps him questioning and moving forward. The Marine in him keeps him in the fight. It’s the trickster and the ally. Somewhere in the middle Ron emerges. In the end he has won his battle but the fight is far from finished. I see my story falling between those two, light-hearted but able to get dark at times.