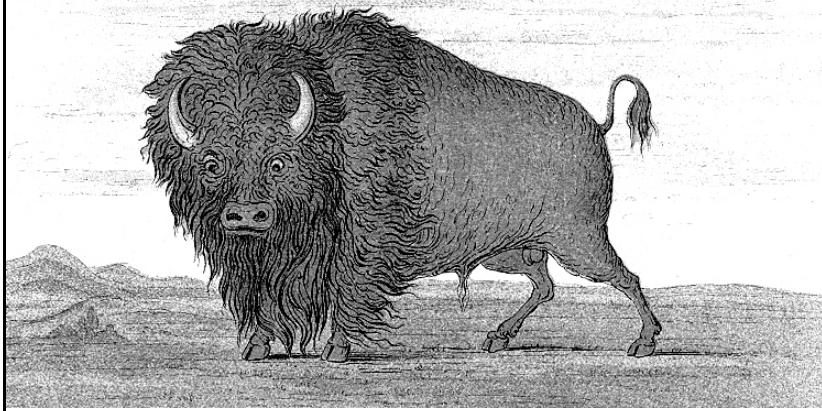


# The Buffalo Film Seminars



Conversations about great films  
with Diane Christian & Bruce Jackson

**JOHN FRANKENHEIMER** (19 February 1930, New York, New York—6 July 2002, Los Angeles, California, stroke due to complications following spinal surgery) directed 49 theatrical and made-for-tv films, among them *Ronin* (1998), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1996), "Against the Wall" (1994), *52 Pick-Up* (1986), *Black Sunday* (1977), *French Connection II* (1975), *The Iceman Cometh* (1973), *The Gypsy Moths* (1969), *Seconds* (1966), *Seven Days in May* (1964), and *Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962). He also directed many of the great episodes in the 1950s live tv dramatic series "Playhouse 90," and did a lot of other television before the shift to taped tv dramatic production convinced him that he might as well make films.

**FRANK SINATRA** (12 December 1915, Hoboken, New Jersey—14 May 1998, Los Angeles, heart & kidney disease; bladder cancer; senility) acted in about 60 films, among them *The First Deadly Sin* (1980), *The Detective* (1968), *The Naked Runner* (1967), *Von Ryan's Express* (1965), *Robin and the 7 Hoods* (1964), *Come Blow Your Horn* (1963), *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), *Ocean's Eleven* (1960), *Some Came Running* (1958), *Pal Joey* (1957), *High Society* (1956), *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), *Guys and Dolls* (1955), *From Here to Eternity* (1953), *On the Town* (1949), *It Happened in Brooklyn* (1947), *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), and *The Gay City* (1941). Early in his career, Sinatra had been a hugely popular singer in the 1940s but by the time his career was resurrected by his performance in this film, his voice had gone and he'd been appearing in a string of not-very-interesting films. He continued to be a major draw in Las Vegas until not long before his death. He alternated focus on his acting and singing careers, but pretty much wound up playing himself in his own life, with his buddies Dean Martin, Peter Lawford, Joey Bishop and Sammy Davis, Jr., commonly known as "the Ratpack."

**LAURENCE HARVEY** (1 October 1928, Jonischkis, Lithuania—25 November 1973, London, England, cancer), appeared in 58 films, among them *WUSA* (1970), *The Magic Christian* (1969), *A Dandy in Aspic* (1968), *Darling* (1965), *Of Human Bondage* (1964), *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962), *Summer and Smoke* (1961), *Butterfield 8* (1960), *The Alamo* (1960), *Room at the Top* (1959), *I Am a Camera* (1955), *Man on the Run* (1948),

**JANET LEIGH** (6 July 1927, Merced, California—3 October 2004, Beverly Hills, California, vasculitis) acted in 63 films, the last of which was *A Fate Totally Worse Than Death* (2000). Some of the others were *Harper* (1966), *Bye Bye Birdie* (1963), *Psycho* (1960), *Touch of Evil* (1958), *Pete Kelly's Blues* (1955), *Prince Valiant* (1954), *Houdini* (1953), *The Naked Spur* (1953), *Scaramouche* (1952), *It's a Big Country* (1951), *How to Smuggle a Hernia Across the Border* (1949), *That Forsyte Woman* (1949), and *The Romance of Rosy Ridge* (1947). She



**MARCH 29, 2005 (X:10)**

**THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE (1962) 126 min**

Frank Sinatra...Capt./Maj. Bennett Marco  
Laurence Harvey...TSgt. Raymond Shaw  
Janet Leigh...Eugenie Rose Chaney  
Angela Lansbury...Mrs. Iselin  
Henry Silva...Chunjin  
James Gregory...Sen. John Yerkes Iselin  
Leslie Parrish...Jocelyn Jordan  
John McGiver...Sen. Thomas Jordan  
Khigh Dhiegh...Dr. Yen Lo  
James Edwards...Cpl. Alvin Melvin

Douglas Henderson...Col. Milt  
Albert Paulsen...Zilkov  
Whit Bissell...Medical Officer

Directed by John Frankenheimer  
Based on the novel by Richard Condon  
Screenplay by George Axelrod  
Produced by George Axelrod and John Frankenheimer  
Original Music by David Amram  
Cinematography by Lionel Lindon  
Production Design by Richard Sylbert

Nominated Oscar Best Actress in a Supporting Role (Angela Lansbury) and won for Best Film Editing (Ferris Webster)  
Selected by National Film Preservation Board for the National Film Registry (1994)

also did a lot of tv in such series as "The Love Boat," "Fantasy Island," "Matt Houston," Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In," "The Virginian," "The Dean Martin Show," and "The Man from U.N.C.L.E."

**ANGELA LANSBURY (16 October 1925, London, England)** has acted in 73 films and television programs. She is perhaps best known for her series performances as Jessica Fletcher in "Murder, She Wrote," and Jane Marple in "Miss Marple." Some of her films were *The Company of Wolves* (1984), *The Lady Vanishes* (1979), *Death on the Nile* (1978), *Harlow* (1965), *The World of Henry Orient* (1964), *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (1960), *The Long, Hot Summer* (1958), *Samson and Delilah* (1949), *The Hoodlum Saint* (1946), *The Harvey Girls* (1946), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945), *National Velvet* (1944) and *Gaslight* (1944).

**RICHARD (THOMAS) CONDON** (1915, NYC-) was first published as a novelist at the age of 42 with *The Oldest Confession*. Some of his other novels are *The Manchurian Candidate* (1959), *An Infinity of Mirrors* (1964), *Winter Kills* (1974), *Prizzi's Honor* (1984), *Prizzi's Family* (1986), *Prizzi's Glory* (1988) and *Prizzi's Money* (1994)

**The Manchurian Candidate. Greil Marcus. bfi Publishing. London 2002**

[Epigraph]: A popular Chinese magazine proposed, in a plot not unlike 'The Manchurian Candidate,' that Lewinsky had been sent to Washington when she was a child as a Cold War agent on a mission to entrap the president and destabilize the government. 'Is Lewinsky with the KGB?' inquired the headline...Meantime, the Syrian defense minister, too, announced that the affair was a Zionist plot. 'Monica Lewinsky is a young Jewish girl that Mossad hired and pushed into working as an intern in the White House.'

Majorie Garber, 'Moniker', in *Our Monica, Ourselves: The Clinton Affair and National Interest*, edited by Lauren Berlant & Lisa Duggan (New York University Press, 2001)

When a movie becomes part of the folklore of a nation, the borders between the movie and the nation cease to exist. The movie becomes a fable; then it becomes a metaphor. Then it becomes a catchphrase, a joke, a shortcut. It becomes a way not to think, and all the details of the movie, everything that made it stick in people's minds, that brought it to life not just on the screen but in the imagination of people at large, no matter how few or many those details might be, dissolve. The catchphrase contains the movie, and both become meaningless. Speak the words: they have become a way of saying, *We've seen it all before*. Unless you haven't seen the movie.

When *The Manchurian Candidate* was presented at the San Francisco Film Festival in 2001, as part of a programme of films from earlier festivals—in this case, from 1962—the crowd was mostly under forty. The picture was about a plot to assassinate a presidential candidate; taken out of circulation after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, it was rereleased both theatrically and on video in 1988 to great acclaim. Now it was about to unspool in the Castro Theatre, an ornately baroque movie palace with a steep balcony and an organ that emerges from a pit in front of the stage.

The theatre creates an atmosphere of anticipation; it sparks the feeling that, whatever might be on the bill, something extraordinary is about to take place. "This picture invites you in for a cool night of suspense and leaves you with no ground beneath your feet,' the audience has been told, but as the film began, the titters and open laughter made two things clear: first, that it's easy to forget that *The Manchurian Candidate* is, among other things, a comedy, and second, that the people laughing had no idea what was coming.

Published in 1959, Richard Condon's novel *The Manchurian Candidate* had an unusual kind of success. It was simultaneously a bestseller and a cult book, casual reading for the public and the

subject of hushed conversations among sophisticates: could this really happen?

The timing seemed safe. Dwight D. Eisenhower was nearing the end of his second term as president: 'Things,' as he once put it, were 'more like they are now than they ever were before.' Senator Joseph McCarthy had been dead since 1957. Five years had passed since the Senate that once followed his lead had cut him down with an overwhelming vote of censure. It was easy to forget the great days of 1950, when the-then-obscure Republican from Wisconsin stood before a crowd in Wheeling, West Virginia, to charge that there were 205 traitorous members of the Communist Party in the State Department, and that the State Department knew it; when he rose on the floor of the Senate itself not two weeks later to speak for six hours in defence of his nation, then putting himself forward as the leader the nation deserved but did not have, challenging every agency of government and every citizen to stand in his light; when he bestrode like a colossus a land where, finally, all were equal—where no one was above suspicion. But in 1954 McCarthy had gone too far. He accused the Army itself of espionage, refused to reveal his evidence, and in an instant the cry 'Have you no shame?' turned into 'The Emperor has no clothes.' McCarthy had helped turn the United States into a haunted house where you could watch as your fellow citizens were named as turncoats, fellow-travellers, subversives, degenerates—where, even more thrillingly, you yourself might be seized from the gaping crowd—but now the show was over.

The nation turned away from the false charges, from the threatened, bribed or merely lying witnesses, from the whole industry of exposure, and everyone awoke from what all were happy to assure each other had been like a dream. But *what if?* Condon was now so playfully asking in his book—what if Joe McCarthy was really working for the Russians and the Chinese, for the very Communists he was supposedly attempting to destroy? And what if behind such a man lay a genius even more evil than he—say, the senator's own wife, pulling his strings? And what if, in the conspiracy they served, there was the wife's own son, like other American GIs taken prisoner during the Korean War somehow made to turn against his own country, but here far more profoundly, psychologically remade as an assassin-in-waiting, with no knowledge of the role he is to play? And what if his role is to kill in just such a manner as to propel Condon's putatively anti-Communist demagogue into the White House, so that he might turn the country over to its enemies? And then the big question: could anyone stop a conspiracy so brilliant, do perfect, so absurd that no one would believe it?

That was Richard Condon's game in *The Manchurian Candidate*, and the novel was so purposefully crass, so self-consciously superior both in its tale and its audience, that you don't have to believe it. There was one moment when the book

seemed to go through its own looking glass—when, as you read, you could imagine the country looking at itself. ‘This country is going to go through a fire like it has never seen,’ the senator’s wife says to her son in words that will be wiped from his mind as completely as any sense of what he has become. ‘Time,’ she says, ‘is going to roar and flash lightning in the streets, Raymond. Blood will gush behind the noise and stones will fall and fools and mockers will be brought down. The smugness and complacency of this country will be dragged through the blood and noise in the streets until it becomes a country purged and purified.’ But that was an odd break in the underlying contempt of the book for its own actors, in the fog an author leaves when he is bored with his own story—where, in Condon’s pages, he cannot even summon enough respect for his characters to allow them the stage they supposedly occupy, when the nation the writer Joe McCarthy is supposed to command turns into ‘a group for anthropologists,’ gathering from ‘ten thousand yesterdays in the Middle West and neolithic Texas’. They didn’t scare the reader and neither did the book. That the story would lodge in the nation’s psyche and stay there was the work of other hands.

If you come in five minutes after this picture begins, you won’t know what it’s all about! Poster for *The Manchurian Candidate*, 1962.

It’s 1954. Major Ben Marco of the US Army, played by Frank Sinatra, is lying on his bed, fully clothed in his uniform, dreaming the same dream he dreams every night. He’s sweating. As his lips twitch, the camera moves and we enter his dream.

We’re in an old hotel in Spring Lake, New Jersey; a meeting of the Ladies Garden Club is in progress. On a small stage, one Mrs Henry Whittaker, on her feet, is speaking from behind a small white table; seated on either side of her are all the members of the patrol that Major Marco, then Captain Marco, led in Korea in 1952. The soldiers look bored....

The camera begins a circular pan around the room: now we see Mrs Whittaker’s audience, women dressed just like her, most of them over fifty, a few young, listening attentively, taking notes, whispering politely to each other. It’s a long, slow pan, and when the camera returns to Mrs Whittaker the scene is completely different.

Yen Lo, a fat, entertaining scientist from the Pavlov Institute in Moscow, played by Khigh Dhiagh, is now speaking. As in the New Jersey Hotel, the soldiers from Major Marco’s platoon are seated on either side of the speaker, but now in a small, steep, modern auditorium; the seats are filled with Soviet and Chinese cadres. Behind Yen Lo are huge photos of Mao, Stalin, workers, peasants—an ultramodern, post-Constructivist montage of great style and elegance....

Yen Lo explains that the soldiers—betrayed by their interpreter, Chunjin, played by Henry Silva—were set up for an ambush while on manoeuvres in Korea, then flown by helicopter to a centre in Manchuria where Yen Lo has, as he puts it, condescendingly citing endless scholarly monographs from the previous half-century, ‘conditioned them—or *brainwashed* them’, he says, laughing, ‘which I understand is the new American word.’ The soldiers, Yen Lo says to his audience, as if telling an inside joke, which for that matter he is, have been made to believe that they are waiting out a storm in a New Jersey hotel. Whatever Yen Lo says, all they hear is flower talk....

In the audience, a cadaverous Russian demands an end to

Yen Lo’s pedantic accounts of the invention of false memories, the creation of secondary personalities, the Pavlov Institute’s successes in deterministic manipulative response, the naive American belief that men and women cannot be conditioned to act against their true selves...The question, the man in the audience says, is Sergeant Raymond Shaw, a stiff, effete accented prig played by Laurence Harvey—who, in the opening minutes of *The Manchurian Candidate*, we’ve seen returning to the United States from Korea to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, for leading his supposedly lost patrol back to safety. The question is, says the Russian in the audience, ‘Has the man ever killed anyone?’ [He’s ordered to and does and the soldiers act naturally, bored.]

What we’ve seen is unlike any other dream sequence in film history: nothing before it bears comparison, and nothing afterward....The sequence is set up as a dream, but it doesn’t come off the screen as a dream, as a blur, with soft edges or milky tones in its images. There are no lacunae, self-canceling actions or logical gaps in its narrative. Is it a dream, emerging out of Marco’s existence as a subjective individual, out of his own fears and desires—or is it altogether objective, a displaced but absolutely accurate memory of a constructed situation in which, like an actor fed lines through a chip implanted in his brain, Marco once played a part?...Why is the sequence so cold, so funny, so horrible, so pleased with its refusal, even at its moment of death, to resolve its fundamental contradiction, between one narrator who, emotionally must be real, and another who, in real-life terms, cannot be—and vice versa? Why is it so austere?

The sequence is structured around the same modernist principles that, boiled down to propaganda images still more imbued with the delirium of the avant-garde than the functionalism of socialist realism, shape the photo-montage backdrop Yen Lo and Mrs Whittaker speak against...The sequence is visually irresistible—lucid, as anything beautiful is lucid. At the same time it’s unacceptable—confusing, at first, then an impossibility, then perfectly possible. As dramatised by the gestures and speech of the people within it, the action is completely naturalistic. As a game, the sequence plays according to rules as self-reinforcing as they are strict. The tableau is most of all severe. As a story it is mathematical: a fact, true. You realise that in the world posited by the movie, this actually happened.

It’s here, in this moment, that *The Manchurian Candidate*, a black-and-white Hollywood movie directed by John Frankenheimer, written by George Axelrod, takes off. It’s here that you realise something is happening on the screen that you haven’t seen before, that you’re not ready for. Even if you’ve read the book, you aren’t ready. All Condon made up of the movie’s beginning was the setting—the soldiers in the hotel—a setting which in the book lies flat, like Condon’s dialogue, so much of it used word-for-word in the film, alive and frightening on the screen, dead in print. Condon imagined none of the cinematic shifts which nail the details of the event into your mind, the shifts that scramble the event, that make its details almost impossible to keep straight. You sense, suddenly, that this movie you’re watching, a movie that promised no more than an evening’s good time, can go anywhere, in any direction—you sense that there’s no way to predict what’s going to happen next, how it’s going to happen, why it’s going to happen.

*The Manchurian Candidate* stands as the most exciting American movie from *Citizen Kane* to the first two *Godfather* pictures because the opening dream sequence is not a set-piece, not a

matter of a director showing off his cleverness, a cinematographer flaunting deep focus or a set designer parading his flair for matching décor—though all of those things are surely present. That sequence is a promise the movie pays in full. To see Raymond Shaw strangle the soldier—and later, in another patrol member’s matching dream, to see Shaw shoot a second soldier, to see the wash of his blood and brain matter splatter Stalin’s face—is to be shocked, and not to be prepared for the atrocities that follow: much quieter, almost silent atrocities, and all the worse for that. And yet the shock is, in a sense, immaculate: ‘I have written a wicked book,’ Herman Melville wrote to Nathaniel Hawthorne about *Moby-Dick*, ‘and feel spotless as the lamb.’ That’s the feeling: a simultaneous imprisonment and liberation, all outside of history, or anyway the moment in which the film was made—as that moment understood itself.

While the person watching has been made a prisoner of the movie’s drama, he or she has not been made a subject of manipulation, not positioned to accept this argument for that reason, even to take sides for or against one character or another. Whatever the pacing of a given segment of the film, something inside the film is moving too fast for that. That something, you sense, might be a history that the intelligence inside the movie has felt, but not understood, not even tried to understand, repeating to itself, *Don’t analyse, dramatise!* Trapped in the film, you can feel most stranded by the realisation that there is no message here, no point being made, not even any particular implication that foreign Communists are bad and Americans are good, nothing like that whatsoever—this is all, somehow, taking place in an atmosphere of geopolitical neutrality, of aesthetic suspension. (United Artists was afraid of the film because it was concerned that if a détente between the United States and the Soviet Union were to be emerging at the time of the picture’s release, the movie might embarrass President Kennedy. ‘They said [it was] anti-Russian,’ George Axelrod recalled in 1988, ‘which it wasn’t.’ ‘Of course not,’ Frankenheimer said.) The picture floats free of the busy cycle of American Cold War films, be they gross propaganda or auteurist touchstones. It’s too daring, too stylish, in the context of its time too nihilist to play in the Cold War Film Festival alongside the likes of *Shack Out on 101*, *My Son John*, *I Married a Communist*, *Pickup on South Street*, *The Iron Curtain*, *Night People*, *Invasion U.S.A.*, *I Was a Communist for the F.B.I.*—or even *From Russia With Love*.

We’re not seeing a film that wants us to agree with it.

Before and after *The Manchurian Candidate* John Frankenheimer was an efficient director whose movies mostly vanished when you walked out of the theatre; his most distinctive work has come in thrillers of various degrees of cheesiness. Born in New York in 1930, he worked in film while in the Air Force and in 1954 began directing live TV. In 1957, for the prestigious *Playhouse 90* showcase, he made ‘The Comedian’, one of many Rod Serling scripts he directed, starring Mickey Rooney as a cruel, domineering star who cannot love. ‘Someone once asked me, “How were you able to do such quality stuff then, compared to what television does now?”’ Frankenheimer said in 1995 to critic Charles Champlin. ‘The answer is that most people didn’t own a television set in those days. Owning a TV set was a kind of elitist thing, and we had an elitist audience.’ But as a movie director he did not work for an elitist audience, and if twenty-eight years after *The Manchurian Candidate* he was making *The Holcroft Covenant*, an incestuous-Nazis-plot-to-rule-the-world picture in which hero Michael Caine looks embarrassed in almost every

shot, it was different mostly in kind from what had preceded it, or what would follow.

There was *Seven Days in May* in 1964, a liberal cautionary tale about a military coup in the United States, with a script by Serling; in 1966, *Seconds*, a *Twilight Zone* episode blown up to big-picture scale and starring a confused-looking Rock Hudson; the 1977 *Black Sunday*, an expert, glamorous tracking of a terrorist plan to attack the Super Bowl, with Bruce Dern in the most convincing of his many deranged Vietnam veteran roles; cable TV movies about the 1971 Attica prison revolt, the murder of Brazilian rainforest activist Chico Mendes and the attempted assassination of George Wallace. In 2000, at seventy, Frankenheimer made the decadent, creepily empty *Reindeer Games*, a heavily promoted Ben Affleck vehicle notable mainly as one of a whole series of films in which Charlize Theron ends up dead, probably because she has more screen presence than her male leads can tolerate. In 2002 he made *Path to War*, an HBO film about Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam starring Michael Gambon as Johnson as King Lear.

Laurence Harvey, born in Janiskis, Lithuania, in 1928, dead of cancer in 1973, made a career out of playing neurasthenics; Jeremy Irons in the last scene of *Damage*, an exile with no company but his own narcissistic self-loathing, could be summing up almost the whole of Harvey’s career, from his most effective (*A Dandy in Aspic*, 1968) to his most miserablist (*Room at the Top*, 1959). ‘What more can you say of a man most interesting as a zombie?’ David Thomson wrote in *A Biographical Dictionary of Film*. You can say that in *The Manchurian Candidate*, Harvey, like Al Pacino as Michael Corleone in *The Godfather Part II*, kept his character in such an Iron Maiden of repression that there may be nothing in the film so frightening as the moment when, with his very last words in the picture, he speaks as a human being, as a man possessed—as a man possessed, finally, by himself.

With nearly forty movie roles between 1941 and 1961, Frank Sinatra, born in Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1915, dead in 1988, was sometimes a good actor, sometimes more than that, instinctive and wary, but his film career mostly suggested he had nothing better to do with himself—even though, with the Capitol recordings that peaked in 1959 with *No One Cares*, he obviously did. In that album, especially on his bottomless version of Bunny Berigan’s 1937 ‘I Can’t Get Started’, he tapped into a well of melancholy, summoning a sense of despair he was never able to carry into film—or was never moved to do so—until the last shot and the last words of *The Manchurian Candidate*....Sinatra’s movies often played like publicity for his music, or as a reach for validation that war, politics or crime can provide, but art cannot: the certainty that one matters, or that the lives of others depend on yours. Without its meaningless thematic link to *The Manchurian Candidate*, there would be no reason to remember *Suddenly*, the 1954 picture in which Sinatra plays a would-be presidential assassin—a plodding movie, supposedly seen by Lee Harvey Oswald only days before John F. Kennedy was shot.

Sinatra made eighteen pictures after *The Manchurian Candidate*; not one can support the weight of his panic when he realises the story Raymond Shaw is carrying is crashing to its end and he cannot stop it. Sinatra had to know his life in the movies would rest with this one film. He had ownership of the rights to reissue the picture seven years after its initial release, rights that, in 1962, were worthless (‘A picture played on television and it was over,’ as Frankenheimer put it to Charles Champlin in 1995).

In 1988, when United Artists wanted to put the film out on video, Sinatra insisted it be released theatrically; when the studio refused, he put up two million dollars of his own money as a guarantee.

It was George Axelrod who suggested to Frankenheimer that they look at Richard Condon's novel. They read it together, and the property having been turned down all over Hollywood as too explosive, secured the rights the same day, each putting up \$5,000 against a purchase price of \$75,000. Again at their own expense they flew to Florida to approach Sinatra, offering him his choice of roles. With Sinatra on board, they were close to a studio commitment, but it apparently took Sinatra's intercession with President Kennedy and a call from Kennedy to Arthur Krim, head of both the Democratic National Committee and of United Artists, which controlled distribution of Sinatra pictures, to overcome United Artists' resistance to the project. Kennedy had read the book himself. 'Who plays the mother?' he supposedly asked Sinatra; Sinatra wanted Lucille Ball. It's impossible not to try to think the notion through, to imagine Ball matching Martha Raye in Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*—to imagine Ball with her *I Love Lucy* years already over, not only leaving behind a beloved American icon, but a witch looking out from her batting eyes.

Frankenheimer wanted Angela Lansbury, with whom he'd worked in his serious family drama *All Fall Down*, finished in 1962 just before work on *The Manchurian Candidate* was to begin. The film convinced Sinatra—but in *All Fall Down* Lansbury's controlling mother is merely hysterical in her desperate attempt to make sure that no one ever does anything wrong; it's *her* problem. The performance is only steps away from her Eleanor Iselin, who is our problem, but they are steps from one world into another. Born in London in 1925, Lansbury was only three years older than Laurence Harvey; as the mother in *All Fall Down*, she seems older than the mother in *The Manchurian Candidate*. At the same time, the mother of *All Fall Down*'s callow Warren Beatty could never have been the mother of the frozen, terrified Laurence Harvey. Lansbury had to be both older and younger—more powerful, more sexual, more intelligent, more loving, more cruel. How did she do it? How do you not doubt for an instant that Lansbury's Eleanor Iselin gave birth to Harvey's Raymond, and that the camera must cut away from the kiss she gives him as she sends him off to perdition for the same reason a camera in 1962 always had to cut away from a kiss? She might have turned herself into Agatha Christie's Miss Marple for *The Mirror Crack'd* in 1980 and Jessica Fletcher for the 1984-91 television series *Murder, She Wrote* simply to erase the memory of Eleanor Iselin's crimes—God knows, Marple and Fletcher couldn't have solved them. Lansbury never came close to what she did in *The Manchurian Candidate* before, and she never came close again.

The plot of *The Manchurian Candidate* is an exploitation of terrors floating in the air in 1959: the terror of McCarthyism, where in the United States any citizen could at any time be called a Communist and then blacklisted, deprived of her job, cast out of his community; the terror of Communist brainwashing, good American boys in Korea tortured with beatings, castor oil, drugs, with unimaginable techniques, until they denounced their own country and praised their own enemies. The Soviets and Chinese Communists have made an amnesiac assassin out of American Soldier Raymond Shaw and contrived to have him awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, to place him above suspicion, beyond reproach. Their comrade in the United States Senate is

Shaw's mother, whose husband is Senator John Iselin, a stand-in for Senator Joe McCarthy. (Frankenheimer would speak with pride of his job as the assistant director on the episode of '*See It Now* with Edward R. Murrow the night he nailed Senator McCarthy'. Posing as rabid anti-Communists, Senator and Mrs Iselin are Communist agents....

Save as an entry into a certain state of mind, there is no point in pausing over this plot as a clue to anything. The plot in this movie is an excuse—an excuse for the pleasure of its violence....I can't think of another movie that in its smallest details is so naturalistic and in its overarching tone is so crazy—is first of all fun. It's slapstick, as Pauline Kael said, who loved the film ('I have talked to a number of people about why they hated *The Manchurian Candidate*.' Kael wrote in 1962, 'and I swear not one of them can remember that when the liberal senator is killed, milk pours out').

When you look, now, at this 1962 black-and-white movie made up of bits and pieces of Hitchcock and Orson Welles, of *Psycho* and *Citizen Kane* most obviously, but more completely, taking *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* out of science fiction and returning it to history—made up out of a lot of clean steals, workmanlike thievery, a second-class director with a first-class cast using whatever he can get his hands on—what's overwhelming is a sense of what the movie does that movies no longer do. The momentum of the film is so strong you may not catch the dislocation until the second time you see the picture, the third time, the tenth time—but that sense, that itch, may keep calling you back.

This kind of violation, this extremism—presented, for all of its impossibility and absurdism, in a mode of naturalism, and the naturalism sealed by the believability of each smile, each fast reach for a hat, every expression and every gesture—is not all there is in *The Manchurian Candidate* that is not in movies today. There is that sense of people working over their heads, which is really a sense of playfulness: What can we get away with? What will people catch? What's going to go right past them? Do we really care?

Do we really care that the disaster building inside the film is present even before it begins, in David Amram's title theme? The theme is reminiscent, now, of Nina Rota's theme for *The Godfather*, but what makes it different is the absence of stateliness—of power. Instead, before anything has happened, there is a fatal undercurrent of sadness, of regret for things lost that can never be recovered, for acts committed that can never be undone, and the pull of the music is as great as it is in Hank Williams's posthumously released 1949 recording 'Alone and Forsaken,' which the composer John Fahey called 'the greatest song of despair ever written', which it is. 'We met in the springtime,' the song begins; 'By the fifth word,' Fahey wrote, 'you know it's all over,' and the same is true no farther into Amram's melody.

Finally, though, there is another dimension to *The Manchurian Candidate* that is part of this displacement—not, one might think, part of the glee with which those who made the movie made it, not part of the glee with which they let it happen, played it out, but a dimension that confronts us now, four decades later. That is, we are watching a movie made in another world—and we don't know if the ugly knowledge we bring to the movie is knowledge the



movie had or not.

There are obvious moments that take us out of our time, as we watch the movie today, moments that seal the movie as a curiosity, as a relic, that take place around the edges of the action. There's the glimpse of the elevator operator in Raymond Shaw's apartment building, who smokes in the elevator. Far more than the sight of late-1950s, early-1960s cars on screen, or the use of the Korean War as a social fact it's assumed everyone understands, or Joe McCarthy as a monster or a hero everyone only recently applauded or reviled, this is odd. We know that elevator operators, to the degree that they even exist, can't do that any more. We know that even if we get another Korean War, another Joe McCarthy, we won't get any more elevator operators smoking in elevators. Such tiny details, as we see them today, make the movie seem safe. They protect us from it. Maybe, subliminally, as the movie plays itself out, we try to hold onto such details, because the rest of the movie is too familiar.

*The Manchurian Candidate*, plunging towards the assassination of a would-be president, climaxing with the assassination of the man who's going to take his place, was taken out of circulation not long after it was released. Not that quickly, not right after the assassination of President Kennedy; while Frankenheimer refused to allow a second theatrical run, the film played on television. Then it went missing. Certainly among those who remembered it, as year after year people continued to tell others about it, about how they had to see it, only to discover that they couldn't, there was a feeling that the film might be part of an inexplicable cycle of assassinations that followed it—a feeling that went far beyond anything in, say, Richard Condon's "Manchurian Candidate" in *Dallas*, published in the 28 December 1963 number of the *Nation*: 'I was reading about how Senator Thurston Morton of Kentucky absolved the American people from any guilt in the assassination of the President when a reporter from a South African press association telephoned from London to ask if I felt responsible for the President's killing, inasmuch as I had written a novel, *The Manchurian Candidate*, on which had been based a film that had just been "frozen" in the United States because it was felt that the assassin might have seen it and been influenced by it. I told the reporter that, with all Americans, I had contributed to form the attitudes of the assassin; and that the assassin, and Americans like him, had contributed to the attitudes which had caused me to write the novel.' Rather it was a feeling that the film was part of a supposedly scattered but obviously whole, complete, singular event that the cycle of assassinations comprised: its transformation of what in the United States had been taken as open, public life into private crime or hidden conspiracy. And there must have been a feeling, as the film itself stayed hidden, that the country's real history, history as it is lived out every day, its fundamental premises of work and leisure, love and death, might be a kind of awful secret that no one would ever understand.

As the movie ends, in its final scene, Sinatra's Marco understands the whole story—why it happened, how it happened—and he can't accept it. 'Hell,' he curses. 'Hell.' That's the end of the film: misery, regret, fury, the secret he has to hold inside himself. It can't be told, that the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China conspired with purported American anti-Communists, who linked themselves with fascist tendencies in American life, in order to destroy the American republic. The repercussion would be too great. Marco will have to take the secret to his grave. The truth of the life and near death of the republic cannot be told to the people who are the republic. It will

be buried, for our own good.

So you look at the movie, lost in its visual delights, cringing at its violence, wondering what it says, if it says anything, weighed down by the knowledge you're bringing to it, freed from that knowledge by those moments in the film that are unburdened by any moral weight at all—such as the great karate fight between Sinatra's Marco and Henry Silva's Chunjin. In 1962, no one had seen anything like it—and while audiences today, schooled on Bruce Lee and Hong Kong cinema, find the fight clumsy and laugh, it retains a desperation the infinitely more brilliant, stylised bouts that followed don't hint at, because those fights are about themselves, their own reward, and this fight was not.

After so many years, or after you see the movie now, more than once, another element enters. You see that, here, everyone acts politically: the villains, the heroes, the characters that barely register, those who simply come and go. Everyone acts as a citizen of the republic, or as an anticitizen. What's at stake is a commonwealth. As the movie closes, in that final scene, Major Marco rewrites the dead Raymond Shaw's Medal of Honor citation. In 1952, in what, now, seems so long ago, it had been a conditioned Marco himself who had recommended Shaw for the posting: 'He saved out lives,' as Marco had said, parroting his lines for Yen Lo in Manchuria, 'and took out a complete company of Chinese infantry.' 'Made,' Marco says now, with a long pause, the words not coming easily, 'to commit acts—too unspeakable to be cited here. He freed himself, and in the end, heroically and unhesitatingly, gave his life to save his country.'

The words carry enormous weight—the weight of the idea of one's country, one's community, one's social identity. Of course, this is no less an absurdity, no less a fantasy than anything else in *The Manchurian Candidate*: the idea that a single person could ruin the commonwealth, or save it. That is where all the folklore of the movie comes from, all the constant twists and turns of the catchphrase 'Manchurian Candidate' as it has entered our language and so easily summed up moments in history that cannot be summed up—where the folklore comes from and where it stays. But the film has, perhaps without intention, played against this idea of the single, all-powerful hero, or all-powerful villain, throughout its length. In this movie, everyone, hero or villain, minor character and star, has appeared not as a function of the plot, but as someone who acts as if the life of the republic depended on his or her actions, on his or her convictions, beliefs, his or her will, motive, desire.

I [Greil Marcus recounting an undergraduate seminar at Princeton where he used Kennedy's Inaugural speech and *The Manchurian Candidate*] had paired Kennedy's speech with the film because of a sense that for all of Kennedy's call to glory, to nobility, to a mission bigger and finer than any individual who felt called to it—and most who made *The Manchurian Candidate*, one can be sure, had, if only for a moment, felt called to it—there was in the movie an apprehension that everything was out of joint. There was a felt, even thrilled embrace of the notion that nothing was what it seemed, that some terrible conspiracy, some terrible betrayal was at work—and there was. In the White House, Kennedy was continuing his affair with a woman to whom he had been introduced by Frank Sinatra: Judith Campbell, who was simultaneously carrying on an affair with Sam Giancana, head of the Chicago mob. While the country was rededicating itself to the New Frontier, the administration was working with the mafia in Chicago and New Orleans to assassinate Fidel Castro; a more

classic conspiracy couldn't be imagined. When Lyndon Johnson became president he found out he had been cut out of Cuban policy-making; 'We were running a goddamned Murder, Inc., in the Caribbean,' he later said. Johnson believed Castro had Kennedy killed because Kennedy had tried to kill him.

*In 1995*

It was at a party at John Frankenheimer's house in Malibu, California, just before the California primary, that the novelist Romaine Gary approached Robert Kennedy and said, 'You know, don't you, that somebody is going to kill you?' Frankenheimer had spent 102 days on the campaign with Kennedy, filming speeches and appearances and making advertisements; on the day of the California primary Kennedy decided he wanted to watch the returns at Frankenheimer's house in Malibu. The campaign staff insisted he be at the Ambassador Hotel for a network interview. Frankenheimer drove him. 'He went in and did the telecast,' Frankenheimer recalled in 1995, speaking to Charles Champlin, but Kennedy nevertheless insisted on returning to Frankenheimer's house as soon as he was able to make his victory speech. Eugene McCarthy was refusing to concede; finally he did. 'Bobby said, "I want you standing next to me on the podium,"' Frankenheimer said. 'I said, "Bobby, I don't think it looks good for you to have a Hollywood director standing next to you. It's not the image." He said, "You're right." And the man who stood next to him was shot, too. That would have been me.'...

It's not that *The Manchurian Candidate* prefigured, let alone prophesied, the events that followed it. It didn't. It is a fantasy in which Joe McCarthy, as Thomas Jordan says to Eleanor Iselin of her husband 'could not do more harm to this country if he were a paid Soviet agent'—a cheap irony, like the folklore that has grown up around the picture, boiling it down to a catchphrase, as Richard Condon himself did from the beginning.

What *The Manchurian Candidate* did prefigure—what it acted out, what it played out, in advance—was the state of mind that would accompany the assassinations that followed it, those violations of American public life. It prefigured the sense that the events that shape our lives take place in a world we cannot see, to

which we have no access, that we will never be able to explain. If a dream is a memory of the future, this is the future *The Manchurian Candidate* remembered.

**from *World Film Directors Volume II*. Ed. John Wakeman.  
The H.W. Wilson Co., NY 1988**

"I really enjoyed television," Frankenheimer says. "I enjoyed television more than I can really tell you and I think that everything I am today I owe to it...I drew a tremendous amount of experience from five years as a television director, more I think many film directors ever get in their entire career." He learned to work with actors "in a rather fluid way," waiting "to see what they do in a scene" rather than imposing movements on them. And he learned to deal with writers: "If you don't write yourself (which I don't) you have to be able to work extremely well and communicate closely with your writer, because if you're going to have any of your own personality in a film or in a television show it has to be there in the script."

When Frankenheimer "found that television was turning into a purely film and tape medium," he "started thinking about leaving. I thought, if I'm to work on film, I'll work in the real film."

Frankenheimer himself, in partnership with George Axelrod, bought the rights to *The Manchurian Candidate*, and Axelrod wrote the adaptation. The result, Frankenheimer says, was "the first film I really instigated and had complete control over...the film I did exactly as I wanted it to be."

Richard Combs has suggested that Frankenheimer, "perhaps most conspicuously of his television-trained generation, failed the transition from the 50s and 60s cinema of the well-made but serious subject to the genre extravaganzas of the 70s." But for John Thomas, Frankenheimer, "who embodies within himself and his work so many of the ambiguities of American life... is a major director because he is the only Hollywood filmmaker in recent years to make these qualities the center of a film."

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