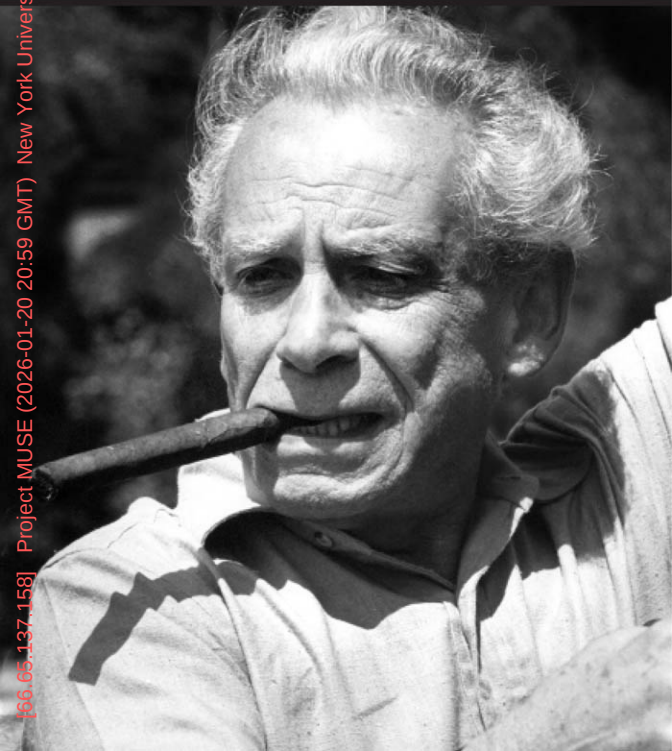


Samuel Fuller

INTERVIEWS

Edited by Gerald Peary

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why the reporter went insane. But were you trying to say more than that: that everyone has this insanity inside of him?

A: Sure! I should have emphasized that even more strongly in the film. I should have made it clearer that for the reporter to want to do this, to volunteer to be accepted as an inmate, he had to be a little crazy in the first place.

Every one of us naturally has an inclination to yell or go crazy or break things. Even if you don't think that's a form of insanity, I do. I'm positive that, next to death, insanity is one of the most interesting subjects. I mean, I'm intrigued by it.

The Naked Kiss

Q: I think that *The Naked Kiss* is in many ways more "shocking" than *Shock Corridor*.

A: It is.

Q: In fact, I would say that it's the most shocking film you've made. It seemed that you deliberately went to lengths to get a reaction from the audience, especially when you pull the rug out from under everything in the child-molesting scene.

A: I wanted to bring something else out, but I don't know if I succeeded, because we were short on loot, the bastards. I had a scene where [Kelly] Constance Towers confronts the townspeople after they find out that she's innocent. At first they were ready to lynch her, and now they want vindication. She tells them to go to hell. I didn't shoot this scene—no money. She calls them hypocrites, which is all right. But the important thing is that she realizes how happy she was in her [prostitution] profession. She says, in effect, "What a thrill it is: when you get through laying any of those bastards, he pays you off and leaves. You don't have to listen to him or to his stories or to his lies, like I have to listen to your lies every day."

I thought it would be very effective if a girl kills a saint, and no one believes that the saint is really guilty of a horrible crime. That's the premise I wanted. How do I make this man saintly and canonize him? I made him the sweetest man in the world, with all sorts of charitable gadgets: hospitals, a town named after him, and so on.

So when I [conceived] the film as a shocker, the original impression I wanted was of a wonderful, almost dull, very, very ordinary love story: the poor girl from the wrong side of the tracks, the rich man who falls in

love with her. Well, I hate those kinds of stories. So I knew I was going to have fun the minute she finds him molesting the child. Now, when you saw the picture, did that scene shock you?

Q: To say the least.

A: Good. That's what I wanted. I don't mean that I wanted it to shock you content-wise; I wanted it to shock you story-wise. A lot of people didn't like that picture. Certain friends of mine said, "Oh, why'd you have him try to lay a little girl?" I don't know, maybe they resented it because of some secret, hidden desire. What [did they] expect me to do? Suppose there's no child-molesting scene. I wouldn't have made the story. There is no story, as far as I'm concerned. I'm not interested in the girl from the wrong side of the tracks. They made those stories at Metro and Warners for fifty years: She goes to the right side, she meets the fellow, sometimes she finds out he's a nice guy, sometimes she finds out he's a phony, but there's always a happy ending.

Q: The opening scene is astonishing, where Towers beats up the pimp as her wig is falling off. The viewer is assaulted before the credits even come on.

A: Did that surprise you, that beginning? There's no fade-in, you know. We open with a direct cut. In that scene, the actors utilized the camera. They held the camera; it was strapped on them. For the first shot, the pimp has the camera strapped on his chest. I say to Towers, "Hit the camera!" She hits the camera, the lens. Then I reverse it. I put the camera on her, and she whacks the hell out of him. I thought it was effective. She had a difficult time making herself up at the end of the scene, because she had to use the lens as a mirror. As the titles come on, she's looking into the lens.

Q: There are many artistic references in the film, mostly connected with Grant [Michael Dante], the millionaire. The most outstanding ones are to Beethoven.

A: Ah! First of all, I wanted to show that the millionaire's a very "nice" man; he likes to sit and listen to music, and all that stuff. The girl is very hungry for something like that. Beethoven is a symbol. It could have been any other composer or artist.

Q: What were you intending with the imaginary trip to Venice during the big love scene?

A: I wanted that very badly for many reasons. First of all, I'm trying to sell him as a poetic, musical type—the fellow she wants so badly. She's never had anything like this before. The Venice scenes gave me a chance to show that pictorially.

But what I wanted more than anything else was to use that to build up to The Kiss, The Naked Kiss. I have him kiss her in the gondola, with the leaves falling. I cut on that position to them kissing on the couch. One more leaf falls. We'll never know whether that's in her mind or it really happened. The minute she kisses him, she draws away. He says, "What's the matter?" She says, "Nothing." That's when she should have said, "There's something wrong with you." But she didn't.

I had to have something highly molasses-like, even cornily romantic, in that scene. I couldn't just have them kissing on the couch. I had to have all that phony mood for one reason: I thought if I gave him an overload of gibble-gabble—about poets and painters and writers and musicians—we would understand why she doesn't object right then. I had to get a man who symbolized everything she was hungry for. I went overboard. I had to.

When she does find out this man's secret, and she realizes that he had given her a Naked Kiss, she's shocked, and he's shocked that she's shocked. Since she's a hooker, he thought that she would understand why he likes little girls.

Shark!

A: When I made *Shark!* I had what I felt was a brainstorm: doing a story about four amoral characters. One is a scientist [Barry Sullivan]: no morals. One is the girl [Silvia Pinal] he's laying: no morals. One is the young hero [Burt Reynolds]: no morals. One is the cop [Enrique Lucero]: no morals. I thought it would be interesting to show not only a double-cross on a double-cross, but when we think we know who the heavy is, we find out that the real heavy behind it all is the girl. She's the lowest. She does have a chance to get out of it alive, if she levels with the lead. But she doesn't. She is responsible for her own death. He lets her die. I tried something different there. They're in love and all that stuff, and I have the hero not only allow her to die, but he shrugs it off. I thought that was exciting.

I like the idea of a love affair where the man finds out the girl has used him. I gave her a great line of dialogue. The last line of the picture—now I find out that the producers have put it in ahead, and it's no longer the

A Long Chat with Sam Fuller

Richard Schickel/1982

Previously unpublished interview. Printed by permission of Richard Schickel.

Q: How did you get into movies from being a newspaperman?

Fuller: I never thought I'd be in the picture business, number one, ever. Though I loved movies . . . Tom Mix and William S. Hart. When I was a kid, I always tried to figure out how Tom Mix had that big hat on in a fight. I saw him go through a glass window and jump off a cliff with [his horse] Tony. There's the water, they get a close-up shot, and his hat is on. I don't know. I didn't understand it.

I was on an unsolved murder [in 1931] that inadvertently got me [noticed by] the movie business. It was a double homicide, my byline, page one, and I got a letter from Loews Incorporated in New York [which owned MGM]. It was perfumed, evidently the secretary, and they said, "We love your story. If you give us an ending—since no one had solved the murder—we'll pay you \$5,000."

I went home, my mother said, "Take the five. You'll never see \$5,000 in your life. This is it." But I turned it down. I don't want to go into detail, but it was very difficult to solve a murder in New York City, especially when a victim is a multi-millionaire. If he has no family, seven years after his death, the City takes that money . . . and just put that together!

So I was traveling back and forth on newspapers covering different ways of execution: Texas by the gunshot, Oklahoma and Utah hanging, the West Coast electric chair. This led to movies. I met a man in Cicero, outside of Chicago [who owned a billiards club], and I slept on the pool table. I was waiting for Shainmark of the *Chicago-American*, who'd said, "You come out here. We got a spot for you." A small, bald-headed, stocky man came in and asked for directions, the quickest way to go to Chicago. I said, "Can you give me a lift? I'm going to try to get a job on a newspaper, *The Chicago-American*."

In the car, he said, "I know Mr. Shainmark. Ezekial Isaiah Shainmark." I said, "He's a very good editor." He said, "Listen, what did you do before?" I said, "I was on [*The New York Journal*], and on [*The New York Evening Graphic*]." He connected me with the double murder, because they were hot murders, very hot. And he said, "Listen, why don't you write for me? I am Herbert Yates, and I am Consolidated Film Company. I also own Republic Studio. We have two stars, Gene Autry and John Wayne." We pulled into Chicago and to the Morrison Hotel. Mr. Yates said, "I'll get you a room here. You write a story for me. Anything. What kind of typewriter do you use?" I said, "Royal. All black ribbon."

The next morning, I gave him my story and he sold it. And he gave me \$10,000. It was called *Gangs of New York* [1938]. It's what would happen if Al Capone was said to be sprung, but they keep him as a prisoner, unbeknownst to anyone except the Attorney General of the United States. They have a man who's been scarred and had surgery who's been mimicking him, a phony Al Capone who gets out of jail. There's a big shoot-out at the end, the men kill "Capone," but they don't know which is the real one.

The minute that was sold, I went to San Diego to the *Sun*, a Scripps-Howard newspaper. And from there to the *LA Herald*. And Yates said, "Do you have anything else? Quick. Give me whatever you want." I said, "What about Typhoid Mary, and the little boy selling newspapers? The kid doesn't know he has typhus. And everyone who buys a paper gets it, you see." He said, "Great!" So they made *Bowery Boy* [1940]. I got a lot of calls [for film stories] while I was on newspapers. They were easy to write and had nothing to do with a big head, or art.

I ran into a very big agent called Charlie Feldman. He said, "We'll give you assignments. But no name." I said, "That's perfectly all right. I don't care about that." My love was a byline in a newspaper. Watching people in the subway read my story. I wrote these ghosted film stories [for Feldman]. I got very good money.

Charlie was drafted, but I didn't want to go in because there was no action. That was pre-Pearl Harbor, and I was writing a book [*The Dark Page*]. But if we were attacked, I'd fight. Otto Preminger was the last one [for whom I wrote anonymously]. He said, "Listen, you don't have to carry a rifle." I said, "If there's a war, I don't want to do anything but. It's the biggest story since William the Conqueror." And I went to war.

Q: Back from the War, didn't you have trouble selling scripts to studios because they were too pessimistic?

A: They said, "We like the writing, we don't like the content." L. B. Mayer didn't love my stories because "Crime does pay." He said, "Boys can't grow up like that." A producer named Robert L. Lippert said to me, "I agree with the studios. It's ridiculous having these kinds of stories. Everybody betraying, and all the bad people in the end living very happily and rich to ninety-five years old." But he said, "I like the way you write." I said, "I want to do the story of Cassius. What makes an assassin an assassin? Is it his idea, or his mother's, his colleague's, his son's, his daughter's?" He said, "That sounds great. But who is Cassius?" And I told him. He said, "You mean the fellows hanging around those Roman baths with those kind of tablecloths they wear? Well, I don't want to touch anything like that."

I went through three or four [other] assassinations, including the President of France. And he said, "We're getting nowhere. I don't like those kinds of periods." I said, "Well, the last resort . . . Robert Ford. He's the guy who shot Jesse James." Lippert jumped up. "We got a picture!" We made a deal, and he mentioned a figure. I said, "That's too much, too much, for the first script." He said, "That's not for the script. That's for the whole movie. Ten days." I said, "I'll do it on the condition I [also] direct, because my mother laughs on the phone every time I write a script and nobody makes the picture." Lippert said, "You can direct it." *I Shot Jesse James* [1948] was made for \$104,000. And it was ten days. That was Lippert's personal money. He didn't go to a bank.

Q: You'd gone from the news desk to directing a Hollywood film.

A: I didn't know anything about shooting it. But one thing I learned from newspapers, when a man kills another man and then dies and you look at the two corpses, you'll never be able to determine who is the best of them, or who is a killer. So I began *I Shot Jesse James* with faces, and they're sweating. I didn't want people to know who is the clerk and who is the thief, who is the robber. No, no, no, no, no. And I learned the power of the camera. It's exactly like boldfaced type. And I learned I could milk [a scene] as long as I wanted to: a man with a gun, hands up, lights up. Now you're beginning to know it's a holdup. You don't know you're in a bank. Within the next four or five shots, you know it. I learned something I tried to pass on. Show it! Two little words. It's better than five hundred words of discussion. So that's the beginning of my adventures in Hollywood.

Q: You have a lot of sympathy for the Robert Ford character. It's a real twist on what you expect from this story.

A: I'm glad you said that. You make me happy. Now Jesse is no hero at all. Ever! He and his brother, Frank, the first job they had—I have the newspaper—they held up a hospital military train, robbed the wounded and killed them. That's number one. Number two, when Jesse was sixteen, he was a girl impersonator. I've got the picture of "the House of Love." He would dress as a girl, he would entice soldiers in there, get them drunk, and Frank would kill them. Now I ended my picture in a way like that, where the man who killed Jesse is dying. And he says, and this is to me what was *in* Jesse, "I'm sorry what I done to Jesse. I loved him." And Lippert said, "That's great! I like that kind of relationship like, you know, John Wayne and Ward Bond." And I laughed like hell.

At one time I thought of doing that picture about the sixteen-year-old Jesse. But I didn't want to break any bubble. If I were a kid, I wouldn't want to see Jesse James like that.

Q: The motivation of the Ford character is very simple and pure. He thinks if he kills this guy, he'll get an amnesty. He'll make a few dollars, there's this girl, so maybe they can go get a farm. He hasn't really thought it out. This girl who's an actress probably doesn't want to live on a farm. It's almost a perverse simplicity that the man has, a willed-in capacity to never think more than one step at a time.

A: He's just a poor farmer who happens to be a bank robber. It all makes sense to him, in his apish way of thinking. It's like he'd do anything for the girl, and it's all right [to kill Jesse]. Everything he did was from the heart. And to settle down. That's Horatio Alger, from poor to riches.

Q: Ford didn't think through what would happen if you killed a mythic figure. That you yourself would be the next target, like the confrontation with the young boy.

A: I cast a little kid who looked like him, John Ireland. The little kid takes a shot, and [Bob Ford] starts shooting back at the burst of the gun. The little boy says, the most famous line to me, "Please don't shoot. I'm out of bullets." [It could be:] "Don't shoot, I'm out of a sword. A stone. A club. A javelin." That's what I wanted to get in: the hypocrisy of all people, when they're armed, they never say, "Don't shoot." They shoot. Bob Ford asks, "What the hell did you shoot me for?" He says, "You shot Jesse James. That makes you the biggest gunfighter in the world."

Q: The beginnings of your movies have to be the best of anybody's. *The Steel Helmet*: you think it's a dead man's helmet and then the guy appears out of it. I think of Rod Steiger and *The Run of the Arrow*, where's he's eating lunch off the guy he thinks he's killed. The opening of *The Naked Kiss* is fabulous. I have the feeling that your openings go back to your journalism. I mean, they're great tabloid leads, very vivid.

A: You hit it. They're leads. They usually used bold-faced type on the *New York Journal* for a page-one homicide. And the editor would say, "Hit it as hard as you can [in the lead] because that's the story. The rest, details, they can go on page 30." That taught me a lesson. It's easy to open a picture by establishing a character doing something, but I like to be gripped right away. You don't have to show the city of New York, and you don't have to show buildings, and the waterfront. [Better,] a woman [comes into the frame]. You pull back, and you're seeing things through the sight of a rifle. And you come right to the finger, and he pulls the finger, and wham! There's an explosion way over there. You don't have to see who the hell he hits.

So when you say you like the openings—I'm very happy you like them. But it's not just a trademark. It's from instinct. I'm very impatient when a picture opens up with an establishing shot of where you are, and somebody drives up and he gets out of a car, and he walks to an apartment and he rings the bell, and he goes upstairs and asks, "Is Joe here?" And Joe isn't here. So he goes out. Why didn't he phone? We have telephones.

Q: Your openings plunge you into the story.

A: The heat of the story is what I'm interested in. As the heat get hotter, you begin to see where you are, who is what, and what they are doing. Then you move in closer and closer, and over a shoulder.

Q: That's well put. Let's talk about the sergeant in *The Steel Helmet*. I know you admire people of this kind because he comes back with the Lee Marvin character in *The Big Red One*. He's incredibly competent at what he does, but he's also crazy, isn't he?

A: That's not one character. It's a composite of a few sergeants. They're all similar mentally. You have to have a screw loose, a little bit, to be a squad leader. I was an assistant squad leader, a corporal. But I had no command. He has command. A sergeant of a rifle squad, he says, "Go over behind that rock." He's with it, he's in it, he has to be a little bit weirdo. If you don't do [what he orders], he'll shoot you. If you don't

do it NOW! It's so fast. And your head is blown off! A fire fight lasts two or three minutes, that's all. Twenty minutes is unusual. People die very quickly. People are wounded very quickly.

I never saw heroic acts in three years [in the War.] You do something out of instinct because we are animals. You do something to save your life, and while you are saving your life, you save three other lives, and while you are doing the same, you save 150 lives, á la Sergeant York. Now because of Washington, there's the Purple Heart, the Silver Star. It never dawned on us about being a hero. I'm against war to such an extent! Don't forget, the average professional soldier is the most anti-war person in the world.

So we get back to the sergeant in *The Steel Helmet*. He's a professional soldier. He's not too dumb, not too brilliant. But there's a cunning about this man that I try to catch. And he has an armor about him, and kids mean nothing. His mother would mean nothing. Survival means everything. That's all. That's the man.

Because he blew his top and killed the Commie [POW in cold blood], the [US] government got very upset, and my mother called me from New York, and she said, "Hello, comrade." I'll never forget it. "What happened?" She said, "You are an un-American, anti-American Communist." It was [a piece] written by Victor Riesel, a syndicated labor columnist. He said, "This is the most un-American, and this is. . . ." I should be investigated. Under reviews of *The Steel Helmet*, Riesel wrote a whole column, and, the next day, another column. "Who is this fellow? Who made this picture? An American! He makes a beast out of the American soldier, who shoots down the very small. He has a big fellow as a sergeant, and a very thin little Chinese Communist officer he killed. Where is the killing? In a Buddhist temple!"

Q: I assume you disagreed with Riesel's analysis?

A: It's against the law to shoot a prisoner-of-war, an unarmed man? What law? That's all hooley. The law is a young man with a rifle. That's the law.

Now, *The People's World* and the *Daily Worker* had me on page one: "Magnificent! Except the last half of the picture." They said, "The last half was financed by General MacArthur." And a famous French critic, George Sadoul, tore me apart, that "[Fuller] said something against Communism, he's a reactionary." I found out that he was a professional Lefty.

It was a very controversial picture. I have a scene where the [Korean POW] says to a Nisei, a second- or third-generation Japanese American soldier, "Why do you fight along with these white son-of-a-bitches? I

heard they had put-'em-away places and all that in the War." And the Nisei says, "They're camps. My mother was put away in a camp in Arizona, my father in California." That's on the screen, a taboo statement. It's real, but I'm not ashamed of it. Our country's only two hundred years old. What the hell! We should never do it again is better than feeling ashamed.

Q: The movie actually did well in the theatres.

A: I got a call from [Columbia head] Harry Cohn, and he said, "It won't work. No girls. And you have one set and only a few men." When the picture went out, it got great reviews and made a lot of money. Big money. Cohn bought theatres with that money. He said, "Well, I was wrong." I said, "The stories I used are real news stories. Prisoners of war were killed. They did put civilians in camps in the United States. That's real." I tried to get as close as possible to the roughness without exaggeration. This is not a tough guy from Victor McLaglen's tough guy in *What Price Glory?* These are not tough guys that sit around and talk about the women and drinking, and go into bars and fight, you see? The average soldiers in my outfit, a division of fifteen thousand men, were clerks and truck drivers and insurance men, young delivery men. That's what they were.

Q: In *The Steel Helmet*, there's the protagonist and a little kid who attaches himself to the man, and a relationship develops. Usually in your films, the guy tries to push a kid away, but somehow the kid worms his way in. It's in *Shark!*, it's in a lot of your pictures.

A: Before you take an area in war, you clobber it with bombs and artillery shells. The only thing you'll find [after] are old men and women who couldn't make it out, dead animals, or a living child, abandoned in all that confusion. We always had a kid somewhere, coming out of the rubble. That to me is the only contact we have with the civilians we fight. Every infantryman has that everywhere. Children forgotten. Orphans. That's why I like a kid in the picture. In *The Big Red One*, they find a kid. He's pulling his dead mother to the beach so she can be buried. He won't tell them where his secret German gun is until they promise him a four-handle casket.

Q: *Fixed Bayonets* (1951) is about a guy, Denno [Richard Basehart], who is an assistant squad leader, and he's terrified he'll have to take over the squad and may actually shoot somebody. Is that character a projection of your emotions in wartime?

A: We all felt like that. This man couldn't kill face to face. He just couldn't. And when he does, it's an accident, he's shaking so much with the squeezing of a trigger. The men congratulate him. He says nothing. He doesn't say, "It was an accident." Everybody is a coward. Everybody is brave. It's what happens at the moment you do something.

Fixed Bayonets was my first picture for Fox. I met with the heads of all the studios, and [Darryl F.] Zanuck at Fox was the only one who said, "Look, what story do you want to tell?" That's the studio I went with. And I got along great with him. I mean, happiest in my life. He wanted to make a deal for five to seven pictures. I would write, direct, and produce.

Q: But *Park Row*, your next film, was released by United Artists, not Fox. It's a very good newspaper picture, but it doesn't have any kind of genre for people to relate to. It's hard for people to get a hold of it, I think.

A: You say there is something lacking in it to grip you? Zanuck said the same thing when he read it. You said almost word for word what he said before the picture was made. [Zanuck said,] "We made a picture [in 1938] called *In Old Chicago*. It was very successful. [Director] Henry King. Ty Power. Yours we want to call *In Old New York*. Dan Dailey and Mitzi Gaynor. She can play a barmaid, the first barmaid in New York. He can play Steve Brodie. [Gregory] Peck ought to be a composite of all the great newspaper people. And we do it in color. And we do it big. I said, "That's what I don't want. I love *In Old Chicago*. I don't want it to be one of those big things. And in color."

Q: *Pickup on South Street*, maybe your most famous film, was back at Fox. It's got a great opening, hasn't it?

A: Oh, yeah. Everybody thinks that guy is reaching for the crotch. That one was OK'd by Zanuck. I didn't have the yarn. I walked around and said, "I'd like to [figure out these] characters, [who are] very anti-social and on the precipice of crime." The pickpocket? Now, to me a pickpocket is no real criminal, he's an artist. An informer? Yes, she could be a criminal, but that's her job. A girl. Too dumb to be a hooker, too dumb to be a mistress, but she'd do something for a dress. I know girls like that. If you want to use them as a courier, you give them a few dollars and buy them some dresses.

Zanuck said, "That's great. I love these characters. Now who do we root for?" I said, "What do you mean, root for?" He said, "These are horrible characters, but they're so fascinating, they would be good on screen. Who now is their leader?" I give him credit. That's the first time

he OK'd anything like that. He OK'd a movie where the people have no taste.

But the interesting thing is the mental and artistic capacity of a petty criminal. I got to know quite a few of them. I trusted them more than anyone in the world. My mother would say, "I'll meet you at two o'clock." She'd be there at 2:30. They are never late, never. When you want information, they're there. They're there ahead of me, waiting. And they don't care what you do. That's their mind, and I love that.

Q: *Pickup on South Street* is about spies, the Cold War. But the people are so apolitical. They get themselves crazily involved with politics, but they don't mean to. It never has any effect on them, does it? No matter what the cops and FBI are onto, these guys are just pursuing their small, narrow human ends.

A: Here is Thelma Ritter being a stool pigeon, always arguing with the cops for more money, and she sells [them] a fellow that's like her son, who she saw grow up. But her job, her profession, is stool pigeon. [The fellow] never gets mad at her. That's her job.

We had two meetings—[Darryl F.] Zanuck, J. Edgar Hoover, and me—at Romanoff's Restaurant. Hoover was against the picture. "We don't have an FBI man there in the presence of an informer. We don't depend on the New York Police Department to depend on informers to get information. Not the Department of Justice!" And he didn't like for [Richard] Widmark to say, "Don't wave the flag at me!" [Hoover] said, "I don't want anyone in this Cold War to say that to anyone, especially cops. The other thing I don't like is [that Widmark] went after [the Communist agent because] the man beat up the girl. He [should have gone] after the man for the United States."

And Zanuck said, "That's [Widmark's] character. [That's Skip.] That's what I like about this guy's story." [Skip] didn't go for all that phony Cold War stuff. He's not interested in politics. You hit the nail on that. They're not even as close as apolitical. They don't give a damn about anything [except] their own little income.

I knew a fellow who lived [like Skip] on the Hudson. No rent. Nobody there. They used to have little shacks like that along the river. They never tore his down. I slept there a lot of times. By the way, [about] the part played by Richard Kiley. He's a Communist agent. But that doesn't mean he's a Communist, a Red. He's a man who, for a dollar, will do what you want on Monday. And Tuesday, if you want him, he becomes your agent.

I wanted to be very, very authentic because I met agents that'll work for anyone. They don't give a damn.

Q: I'd like to talk about *Run of the Arrow*, a remarkable movie. It seems to me to be about how a man, O'Meara, nearly ruins his life by believing too much in a cause. This man, who fought for the South in the Civil War, is so embittered by the lost Rebel cause that he really deserts his country. He goes over to an alien Native culture.

A: He's a symbol of what later became the KKK. A sore loser. This man was brought up in the 1840s and 1850s. Now it's the 1860s. He hates Yankees. [Men like him] were bred so strongly that in World War II, guys were carrying the Confederate flag. He wants to do something à la Robinson Crusoe. Get away from civilization. It's a letdown. Even his own mother [condemns him]: "It's too bad you weren't shot. You shouldn't have come out alive."

Q: You contrast him with the honorable Robert E. Lee.

A: Now, Robert E. Lee . . . a beautiful man, big heart. He was not a blood-thirsty man like Grant was. They [willingly] fought for Lee. Ol' Massah Bob.

Q: O'Meara [Rod Steiger] fires the last shot of the Civil War, wounding a Union officer. He keeps the bullet. Many years later, much has happened, and he uses the bullet a second time, to effect. O'Meara shoots the same guy, who has been captured by his tribe, the Oglalas.

A: He was brought up to hate everyone but Dixie people. But [now] he's an Oglala. The game of *Run of the Arrow*, they peel [the officer's] balls and they cut his cock off and then they kill him. [O'Meara] with all his hate inside for the Yankees, he can't face this. He's sitting there with all the Oglalas watching a man being peeled to death. He takes that bullet and puts it in [a gun] and kills the officer. That's the only act he performs in this picture that I like, that puts him above hate. I ended it without an end. That's only the beginning. He married an Indian. They're going to have a hell of a tough time in the South.

Q: You cast many real Native Americans in the film.

A: About 120 Sioux, whose ancestors, grandpappy or whatever, fought at Little Big Horn. My description was "No saddles. Ropes. No leather." That's their own ponies. They slept on the ground. They wouldn't sleep

in motels. I had to have a little boy in it. I was up in the village there, in the reservation, and I found a kid who was half Comanche. Two brothers representing those 120 Indians, said, "We're Sioux. We don't work with that boy. Devil!"

I got along with them very well, but I made an error. They would roll their long hair up in a bun, and I said, "My mother used to do that." This Indian got very angry. "Don't ever say that . . . a comparison with a woman." I don't know. They're very touchy. I made a speech [to them], and William Dozier, the executive of RKO, was there. I said, "For this final attack, just remember that a man called Custer and his outfit were killed by your people. But remember this too. That's not the last battle." All of this was being translated into their language. "There's the Battle of Wounded Knee, and we killed over three hundred of your civilians. When you charge, you are attacking engineers, and they're protected by infantry, cavalry with guns." I wanted meanness, because I had just insulted them, you see.

Q: What about the casting of Steiger as O'Meara? I think that's interesting.

A: I went for Rod Steiger because of Kazan's picture, *On the Waterfront*. I liked him very much. But the man who owned the Studio [RKO], Tom O'Neill, president of the General Tire Company, wanted Gary Cooper. And he talked to Cooper. I said, "No Cooper! Your sympathy is with him immediately. He's a wonderful man. You love him. He's Gary Cooper. I want a man you're going to hate." When I was in a motel, my cameraman, Joe Biroc, answered the phone. [It was O'Neill.] He said, "I can't sleep. I've been thinking. We'll pay off whoever you wanted. Steiger? This has nothing to do with Steiger. I want Gary Cooper." I said, "Then I'll go somewhere else. I don't want a hero like that. I want a man who looks like I look on a horse. Like a clown. Like nothing, you see." And he gave in.

That man [Steiger] was perfect. He was surly. He looked uncomfortable, he looked like a dirt farmer. He had ANGER. With all due respect to Mr. Cooper, he couldn't give me that anger, that hate.

Q: The "Run of the Arrow," the actual game. How did you come about that?

A: I had a thick book on the etymology of the different languages of the Sioux, and of things they did away from hunting. When they had a "Run of the Arrow"? . . . They didn't like the Cherokee much, they would give

them that barefoot run. They had their best marksman shoot an arrow a certain number of yards, and [the captive] would walk to that place. That's the distance [from those chasing after]. If he could lengthen that distance and tire out the people chasing him, he lived. You like that game, don't you?

Q: It's wonderful in the movie. Well, I'd like to talk about another scene that to me is vivid in that same way. That's in your next film, *China Gate*, where the soldiers walk into an ambush, and a man's wounded. They all know he is going to die. And one guy says, "Well, we have to bury you," and the guy says, "Well, yeah." There's a whole dialogue scene: "Well, we can't bury you while you are alive."

A: That's where he says, "I'm sorry I'm taking so long to die." I tried to catch a feeling. [In the War,] we would see a guy like that. We're stuck with him, and we can't move. He gets on our nerves. He's groaning and grunting and gasping, and actually we want him to get it over with. His eyes open, and he sees us looking at him like that. So I thought it would be a nice touch if he apologizes. We saw too many [like him] when we were on the beach. We'd be stuck with him for hours, nowhere to go. Can't go in the water, and [the enemy] is on the cliffs. You're not supposed to help anybody. That's the medics' job. They're the greatest guys in the world, way above the infantry.

Q: What about the love triangle in *China Gate*?

A: I said, "This time, a girl is necessary, she's sleeping with both ends, the French and the Commies." Zanuck: "Do you have a girl in mind?" And I said, "Yes, Angie Dickinson." "Who is she? What has she done?" I said, "I don't know. I used her voice in *Run of the Arrow*." She'd dubbed a voice: I needed a soft voice for this woman. He said, "All right. Okay." He said [about the script], "You make a Commie look pretty good in here. He's educated." I had a line that says, "Ho Chi Minh speaks seven languages. I speak nine. And teachers here don't make any money." Zanuck said: "That's good, because teachers [in America] are always complaining that they are underpaid."

They [Fox] wanted to know who Ho Chi Minh was. I told them. The second assistant pastry chef at the Ritz, in London. And Zanuck said, "You mean a pastry chef is head of a country?" I said, "The second assistant." Zanuck: "I love him because he's Horatio Alger. I'm glad he's head of a country!" What a guy! That's Zanuck, forgetting everything else politically [for] an assistant pastry chef. Then he said, "First thing we'll do

is have this big, in CinemaScope, of course. Color." I said, "I want black-and-white." He said, "I'm approving two pictures for you in black-and-white." [*Forty Guns* and *China Gate*] are the only two pictures 20th made [in black-and-white] in CinemaScope.

Zanuck said, "All right, now where will we shoot it?" I said, "I don't want to go on location, Bill Wellman made a great picture, [*The Story of*] *G.I. Joe* at the RKO-Pathè lot, or part of the old Selznick lot, or the inter-marriage of both lots in Culver City. They knocked out a town there. It's supposed to be some town in Italy. With posters of Mao, of Ho, I knew what I could do with that set without touching it. You put up a couple of pictures, huge posters, and you know where you are. [Indo-China.] It was a very unusual [request], because this was 20th Century Fox. They had a great Western lot. They had locations, everything you want. But they didn't have Bill Wellman's set.

Q: It seems to me you've never really wanted to make very expensive movies. You like to work cheaply.

A: I like to work like I made my first three pictures. I rehearse and rehearse, and shoot once, and I like it. You didn't play around with too much on a newspaper, my God. If a hunch was wrong, your hunch was wrong. That's all. I go by hunches, if a thing smells right. Later on, you're going to talk about *Merrill's Marauders*, that's where I had extras. But I still would handle only a small bunch of men.

Q: In *Forty Guns*, I've rarely seen a cliché overturned so astonishingly as where the bad guy pulls the woman, Barbara Stanwyck, in front of him as a shield, and the other guy just drills them both. I know that the studio said, "All right, she can't be dead. She can only be wounded." Still, it's an amazing moment.

A: Zanuck said she must not die. "We've been making pictures for years, and the hero does not kill the heroine. You've seen *High Noon*. At a very vital moment, Kelly pushes the guy away, and that's when Cooper shoots him." Now how can [Stanwyck] push the guy away? He's holding her with an iron grip. That man [Barry Sullivan] hasn't used a gun in ten years. When he picks up a gun, it's to kill. If that was his mother shielding that guy, he'd kill her because he has a gun and doesn't want to use a gun. [Sullivan] said, "Wait a minute, you cannot kill the heroine. I like the picture, but you cannot shoot her. I said, "He's not himself. He's a gun."

Q: But you also supplied a studio ending, as ordered.

A: Zanuck said, "Jesus, now you're making fun of me. That's the old-fashioned type of ending. We've done that for forty years, fifty years. The hero has never killed the heroine." I said, "That's right."

Q: One of the things running through your pictures is a sense of dealing with prejudice, which was, of course, particularly important in the 1950s and '60s. For example, the situation in *The Crimson Kimono*, where a Japanese American detective [James Shigeta], a Nisei, falls in love with an Anglo woman [Victoria Shaw], and his Anglo detective partner [Glenn Corbett] is also in love with her.

A: She goes for the Japanese American, according to my script, because she loves him. I said, "That's it." [Sam Briskin, the Head of Columbia, asked], "Is it possible for the white cop, maybe in one scene, one scene is all I ask for, to be a little bit on the rough side [with her, so she turns to the Japanese cop?]" I said, "No. I know what you are getting at. There will be no reason except that she loves him."

This was not *Broken Blossoms*, a Griffith picture with Richard Barthelmess playing a Chinese fellow. A father is beating the hell out of [his white daughter], and you had to make the Papa a mean son-of-a-bitch so the girl will turn to the Chinese. I don't like that at all. I never did buy that picture. If her father was a nice man and treated her beautifully, I'd buy that.

I wanted to bring out a central point that there is racism in everybody, here in the Nisei. [He and the white guy] were in Korea together, and the white was saved by the son-of-a-bitch. The Nisei says, "If I were white, you would take this in stride. But because I'm not, it burns you up. It makes you feel little. It makes you feel ashamed." And the white guy says, "Baloney! I don't care who you are!" He says, "You're a racist" to the Nisei. Now that picture, it's not just a chase story or solving a murder. I like something where [a character] should feel a little uncomfortable the way he feels about [another]. That's the beautiful part of a movie. It's entertainment, but at the same time it should be very emotional.

Q: There's a great visual moment near the opening where a frightened stripper runs down the street. It's one of those Fuller moments that is so dislocating.

A: I had a girl, a blonde stripper, 6'2" or 6'3," because I wanted her to stand out. I had a hidden camera in a truck, and she falls in the middle of

the street. Traffic is passing. Now the funny part is this: there were American sailors and soldiers walking down Main Street, and an almost naked girl running, and not one of them turned around and looked. In the projection room, one guy said, "What the hell is happening to America today?" So we had to do it again. I didn't want actors [directed] to look at her. I wanted it to be real. By luck, a barber who was shaving came out on the street to look. But the reaction in the projection room was similar. There's something wrong with American men today!

Q: In many of your pictures, and it's maybe a central virtue, you deliberately reverse things, like prejudice being expressed by a Japanese man in *The Crimson Kimono*, the heroine being shot in *Forty Guns*. You are always trying to put a reverse spin on expectations.

A: When I read a book, any book, I read the last line [on a page], and if it's not a finished sentence, I make up what [the author] is going to say. And I turn the page. And if it's nothing that I had in mind, I love it. That's how I want to do a picture. I don't want you to know what you're going to see.

A [bad] movie scene: You tell the girl, "Get me the DA." And [cut], she dials, and says, "District Attorney's Office." Then you cut to the DA's office: "So and so called." And you cut, [third] cut, "This is the DA." I go crazy! I really do. If you have eighty, ninety, one hundred minutes, and it's really tightly packed, each little scene opens up little routes. You take a route, you swing around and hit that route, all hell breaks loose. I like a hit man who thinks he's made it. He just killed somebody. Everything is fine. He walks in and says, "Well, I did it, Ma." And his mother shoots him. That's it. That's the shock. That to me is a hit.

Q: What do you remember of your World War II movie, *Merrill's Marauders*, in the Philippines? The Americans versus the Japanese?

A: I had a gun fight, a fire fight, and we'd shoot each other. A lot of smoke. We'd shoot the enemy. The enemy would shoot each other, and then shoot us. After I shot this fight, Jack Warner called. I was sleeping at Clark Air Base. He said, "I love it. I love it. Except I want to see Japanese getting hit." I said, "Cowboys and Indians." He said, "Exactly. We've been doing that for fifty years." A cavalryman shoots, and an Indian falls. I said, "When you move fast like that in the smoke, you shoot anyone." At the end, he bought it. I'm proud of that shot. When one of the survivors looks down [from above], he can't see who is what and who is killed.

I didn't know anything about the Pacific. I didn't know anything about Merrill. That was from a book by Charlton Ogburn. But it's the only time I showed girls in a war picture. A real war picture, not a trek like *China Gate*. They gave me a chance to show fatigue after a battle. One fellow says, "Girls." He sees some girls in a village. And the other guy says, "Yeah." He does a look. And another character just walks. He walks to a little pond, and just puts his arm down and falls on his face in the water.

Q: Could you talk about the three patients in the mental institution in *Shock Corridor*; the black man who, because of the pressures of racism, now thinks he's in the KKK; a Southern redneck who collaborated with the Communists when captured in Korea; a nuclear scientist guilty about developing the A-Bomb?

A: I thought it would be very interesting to make a picture about three images of the U.S. then, [the early 1960s]. A fellow couldn't go to [a Southern university] because he is black, and a very important statesman stands in the doorway and won't let him in. A [poor white] fellow goes to War, and somebody on the Commie side after he's captured calls him "Mister." And number three, a physicist becomes a vacuum. He has a six-year-old mentality because the thing he was working on, something that could kill masses of people, blows up in his brain. I thought I'd use those as a mirror, a reflection [of America] in a nut house.

The thing of shock art: I couldn't show what I wanted to show. It's in my original script. I couldn't shoot it. [In a mental institution,] they're chained to those benches. Women chained. And men. And they're all naked. They pee there. You can't do that in a Hollywood movie. People would walk out.

There was one reviewer, she was very famous, she didn't like the picture at all. I found out through another reviewer she had someone in her family who was in one of those [hospitals]. She didn't like them being shown. Now, that's not fair. That's personal. If you're a critic, you should like it whether it's a good picture or a bad picture. Did it interest you? Did it enlighten you in any way?

[My wife] Christa picked up the *New York Times*, and there was a story about [James] Meredith, the young man, the black student, who I'd based [my character on in the mental institution]. Meredith said, "I had to quit [the University of Mississippi]. Otherwise, I would have 'gone away.'" Oh, that made me feel funny. This is true.

Q: Can you discuss maybe the single most arresting image you ever made, and that's the opening of *The Naked Kiss*?

A: I open up with a hooker [Constance Towers] fighting her pimp because he held out her money, and she's whacking him with her purse, and her hair falls off, and you find out she was bald. [Maybe] he had cut her hair off to punish her because she wasn't laying enough men. Or [he thought] she was holding back some of the money. Well, let's talk about a technical thing there, and give him his due. Stanley Cortez, the cameraman. He's wonderful, wonderful. He did *Shock Corridor* for me. I said to Stanley, "I know it's easy for you. Hand-held camera. But [instead] I'd like for the man to have the camera strapped to him when she beats him. And I'd like for her to have the camera strapped on her breast, when you see the purse going." And we did that. The biggest worry we had was the cameras were so heavy, and these are actors, you see.

Show it! Don't talk about it! I didn't want to say, "She's an honest whore." [Instead,] she beats the hell out of [her pimp], he's semi-conscious, she takes out his roll, takes what's due to her, and throws the rest of the money in his face. That shows her character. That's a good way to open a picture.

Q: Later in the film, the prostitute, Kelly, is thrown in jail for murder, with everyone in a small town against her. But they suddenly embrace her when it's learned that the man she killed was a child molester.

A: Now they want her to stay, she wants to go back to the clean, fresh breath of air of whoring. And to a big city. In little towns we didn't do any business at all, because I have her speaking right into the camera. "You're all hypocrites." I had a stronger speech than that, but [the Studio] said, "Why don't we go a little easy on this? You're speaking about a chairman of the board of aldermen, and the aldermen, and mayors. Kind of leave that out, will you?"

Q: I've heard that John Wayne wanted to play The Sergeant in *The Big Red One* (1980), but you were reluctant to use him.

A: I said, "First I have to go look for locations. I don't know. I haven't got a hook." And [Jack] Warner said, "What is a hook?" I said, "A hook is what the story is. S-T-O-R-Y. It's not just a lot of fighting." Then I kept stalling. Meanwhile, Oscar Dystel came out from New York. He's an editor at Bantam. He said, "If you're going to do *The Big Red One*, do it as a book. You can do it as a movie later." Now it had reached the point where I was embarrassed. Every time I saw Wayne he said, "Where is the script?"

The hell with the book.” Dystel said, “The hell with the picture.” And then I got the hook. And the hook, of course, is survivors. Each survivor could represent fifteen thousand men.

Now Wayne, who I liked, was wrong for *The Sergeant*. I wanted a tired man from World War I. A man sapped out of everything, but, above all, who represents death. Gaunt. Bony. And then I met Lee Marvin at the Witness Tobacco Shop. I said, “I am working on a script. You’re the guy for it.” “Ah, you tell that to every son-of-a-bitch you meet in the cigar store,” he said. And when it came time to cast, the one they wanted was Steve McQueen. He was very hot. I said, “Wrong. Wrong age. He’d have been eleven in World War II.” Lee Marvin was in New Mexico. He called me and said, “This is your Sergeant,” and hung up. I was very happy because he was cast right. He was wise, he was experienced, he was cold.

Q: Even in *The Big Red One*, you work in an insane asylum.

A: They’re going to knock off a German observation post in the attic of an insane asylum in Belgium, and the young fellow, Mark Hamill, says to Marvin, “Why the hell do we have to go in there? Why don’t we blow up the goddamned thing?” Marvin says, “Naw, there are insane people in there.” And the kid says, “You mean it’s wrong for us to kill insane people?” “That’s right. It’s wrong.” “But it’s okay to kill sane people?” “Yes.” Now that’s war!

Q: We need to talk about *White Dog* (1982), which seems to me one of your most important movies.

A: Yeah, it wasn’t shown in theatres by Paramount. I feel very strong about that story. It’s strictly an anti-racist story. It’s an exposé of Mama and Papa and Grandpapa. And my old flag. I wave that flag all the time. It’s the parents who are responsible [for teaching racism]. It’s how a kid is reared, like the dog was raised to hate and attack [anyone] black.

It may be ten generations from now, fifty generations, where people will say, “You mean to say that someone did so-and-so to someone because of his color?” That’s like us saying, “Do you mean in the Coliseum midgets would come out with naked women and they’d fight each other?” We think it’s crude or moronic, or animalistic or cannibalistic.

Q: *White Dog* comes from a story by the French novelist, Romain Gary, doesn’t it?

A: He wrote an autobiography that was published in its entirety in *Life* magazine, when [publisher] Henry Luce was alive, with a cover of *White*

Dog. The whole story. It's about himself and his wife [actress Jean Seberg] and the Black Panthers, this and that. I threw all that out. That's for a gossip column. I'm not worried about your personal life at all. Couldn't interest me. You want to sleep with a horse, you sleep with a horse. It doesn't bother me. I don't like meddling in anyone's personal likes or dislikes. So I made it a simple story of how a dog is trained, and how a black man tries to retrain that dog.

Q: We are in Paris. You are the most American of Americans. How come you are living here?

A: Well, I came here for the opening of *White Dog*. Here it's called a masterpiece. The *London Times*: "Magnificent." Not [so in] America. For personal reasons, we remained here. My little kid got sick, so we stayed. I could live anywhere. I don't give a damn. My little kid misses California. We're [also] renting a house in Hollywood.

Q: Here in France, your films have been reevaluated and highly praised. You are probably familiar with what François Truffaut wrote about them. I think what he's saying is, your pictures are not primitive and not crude, but they are rude. He's saying, you cut through a lot of bullshit. You get to very, very basic emotions.

A: Well, I never had that translated for me. All I knew is that it was complimentary.

Q: But you can feel that you are more appreciated in France than the USA?

A: Well, they did that even before I got here. It's good for my ego, which is normal. But the thing is, I don't care where I am. I even made a film in Mexico, and we lived there for a year. I went to—where the hell is it?—Portugal, and made one there. And now I just finished one here.

Q: To you, what is a director?

A: You give him a sandwich, and it's rounded into a hell of a dinner. That to me is a director. A director is a creator who chooses to create with a camera, who shouldn't be hog-tied by [adapting] a novel. Now, they say, of course, you can't photograph a novel. You can't photograph thoughts. You can. A camera can do anything you want. Now I've known directors who've taken ordinary scripts and made them brilliant, like Welles doing it in *Touch of Evil*. But a director [doesn't necessarily have] to change anything. It's like an extremely good editor. He does not alter your work.

I don't think it's necessary to [make changes] if you have a great scene from Dostoyevsky, or Dickens's [*David*] *Copperfield*, or Balzac gone crazy. Anything Edgar Poe wrote is visual. Anything O'Henry wrote is visual.

A director is someone who puts things on screen visually. There might be fifteen or twenty pages of dialogue. Visually, it's five seconds on the screen. A director conceives what is the highlight of a story. *War and Peace* doesn't have to take eight or ten hours. What is a highlight Tolstoy wanted to bring out? And how can we show it where we don't lose the progress of characters? A director must be infested with emotion. He should pinpoint an emotion and milk it, and not bore anyone with it.

I saw [Laurence] Olivier, a few of his Shakespeare [productions]. I love him! I thought they were great. He gave them flesh and blood. *Storm over Asia* [1928], a Russian picture. [V. I.] Pudovkin was the director. A group of men, and they are going to attack the cavalry. You get a few good stuntmen and you've got the damned horses, and you do it. But Pudovkin . . . he had the wind blowing high grass toward you. The wind is coming in. Sssshh! Then the strength and power of those hoofs made the grass go that way! Aaagh! That's storytelling. And it's visual!

A director has always been compared to an orchestra conductor, and I think that's nonsense. [He is] following something note for note for note. A director of a film will add notes. A director can do that with the camera. Visual emotion. A director takes a song and he makes a symphony out of it. Does that make sense to you?

Q: That's great. Thanks. That's it!