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Remakes and Remaking

Concepts – Media – Practices

[transcript]

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MICHAEL BUTTER

THE REMAKE AS UPDATE

In one of the earliest scholarly engagements with remakes, Thomas M. Leitch (1990) distinguishes between four types of film remakes: the "homage" is primarily meant to honor the original film; the, as Leitch somewhat confusingly calls it, "true remake" tries to surpass and thus effectively erase the need for the original; the "readaptation" is less concerned with an already existing film version of the story and primarily refers back to an earlier literary source, most often a novel or a play; and the "update" adjusts the story as presented in the original film or an earlier literary source to make it relevant for a changed social and cultural context. Unsurprisingly, this typology has drawn a lot of criticism (Oltmann 2008: 85). It mistakenly suggests that in most, if not in all cases, there is a literary source on which the original film is based, it conflates notions of intra-medial and inter-medial remaking, and it does not acknowledge that there are films that should be placed in more than one category, as paying homage to a classic pretext surely does not exclude the possibility of updating its storyline and character constellation. My purpose here, however, is not to critique either Leitch's typology or the often not more convincing ones developed by later scholars (many of which the introduction to this volume addresses). Far more narrowly, and modestly, this paper discusses the relationship between John Frankenheimer's 1962 film *The Manchurian Candidate* and Jonathan Demme's

remake of the same title from 2004 – and for this purpose Leitch's notion of the update will prove helpful.[1]

Interestingly, though, in the remake's making-of documentary "The Enemy Within: Inside *The Manchurian Candidate*" (2004), which is included among the special features on the DVD, screenwriter Daniel Pyne initially casts the remake as a re-adaptation:

> "We tried to surprise people, as the film unfolded. We tried to do what Condon does in his original novel, which is to utilize many different genres. He's writing a thriller. He's writing a comedy. He's writing a political satire. He's writing a social satire. And he's writing a Greek tragedy, all at the same time."

However, preserving this generic hybridity does not really distinguish the 2004 film from the 1962 version, since Frankenheimer's film already is, as Matt Bell puts it, "a war film, a coming-home film, a satire of American politics, an oedipal melodrama, a 'problem film' centered on a social misfit, a detective film, a romantic comedy, an espionage thriller, and a revenge tragedy" (2006: 88). Thus, rather than adequately describing the difference between two adaptations, Pyne's comment unveils that the two versions have a lot in common.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, throughout the rest of the 'making of', both he and Demme consistently position their film primarily vis-à-vis Frankenheimer's film, with Condon's novel invariably entering their thoughts in second place. For example, according to Demme, "[a]nother big challenge that [they] were faced with was somehow justifying the title *Manchurian Candidate*. In the first movie, and in the book, it refers to Manchuria as a hotbed of communism." Pyne then explains that "Eleanor Shaw was the big point of departure for me from where this new movie really separated itself from the original movie and from Condon's novel." And a little later he admits that "It was incredibly challenging to come up with a new way of killing Senator Jordan and his daughter. I didn't wanna go anywhere near the old movie. It was one of the places where I really thought about what had been done in the old movie and how beautifully done it was." ("The Enemy Within" 2004) He leaves out that Frankenheimer's film closely follows Condon's novel in its staging of the killings, unwittingly bringing to the fore that the film is not primarily a re-adaptation but a remake, as its major point of reference is not the novel, but Frankenheimer's film.

This, of course, is not surprising since *The Manchurian Candidate* is usually considered – unjustly, as I have argued elsewhere[2] – "one of those cases where the film seems to eliminate the need for the text from which it comes" (Jackson

1 For readers unfamiliar with Frankenheimer's film a short plot summary is in order: The film revolves around two American soldiers, Sgt. Shaw (played by Laurence Harvey) and Major Marco (Frank Sinatra) who are abducted together with their platoon by enemy forces during the Korean War and transported to Manchuria, where a team of Russian and Chinese scientists brainwashes them. Shaw is turned into a sleeper agent who can be activated by way of playing cards and code words and will then execute every order (and forget what he has done afterwards). After three days they are returned to Korea and set free but they now all believe that they were openly attacked by enemies and only survived because of the heroic conduct of Shaw who because of Marco's report is awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor after their return to the United States. There, Marco is haunted by nightmares in which he glimpses bits and pieces of what really happened but which he cannot make sense of until he learns that another member of the platoon, Al Melvin has the same nightmares. Meanwhile, Shaw's overbearing mother, Eleanor Iselin, tries to promote the political career of her husband, Johnny, a U.S. Senator, by exploiting her son's fame. What is more, halfway through the film the audience finds out that she is Shaw's American operator and the mastermind behind the conspiracy that began in Manchuria. The conspirators' aim is to win the nomination for the vice presidency for Iselin and to then have his running mate assassinated in order to secure the nomination and then the presidency for Iselin, who is as much under the control of his wife as Shaw is. As this plot slowly unfolds, Marco is on the brink of a nervous breakdown, but he recovers when he meets a mysterious woman on a train, Rosie, who takes a fancy to him and nurtures him. Moreover, when he and Melvin independently identify the communist scientists who brainwashed them from photographs, the FBI finally believes Marco that the patrol was never attacked and begins to covertly investigate Shaw. At about the same time, Shaw's fate seems to take a turn for the better when he re-connects with and secretly marries his girlfriend Jocie, whose father is one of Iselin's most fervent opponents. Eleanor Shaw, however, manages to reestablish control over her son and has him kill Jocie and her father. Shortly before the convention where Shaw is supposed to kill the presidential candidate, though, Marco and his team of FBI agents accidentally manage to break Shaw's conditioning. Acting on his own, Shaw shoots Iselin, his mother, and then himself at the convention. The film ends with a tear-stained Marco, comforted by Rosie, praising Shaw's heroism.

2 See Butter 2014: 264-82 for a reading of Condon's novel and Frankenheimer's film that suggests "that both texts are equally complex and function in a very similar way" and that "if any of the two texts deserves to be labeled more critical than affirmative, it is the novel and not the film" (2014: 264).

2000: 40). Therefore I am exclusively concerned here with the relationship between the films. I read Demme's version as an update of Frankenheimer's film that retains its basic plot structure and character constellation but that also adjusts them to fit its 21st-century context: The story is no longer set in the Cold War but in the post-9/11 present, with the patrol having been abducted during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. Behind the abduction are no longer the Communists, but Manchurian Global, an Enron-like American-based company that, since "business can always be better", as one member of the board puts it, wants to place its own president in the White House. Diverging from Frankenheimer's film, their candidate for this position is no longer Senator Iselin, who is completely eliminated from the plot, but Raymond Shaw himself, whom his military fame as savior of the patrol has catapulted into Congress already. As in the earlier version, though, Shaw (Liev Schreiber) has a complicated relationship with his mother, Eleanor Iselin (Meryl Streep), who, reflecting the updated social and political environment, serves as a Republican senator herself and secures the vice presidential nomination for her son early on. Thus, whereas the original film ends with the convention, the remake begins with it. As in the original, though, the plot mostly revolves around Major Marco (Denzel Washington) and his attempts to find out what really happened during the war and what the conspirators are up to. Unlike in the original, it is Marco who eventually pulls the trigger to foil the plot. Programed by the conspirators to shoot Shaw's running mate during the celebrations on election night in order to secure the presidency for Shaw, Marco shoots Shaw and his mother – a deed then covered up by the FBI.

Instead of Communism, then, Demme's film focuses on the War on Terror and on transnational capitalism. Moreover, the new film intensifies the original's media critique. Whereas Frankenheimer's film blamed television for the rise of the McCarthyian Johnny Iselin, Demme's version, by way of the omnipresence of commercials, billboards, and sensationalist news coverage, suggests that the American people are blatantly manipulated by those who control the media. Finally, the film also updates the original's anxiety about brainwashing. Whereas in Frankenheimer's film the Communist conspirators rely on Freudian psychoanalysis, hypnosis, and stimulus-response conditioning to turn the American soldiers into sleepers, in Demme's film, Manchurian Global's scientists, evoking contemporary anxieties about bio-engineering, use computer animations, psychotropic drugs, and high-tech chips implanted into the victims' bodies.

In the final analysis, though, both the original and the remake thus work to re-affirm traditional notions of self and agency. As Timothy Melley has convincingly demonstrated, during the 1950s American social scientists as well as the public became quite preoccupied with brainwashing because it allowed for the

recasting of systemic social conditioning as intentional manipulation and thus worked to preserve the notion of an autonomous, albeit threatened, self: "the theory of brainwashing studiously avoids structuralism; it preserves the intentionality at the heart of individualism by understanding social control as the work of an exceptionally powerful, willful, rational, and malevolent human agent – the brainwasher" (2008: 149). Exactly the same is true for Demme's remake. Here, too, manipulation is not the result of systemic effects, but of meticulous planning and execution. Both films thus not only raise the specter of "other-directedness", as 1950s discourse called it (Riesman 1950), but also carry the promise that this external control can be broken and inner-directed agency can be restored.

While the films' media critique and theories of identity and agency would deserve closer attention, I want to focus here on two closely related differences that create a certain ideological tension between the two films. Whereas Frankenheimer's film casts the conspiracy largely as an external threat, Demme's film, reflecting the development of conspiracist fears over the second half of the twentieth century, revolves around an internal enemy. Moreover, the original film forges a close link between the conspiracy and women's manipulation of men more generally, thus echoing a major concern of the 1950s and early 1960s American culture. The few critics who have engaged with Demme's film have argued that the remake does exactly the same. I will argue, however, that the remake can be read to evoke the link between conspiracy and femininity, but that it does so only to then dismiss it. More specifically, and here the differences between the two films I focus on converge, Demme's film suggests that the image of the threatening female Islamist terrorist is a smokescreen intentionally set up by the true conspirators, the white American males who control Manchurian Global, in order to detract attention from their plotting. Moreover, while the original film genders the threat of conspiracy by casting brainwashing as a feminine technique employed to manipulate American men, the remake racializes the scheme: its updated version of brainwashing and bioengineering is performed by white scientists on predominantly black soldiers.

FOREIGN CONSPIRATORS AND DANGEROUS WOMEN IN FRANKENHEIMER'S ORIGINAL

As Matthew Frye Jacobson and Gaspar González pointedly put it in *What Have They Built You to Do*? The Manchurian Candidate *and Cold War America*, John Frankenheimer's film is "both comment on and expression of common Ameri-

can ideas and ideologies at the height of the Cold War" (2006: x).[3] On the one hand, the film satirizes some of the anxieties that preoccupied American culture during the 1950s because it is already temporally and ideologically removed from that decade; on the other, the film is still very much shaped by other discourses of that decade and thus voices anxieties associated with the 1950s in much the same fashion as countless other texts produced during that decade. Thus, the film no longer shares the 1950s concern with a conspiracy against the federal government and society conducted by large numbers of 'real' Americans who have been infected by the virus of Communism. At the same time, however, the film reinforces the link 1950s culture had forged between the Communist threat and a host of unrelated social concerns such as anxieties about the emasculation of the American male and the destructive influence of overbearing, manipulative women on their partners, husbands, and sons, and thus on the nation as a whole.

During the Great Red Scare of the early to mid-1950s, many Americans – and by no means only the right-wing fringe around Senator Joseph McCarthy – worried about a vast conspiracy against the American government and the educational sector that was allegedly orchestrated in Moscow but carried out by 'real' Americans who had secretly become members of the American Communist Party.[4] These fears were voiced in a broad variety of texts – from the Chamber of Commerce's report on *Communists within the Government* (1947) via Joseph McCarthy's infamous Wheeling speech (1950) and Ernst and Loth's *Report on the American Communist* (1952) to J. Edgar Hoover's *Masters of Deceit* (1958), and from the novels of Mickey Spillane to films such as *Big Jim McLain* (1952) or *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). They led to a number of legal measures such as the McCarran International Security Act of September 1950 or the Communist Control Act of 1954, which made "membership in [the Communist party] clearly a crime" (Heale 1990: 182), and which provided anti-

3 Apart from Jacobson and González's book-length study, Frankenheimer's film has generated a number of excellent shorter interpretations that have considerably shaped my thinking about the film. Apart from those I quote, cf. Carruthers (1998) and Gardner (1994).

4 I use the term 'Great Red Scare' and not the far more popular one 'McCarthyism' because the climate of fear and suspicion that appears to us today inextricably linked to McCarthy existed before he entered the scene in 1950, and it endured after his censure by the Senate in 1954. McCarthy is thus best considered the product of a cultural and political climate that he fuelled further (Schrecker 1998: xii).

Communists with the necessary instruments to conduct veritable witch-hunts for alleged Communists.

At first sight, Frankenheimer's film seems to articulate similar fears, because it revolves around a conspiracy whose goal it is to place a puppet in the White House. Yet, unlike in most 1950s conspiracist texts, in *The Manchurian Candidate* this is almost entirely a foreign plot, masterminded by Russian and Chinese conspirators. The only American consciously involved in the scheme is Mrs. Iselin who controls the unsuspecting dupe Johnny Iselin and her son Raymond whom Russians and Chinese have – against his will and without his knowledge – turned into a sleeper. Thus, the 1950s fear that large numbers of 'native' Americans might work for the enemy is implicitly dismissed in the film. Moreover, through the figure of Senator Iselin, the film critiques and satirizes Joseph McCarthy. Like McCarthy, Iselin is, at least in public, a loudmouthed bully who drinks too much, confuses numbers all the time, craves and exploits media attention, and does everything to promote his career – and who unwittingly supports the Communist conspiracy he has set out to fight. In fact, by poking fun at McCarthy via Iselin, the film suggests that right-wing alarmists are as big a danger to American democracy as Soviet communism is. From this vantage point, then, Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* truly appears as the "Kennedy administration film" as which Michael Rogin has famously classified it (1987: 253). With its focus on conspirators located outside the country and its release coinciding with the Cuban Missile Crisis (Jacobson/González 2006: 171), it confirmed the worldview – Communism as a real but largely external danger – that Kennedy shared.

However, while the film criticizes and modifies the established conspiracy narrative of the 1950s, it nevertheless reinforces the link that American culture forged between the Communist threat and a host of unrelated social concerns. As many studies have shown, during the 1950s, many Americans were concerned about what they perceived as the "moral decline" of America (Cuordileone 2005: 66). For them, the steadily rising divorce rate, the apparently drastic spread of homosexuality, and the increasing presence of women outside the domestic sphere were ultimately rooted in the emasculation of the American man. Intellectuals and sociologists like William Whyte or David Riesman suggested that men were increasingly no longer 'real' men, but de-individualized organization men, no longer autonomous decision-makers, but other-directed, weak, and effeminate. Unsurprisingly, women were blamed for what Arthur Schlesinger Jr. famously called "The Crisis of American Masculinity" in a 1958 *Esquire* essay. Many Americans became obsessed with what Philip Wylie had labeled "momism" during the 1940s already, with the allegedly fatal influence of literal

and figurative mothers, controlling, manipulative, self-absorbed "moms" on males. They feared that overbearing mothers made men unfit for normal relationships, robbed them of their autonomy, and could even turn them into homosexuals or communists, or both, as the pink and the red scare were inextricably connected in the eyes of many. As Elaine Tyler May puts it, "moral weakness was associated with sexual degeneracy, which allegedly led to communism" (1988: 86).

This "marriage of perversion and subversion", as Jacobson and González call it in an apt metaphor (2006: 142), permeates countless cultural texts of the period – the writings of Joe McCarthy and J. Edgar Hoover just as much as Hollywood films like *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *Them!* (1954), or virtually all Hitchcock movies of the time such as *North by Northwest* (1959), whose famous train scene Frankenheimer quotes in one of the key scenes of *The Manchurian Candidate*. In *North by Northwest*, Carry Grant's Roger Thornhill only gets into trouble because he is too close to his mother. On the run from both the Communist conspirators and the FBI, he initially becomes the helpless toy of Eve, who, it seems, is part of the conspiracy, before it turns out that she is a spy for the FBI. Later, however, Eve becomes an important catalyst for Thornhill's re-masculinization, and by the end of the film she has been thoroughly domesticated (indicated by the white nightgown she wears in the final scene) and the 'proper' gender hierarchy has been restored.

The Manchurian Candidate forges an even stronger connection between the Communist conspiracy and "momism"; in fact, it conflates these two dimensions entirely. This begins with the famous brainwashing scene during which the American soldiers are made to believe that they are witnessing a ladies' garden club meeting in an American hotel. Throughout the scene, the two settings – the Chinese lecture hall and the American hotel – merge completely. At times, the Chinese Yen Lo lectures about brainwashing, at others about flowers; in some shots he addresses the Communist conspirators, in others the garden club. The same goes, in reversed fashion, for the president of the club. Thus, the film casts brainwashing as a feminine technique, and Yen Lo, representative of an ethnicity habitually feminized in Western culture, only does in more extreme form what all women in the film do. Shaw's mother enjoys complete control over Iselin, and she orchestrates and supervises all of his public performances. In one shot through which the film casts TV as a feminized tool of control, she is shown checking Iselin's TV image, creating the impression that he is merely an actor in a show she is directing. And Shaw, the film suggests, is the perfect candidate for the Manchurian conspiracy because he has been brainwashed by his mother his whole life. Indeed, whereas anti-Communists feared that mothers might spoil

and pervert their sons and thus anchor a propensity for the subversive ideology of Communism in them, *The Manchurian Candidate* turns the mother herself into a Communist agent. Beneath Mrs. Iselin's respectable and matronly outward appearance lurks a Communist pervert who betrays her son and her country.

However, Mrs. Iselin is not the only female brainwasher in the film. Jocie, Raymond's love interest, is a highly ambivalent figure who – in a fashion that echoes the brainwashing scene – talks Major Marco into postponing his attempt to de-brainwash Shaw for a couple of days so that she and Shaw can enjoy their honeymoon, and thus unwittingly contributes to the tragic turn of events. And Rosie, Marco's love interest, is even more explicitly cast as a manipulator when she meets Marco, at this moment clearly "the embodiment of masculinity in crisis" (Jacobson/González 2006: 162), on the train to New York City. Her playfully casting herself as Chinese aligns her with the conspiracy in a metaphorical sense early on, thus misleading a critic like Roger Ebert, who wrote: "My notion is that Sinatra's character [Major Marco] is a Manchurian killer, too – one allowed to remember details of [Shaw's] brainwashing because that would make him more credible. And Leigh? She's Sinatra's controller." (Qtd. in Jacobson/González 2006: 151) This is of course not literally true, but the hypnotizing way in which she has Marco memorize her telephone number – an act that recalls how Eve in *North by Northwest* makes Thornhill remember her compartment number – establishes her as yet another brainwasher, and the rest of the film confirms this impression. Marco remains weak and under her control until the end; he is much weaker indeed than Shaw whose control mechanism he only accidentally breaks. Unlike in the novel, where Marco is the stronger of the two and decides to re-program Shaw, in the film it is Shaw who decides what needs to be done, and he kills Iselin, his mother, and himself. Marco, as always, arrives too late to prevent this, and the final shot of the film shows him, in the presence of Rosie, praising Shaw's heroism and then starting to cry. The re-masculinization that *North by Northwest* has its protagonist undergo by restoring his agency does not occur here. Frankenheimer's version of *The Manchurian Candidate*, then, assumes an ambivalent stance toward 1950s discourses: it dismisses the fear of a huge, internal conspiracy, but affirms anxieties about the harmful influence of overbearing women. Thus, it genders the conspiracy it projects.

DOMESTIC CONSPIRATORS AND STEREOTYPES AS SMOKESCREENS IN DEMME'S REMAKE

According to the few critics who have written about Jonathan Demme's remake, the same goes for the new film. In fact, they insist that the link between femininity and conspiracy is even stronger in the remake. Antje Dallmann, for example, writes: "The latest version portrays a further escalation in this crisis [of masculinity]: While men are grouped together as uncannily manipulated victims, women are portrayed as independent and manipulative." (2007: 108f.) In much the same fashion, Mark Wildermuth suggests: "Although the misogynistic trope's vigor is evident in the first film, its renewal and intensity are equally clear in the second." (2007: 121)

These claims, however, are debatable, to say the least. For example, the meeting on the train between Marco and Rosie plays out very differently in Demme's version. While Marco is even more devastated in the new film than in the 1962 version, Rosie appears far less and not more enigmatic than in the original. As a result, their encounter is not nearly as disturbing as in Frankenheimer's film. When she tells Marco her phone number, there is nothing hypnotizing about it – and he does not need to remember it anyway because, unlike in the original, she takes him home with her right away, because he is quite obviously incapable of finding a hotel for himself. She comes across as friendly, concerned, slightly flirtatious, and insecure, not nearly as self-assured as Janet Leigh's Rosie in the old version. This impression is confirmed throughout the film, and it is not even challenged by the fact that Rosie later turns out to be an FBI agent shadowing Marco and trying to verify the veracity of his claims. She may lie to him initially, but several scenes show that she genuinely cares for him, and apart from taking him in she never makes him do anything, but rather supports his actions, and eventually initiates the cover up after Marco has shot Shaw and his mother. Rosie thus clearly is no manipulator, and even her story that they have met before is true.[5]

5 Rosie's first words to Marco are "Paper or plastic?" in order to remind him that she knows him from "the grocery store." And in fact, an earlier scene shows her asking exactly this question when Marco is paying at the check-out. However, since her face is never shown during the short exchange the casual viewer is unlikely to recognize her. Moreover, it is completely unclear what she is doing there. Marco has not yet started his own investigation at this point in time, thus there is no reason why the FBI should watch him already. While these questions might motivate some viewers to come up with an alternative, 'paranoid' interpretation of the film that presupposes that

Accordingly, Dallmann's claim that "Mother is no exceptional figure" is not convincing (2007: 108). Whereas Frankenheimer's version clearly aligns its Rosie with Shaw's mother, casting both as controllers, albeit of different kinds, Demme's film contrasts the two. In addition, Jocie is of no importance in the remake, does not marry Shaw and only appears in two or three short scenes. What is more, Shaw's mother clearly is both a conspirator and a manipulator, but she enjoys considerably less power over her son than in the old version. Shaw comes across as a fairly normal and indeed likeable human being whom his mother can only get to do what she wants by activating his control mechanism by means of a verbal code.

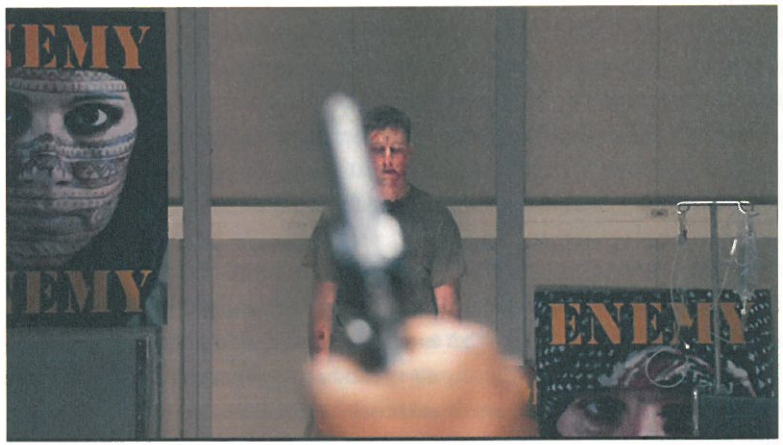
I also disagree with Wildermuth's claim that Rosie is visually aligned with the conspiracy. The basis for this argument is that those members of the patrol who begin to remember what really happened have nightmares in which they are brainwashed and in which the murders occur as they really happened, but in which they are handled not by the male white scientists actually responsible but by Arab women. The audience is confronted with these false images both through the notebooks of Al Melvin, an African-American soldier, which Marco finds in his apartment after Melvin has committed suicide, and through Marco's own nightmares. One of these nightmares occurs a couple of minutes before Marco meets Rosie on the train. According to Wildermuth, in the scene on the train, Rosie "recall[s] the Iraqi women in the dream sequence" because she is like them dressed in "dark apparel" (2007: 125). This, however, is not the case. Rosie, an African American like Marco, is not dressed in black as the Arab women in Marco's nightmare and Melvin's notebook are, but in a beige coat. Moreover, she does not "almost take the place" of the civilian contractor whom Marco briefly imagines before he sees her (Wildermuth 2007: 125). The contractor, who led the patrol into a trap and who emerges as the scientific mastermind behind the brainwashing plot later, appears in Marco's dream sitting directly opposite of him. When he disappears, the camera pans to the right, and then Rosie appears, a few rows further back, smiling at Marco. In addition, a bullet wound that Marco briefly imagines seeing on her forehead a few seconds later visually

nothing is what it seems, I would suggest that this inconsistency is best regarded as one of a couple of logical gaps that one only notices when watching the film repeatedly. Others are that Marco suddenly detects and easily removes the chip that has been implanted into his shoulder more than ten years ago and that has been sitting right under his skin, or that Shaw remains under the control of the conspirators even after Marco has removed the chip from his shoulder (if it is not important, why put it there in the first place?). These gaps, I would suggest, are best ignored.

aligns her with the soldier that Marco was made to shoot by the brainwashers. Thus, the scene on the train does not link her to the conspiracy but associates her with its victims – a reading further corroborated by the fact that, as I discuss below, the film projects the plot as racialized, as directed by white men against blacks.

But even if Rosie is not linked to the conspiracy, Wildermuth is on to something because the images of the Arab women are puzzling indeed. They echo both stereotypical representations of Islamist terrorism in post-9/11 American culture, imagined simultaneously as entirely backward (the women's garbs) and technologically sophisticated (the women talk about bio-engineering), and the oscillation between garden club meeting and Manchurian lecture hall in the original film. However, whereas in Frankenheimer's original the mother and Communist effectively merge in order to suggest a link between "momism" and conspiracy, the Arab women are gradually replaced in Demme's film by white male scientists, as Marco, in later scenes, manages to remember what really happened. Accordingly, I contend that the memory of the Arab women functions as a smokescreen intentionally planted by the conspirators in their victims' brains in order to mislead them should they begin to remember the truth. This becomes most obvious in the scene in which Marco relives, with the help of a drug, how he was made to shoot one of the patrol's soldiers. Here white scientists orchestrate the affair, and the Arab women reappear only on posters in the background that identify them as the "enemy" (*Image 1*).

Image 1:Posters of Arab women as the 'enemy'



Source: DVD *The Manchurian Candidate* (2004), Paramount 2004

Accordingly, Manchurian Global "wears the mask of terrorism", but not, as Sonja Georgi argues, because the film suggests that "multinational capitalism and international terrorism have formed a strange liaison" (2012: 155, 147). Rather, the real conspirators – American businessmen and not ethnically marked foreigners – use the specter of Islamist terrorism to divert attention from their schemes. This, I would contend, must be read as a comment that in the post-9/11 world the true enemy of America seems to be such an ethnic other, but that the real threat is homegrown – an enemy who consciously manufactures the fantasy of a foreign foe to get away with its own crimes. Thus, the film eventually links the manipulative and emasculating power of the media not to the feminine, as Frankenheimer's original does and as American culture has so frequently done in the second half of the twentieth century, but to the deeds of white men, the scientists, who use drugs, implants, and computer animations to plant a fiction in the minds of American soldiers, just as their corporate bosses manipulate the American people through false alerts and TV commercials.

However, Demme's film also racializes this plot in a very specific fashion. The two soldiers who suffer most from the brainwashing they undergo, Marco and Melvin, are both black, whereas those who abuse them are white. Moreover, the scientific mastermind behind the scheme is said to have conducted experiments on blacks in South Africa during the 1980s. This in turn links up with the star persona Denzel Washington brings to the movie. Since his role as black South African activist Steven Biko in *Cry Freedom* (1987), Washington has repeatedly played characters that suffered from and fought against racist violence. But the film recalls not only the history of racism and racial segregation in and outside the U.S. by these means. Through its plot, it also evokes, for example, more specifically the long history of medical experimentation conducted by whites on blacks (cf. Washington 2006).

This, however, creates a certain ambivalence. Not only is it not clear whether or not the film wishes to suggest that today's big corporations treat every citizen as they manipulated African Americans during, for example, the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. Between 1932 and 1972, blacks were told that the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) was treating their syphilis, while government doctors left it untreated to study the progression of the disease (Jones 2006). Moreover, the film's allusions to government-sanctioned violations of black bodies clash with the overall image of the conspiracy the film paints. Like virtually all conspiracy narratives since the 1960s, and unlike the original, then, Demme's remake suggests that most of the conspirators are located not outside, but inside the country, that the threat to democracy and liberty is not foreign, but homegrown. However, while most post-1960 conspiracy narratives assume that the federal government

has already fallen prey to the conspiracy and that agencies such as the FBI, or the PHS, for that matter, have therefore been turned into instruments of the plot, this is not the case in Demme's remake. The reason is surely that for the film to function as a remake it was necessary to retain the original's basic plot idea of placing a brainwashed sleeper in the White House. But the rather positive role that government agencies therefore play in Demme's film – since they have not yet been infiltrated, they work to foil the conspiracy; Rosie, the film's most positive character, is an FBI agent; and the FBI eventually frames Manchurian Global and protects Marco – clashes with the history of institutionalized racism it simultaneously evokes.

In the end, therefore, the remake is as ambivalent as the original, albeit in a different fashion, and this ambivalence is further increased by the ending. Whereas Frankenheimer's film restores Shaw's agency – he decides what to do and acts accordingly – but not Marco's, it remains entirely unclear who or what is responsible for the foiling of the conspiracy in Demme's version. Marco confronts Shaw on Election Day and reveals the conspirators' plot to him. "And what makes you believe that they haven't figured you in?" Shaw replies, suggesting a further complication to the plot that is seemingly confirmed a moment later when Shaw's mother calls Marco, activates him, and, we gather, orders him to shoot the president elect at the victory party later that evening. Yet, in the end Marco shoots Shaw and his mother, and we never really understand how this comes about. Maybe Marco was never activated in the first place. The fact that he had removed the conspirators' implant from his body earlier supports this reading, but the fact that he perceives the world in exactly the fashion as the activated Shaw does when he takes mother's calls, i.e. everything around him lightens up, indicates the opposite. Or is Shaw 'reprogramming' Marco by missing the spot where he is supposed to survive the shooting and looking up to Marco's hiding place significantly several times? The movie leaves this open, thus, probably unintentionally, fostering a sense of paranoia and agency panic that we are used to now, but that found one of its first cultural expressions in the original *The Manchurian Candidate* and that is "updated" in Demme's remake.

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