Hollywood honors Elia Kazan

Filmmaker and informer

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A three-part series
Part 1:

The decision to give Elia Kazan an award

'I do not hate you at all. You are simply not of my kind. You had the choice, my dear fellow, between nobility and a career. You made your choice. Be happy with it, but leave me in peace.' -- Mephisto, *Klaus Mann*

The decision by the board of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to bestow an honorary award on filmmaker Elia Kazan at its annual Oscar ceremony March 21 is an act with definite political implications. Kazan, the director of 19 feature films between 1945 and 1976, was one of the most prominent figures to turn informer during the anticommunist witch-hunts of the early 1950s. After a first appearance before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) January 14, 1952 at which he refused to 'name names,' Kazan reappeared on April 10 and identified eight people who had been members of the Communist Party with him in the mid-1930s, along with certain party functionaries. His testimony damaged the careers and lives of a number of individuals and helped consolidate the Hollywood blacklist. Kazan's decision to collaborate with the HUAC inquisitors epitomized the devil's bargain into which a significant section of the filmmaking community and the American liberal intelligentsia as a whole entered during this period.

The Academy board's January 7 decision, by a unanimous vote, to give Kazan an award has been for the most part warmly received in the media. David Freeman in the *Los Angeles Times* January 19, in a piece entitled 'Kazan's Works May Now Outweigh His Transgressions,' writes: 'This award would have been unlikely without the end of the Cold War. Communism as an international force is spent. HUAC itself seems out of a black-and-white past. Though there are divisive issues today, the economy is good; Hollywood's dominion in popular entertainment has never been stronger. It's a good time to set the house in order.'

The headline of Bernard Weinraub's January 24 article in the *New York Times* says a good deal: 'Time Frees the Hollywood One.' Weinraub argues that the award 'will not only crown Kazan's career, but, in many ways, spell the end of the tormented legacy of the Hollywood blacklist.' In a particularly foul piece ('A Salute to Elia Kazan') in the *Washington Post*, Richard Cohen writes: 'Why, then, has it taken so long to honor this 89-year-old genius? The answer is clear: He was blacklisted.' He goes on: 'I would say that Kazan is finally being honored not because his anti-communism no longer matters but because it does--and it is triumphant. No longer does anyone of note believe either that the Soviet Union or communism represented an essentially--if flawed--progressive cause or, for that matter, that Moscow and Washington were equally at fault for the Cold War. That debate has ended.... His cause (anti-communism) was good, his method (informing) was bad, but now it is only the cause that seems to matter.' This is simply a case of defending yesterday's swinishness to justify tomorrow's.

The extreme right-wing press is naturally jubilant. In a piece published in William Kristol's *Weekly Standard* ('The Rehabilitation of Elia Kazan') Stephen Schwartz writes that on March 21 'a long-standing and bitter injustice will be rectified.' He continues: 'Now, what amounts to Kazan's rehabilitation after decades of blackballing and smears marks a notable breach of the Iron Curtain that has long surrounded Hollywood's collective memory.'

Schwartz is an ideologist, not a film critic. His knowledge of cinema history can be gauged by an ignorant reference to blacklisted filmmaker Abraham Polonsky as 'a Hollywood writer who would never have been heard of had he not received a House subcommittee subpoena long ago.' Before his career was cut short by the witch-hunt, Polonsky was involved in the production of two critical works of the late 1940s, *Body and Soul* (as screenwriter and perhaps more) and *Force of Evil* (as director), both starring John Garfield. Critic Andrew Sarris, no friend of the Stalinists, called Polonsky 'one of the great casualties of the anti-communist hysteria of the fifties.' (Ironically, 30 years ago Sarris noted that the Garfield-Beatrice Pearson taxicab scene in *Force of Evil* 'takes away some of the luster from Kazan's Brando-Steiger tour de force in *On the Waterfront*.')

Perhaps to make themselves feel better, some liberal commentators suggest that Kazan's filmmaking is being honored by the Academy, not his politics. Ellen Schrecker, author of *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, told the *Times*' Weinraub: 'Although I certainly don't approve of what Kazan did during the McCarthy period ... one can maybe learn a lesson from Bill Clinton and compartmentalize, and separate Kazan, the informer, and Kazan, the artist.' Victor Navasky, author of *Naming Names*, commented: 'First of all, it's a human thing.... He's not physically well and he made this great cinematic contribution. Second is, with the passage of time, some of the passions have cooled and things are being put in a different perspective.'

This line of reasoning fails to take into account that the Academy is planning to celebrate Kazan's *lifetime* achievement. No one with any sense would deny the filmmaker's talent or suggest boycotting or ignoring his films, but his role as an informer cannot be walled off so neatly from his artistry. Kazan's renegacy was essential to what and who he was, and subsequently became.

Not satisfied with caving in to reactionary forces, Kazan attempted to transform ratting on one's former comrades to the state into a matter of principle. His belated opposition to Stalinism, about whose crimes he remained entirely silent during the 1930s, was of a right-wing and opportunist character. It coincided with a shift in the needs and policies of American capitalism. One needs to cut through the self-serving arguments and excuses and say what is: Kazan behaved like a scoundrel, becoming an informer in 1952 to save his career in Hollywood and all that went with it.

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After the officially-manipulated patriotic zeal of the early and mid-1950s had subsided somewhat, and Americans were permitted the luxury of reflecting on what had happened, Kazan and other informers became the objects of a natural and instinctive revulsion. Even many political opponents of those who had been blacklisted found it difficult to stomach such contemptible conduct. Kazan deservedly became something of a pariah. Time and a general rightward shift of various social layers have done a good deal over the last several decades to change the mood within Hollywood's upper echelons.

Whatever the board members' conscious motives, their collective decision to honor Kazan is a means of absolving those who collaborated with and assisted HUAC and the McCarthyites. It is likewise an announcement by the film industry establishment that it would do nothing to oppose and resist a new witch-hunt, should it emerge. This is not an academic question. One can see the right-wing political elements who would spearhead such an operation engaged in countless attempts across the country to ban films and books and, of course, the recent effort to keep a sex scandal going in Washington.

A brief review of Kazan's career and the circumstances of the Hollywood blacklist might help place the Academy's decision in its proper artistic and historical context.

Kazan as a film director

'Hendrik was incapable of imagining emotions beyond the compass of his own heart. The passions to which he yielded generally had consequences that were beneficial to his career; on no account were they allowed to endanger or disturb it.' -- Mephisto, *Klaus Mann*

The director was born Elia Kazanjoglou in Constantinople (now Istanbul) in 1909. In 1913 his family, Anatolian Greeks, emigrated to the US and settled in New York City, where Kazan's father became a rug merchant. The future filmmaker graduated from Williams College and went on to study drama at Yale. He joined the left-leaning Group Theatre as an actor and assistant stage manager. The Group, led for much of the 1930s by Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford and Lee Strasberg, was one of the focal points of artistic life, and, inevitably, radical thought and activity, in New York City during the Depression years. It attracted actors and directors, as well as a variety of writers, including Clifford Odets,.

Kazan became a member of the Communist Party in the summer of 1934, and quit in the spring of 1936 in protest, he asserts, over the party leadership's heavy-handed and undemocratic attempt to wrest control of the theater company. He maintained close relations with many in and around the Stalinist movement until his HUAC appearance in 1952.

As an actor he performed in a number of notable works, including Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* and *Golden Boy*. Kazan directed his first play in 1935 and over the next decade established himself as one of Broadway's leading figures, directing the debuts of Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942), Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). Much courted by the Hollywood studios, Kazan began his filmmaking career in 1945 with *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. In 1947 he and Strasberg founded the Actor's Studio; its leading pupil, Marlon Brando, became the American cinema's most dynamic performer in the early 1950s.

A viewing of a dozen or so of Kazan's films produces contradictory responses. Two connected impressions stand out: there is hardly a single one of his films without a remarkable scene or performance; and there is hardly a film that stands up as an integrated, fully realized work. As a discoverer and director of (certain) actors Kazan obviously stood out. After all, what other film director can claim the distinction of having guided performances by so many of Hollywood's 'sensitive' or 'tough-sensitive' leading men: Garfield, Brando, James Dean, Montgomery Clift, Warren Beatty, Robert De Niro and Jack Nicholson? Or of a remarkable, if generally lesser known, group of female performers: Barbara Bel Geddes, Dorothy McGuire, Kim Hunter, Eva Marie Saint, Julie Harris, Carroll Baker, Patricia Neal, Lee Remick and Natalie Wood?

One has a more difficult time, however, in establishing consistent themes that run through Kazan's work. There is a general hostility to bigotry and philistinism, to official abuse of power and a mistrust of dogmatism and rigidity. A demanding or oppressive father and a troubled son make appearances in several of his films (*Sea of Grass*, *East of Eden*, *Splendor in the Grass*). But these are rather diffuse notions or relationships and rather diffusely represented. One might say that Kazan is less attracted to any particular idea or ideas than to representing a certain type of heightened romantic or sexual moment. Instead, however, of probing the source of attraction of these moments and, moreover, cultivating their inner qualities in conscious opposition to the norms of everyday life, Kazan is content to stay on or near the surface. He lets the more disturbing and subversive implications slip through his fingers.

After all, an incandescent moment in film involves more than simply an accidental coming together of talented performers and technicians. Somehow the artists must have pierced the countless layers of conventional thought and behavior that daily existence heaps upon living men and women. To undertake such a task one must have powerful motivation and resources, which, in the final analysis, find their source in dissatisfaction with the existing psychological and social conditions. Lyricism is the beginning of a protest, as the surrealists understood.

In my view, Kazan's filmmaking, which seems to take the form of a steady decline after a somewhat interesting beginning, cannot have been helped by his strenuous and public efforts to put his radical past behind him. After all, how much did the director owe to the fact that he had developed within a socialist cultural milieu, albeit one distorted by Stalinism? In rejecting that milieu, or, rather, in *turning with hostility on* that milieu, how much of what was daring and original in himself did he also repudiate or excise?

In any event, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* has a certain charm, despite its sentimentality, in its evocative recreation of turn-of-the-century working class life in Brooklyn. *Sea of Grass* (1947) and *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) are fairly tedious studio-commissioned works. The first is in the *Effi Briest* mold--a story of a woman's apparent adultery and her separation from her children enforced by an unforgiving husband; the second a liberal critique of anti-Semitism in postwar America. *Panic in the Streets* (1950) is a jittery effort about a manhunt for gangsters in New Orleans, one of whom is carrying pneumonic plague. Regarding Kazan's first half-dozen films Jean-Luc Godard, then a youthful critic, noted their 'impersonality' and an 'absence of style which reveals an affectionate contempt for art on the part of the author.'

Kazan made three of his next four films with Brando-- *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *Viva Zapata!* (1952) and *On the Waterfront* (1954). I have to admit a prejudice here: relatively little sympathy for the Williams-Arthur Miller-Strasberg-Kazan school of drama and acting. I've always thought there was something provincial and stunted about the conceptions of its leading lights. Most of their work, it seems to me, suffered from a false 'depth,' a kind of cluttered psychologizing that covered up at least as much as it revealed. This is obviously a subject that deserves a special study.

In any case, I've always found *A Streetcar Named Desire* particularly problematic. A recent viewing tempered my hostility somewhat. There are some telling moments and genuine feelings in the piece. I still find it hard to take, however. Brando and Kim Hunter make it watchable, particularly the former. I do not know how much credit Kazan deserves for Brando's

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performance, but its restraint, in the midst of a great deal of noisy thrashing about, is remarkable. Brando's Kowalski is wonderfully relaxed and amused, at least in the early scenes. After that everything goes to pieces in this story about 'a neurotic Southern girl on the last lap to the mental ward,' in critic Manny Farber's words.

Viva Zapata! has its excesses and its silly moments, but this is one of Kazan's most creditable works, in my view. Brando is excellent as the Mexican revolutionary and the film as a whole, from a screenplay by John Steinbeck, is done with a certain degree of tact and intelligence. The film's vision of a revolutionary so appalled by the occupational hazards of holding power that he walks away from it remains a compelling, if not entirely satisfying one. From the sociopolitical point of view, this is the one film of Kazan's, if one can make such narrow distinctions, that might be characterized as anti-Stalinist, not anticommunist.

On the Waterfront tells the story of Terry Malloy (Brando), a longshoreman and former boxer, who ends up telling a crime commission everything he knows about the operations of the corrupt and murderous local union leadership. Kazan and screenwriter Budd Schulberg, also a HUAC informer, made the film in large measure to justify their own actions. In his autobiography Brando makes two remarkable claims: first, that 'I did not realize then ... that *On the Waterfront* was really a metaphorical argument' by Kazan and Schulberg 'to justify finking on their friends'; second, that when shown the completed film, 'I was so depressed by my performance I got up and left the screen room. I thought I was a huge failure.' The film stands up, despite its reactionary and self-serving theme, primarily because of the performances of Brando and Eva Marie Saint and its overall grittiness. It also has an extraordinary score by Leonard Bernstein.

The notion, however, that *On the Waterfront* captures metaphorically the truth of Kazan's relationship to the Communist Party, on the one hand, and HUAC, on the other, is fanciful, as is the idea that the film somehow brings out the 'dilemma' facing the potential informer. Where is the 'moral ambiguity' in Malloy's position that Kazan has referred to on various occasions? If Brando's character does not speak to the authorities and seek their protection, he is likely to be rubbed out. He is fighting for his life and has no choice, within the framework established by the film's creators, but to turn on his former associates. Kazan and Schulberg have stacked the deck entirely in their favor.

How do the fictional circumstances in *On the Waterfront* resemble the reality of the early 1950s in the US? In turning informer, it was Kazan who joined a political lynch mob. The Communist Party was not simply synonymous with its Stalinist leadership and program. It contained devoted and self-sacrificing individuals, who believed they were fighting for progressive social change. Terry Malloy's traumatic experiences have more in common with those endured by the actors, directors and writers *who faced the blacklist* than with those who accepted and profited from it.

If Kazan had made *'On the Set'* instead, about a well-paid and successful director who cravenly surrendered to right-wing political forces, would it have had the same resonance? (Brando's failure to see any connection between Kazan's informing and his own character's behavior is comprehensible precisely because the situation set up in the film is so at odds with the director's actual circumstances. Indeed, the strength of the film is that one would not regard it as a defense of cowardice and opportunism without a knowledge of the historical and personal facts.)

James Dean aspired to be another Brando. He never came close to being that, but he is occasionally affecting (and sometimes irritating) in Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, a modern retelling of the Cane and Abel story. The film drags on, however, and the various relationships, which are not all that startling or revealing to begin with, take an interminable amount of time to establish. It takes Kazan 45 minutes to lay out relations that a Douglas Sirk or a Michael Curtiz could have made clear in three or four shots. (In his memoir, blacklisted screenwriter Walter Bernstein recalls that in the aftermath of Kazan's HUAC appearance Dean expressed contempt for the director and vowed never to work with him. After *East of Eden* came out, Bernstein and director Martin Ritt ran into Dean on the street. 'He came up to us,' Bernstein writes, 'and spoke without slackening his stride. 'He made me a star,' he said, and walked on.')

Tennessee Williams did not much like his own script for Kazan's next film, *Baby Doll* (1956), and one can hardly blame him. Carroll Baker, as a still-virginal wife, and Eli Wallach, as an interloper trying to do business in hopelessly backward rural Mississippi, stand out.

Abe Polonsky once asserted that Kazan suffered from a 'bad conscience' in the films he made after giving his HUAC testimony. *A Face in the Crowd* (1957), also written by Schulberg, could be seen in this light. The Caprasque story of a malevolent country singer and huckster who becomes a huge television star and the agent of a fascistic US senator is semi-hysterical in its efforts to demonstrate its makers' progressive social views. Andy Griffith, apparently at the director's urging, plays at top volume from beginning to end and simply grows wearisome. Much in this film is over-inflated, unconvincing. Patricia Neal is affecting, however.

Wild River (1960), the story of a Tennessee Valley Authority official in the 1930s trying to convince an old woman to vacate her property to make way for a hydroelectric project, has its genuine pleasures, above all, in certain moments between Montgomery Clift and Lee Remick. Natalie Wood is a girl in late 1920s Kansas suffering a breakdown after suffering disappointment in love at the hands of Warren Beatty and his family in *Splendor in the Grass* (1961). Andrew Sarris complained at the time that 'Kazan's violence has always been more excessive than expressive, more mannered than meaningful. There is an edge of hysteria even to his pauses and silences, and the thin line between passion and neurosis has been crossed time and again.'

In *America America* (1963), Kazan told the story of his uncle's emigration from Turkey to the US at the turn of the century. For all its pain and pathos this treatment of the immigrant's dream of passage to the new world is markedly uncritical. That the story stops and starts a dozen times, gets sidetracked, loses its way, befits a film that cannot make up its mind what it wants to say about its hero or his new country.

The Last Tycoon (1976) is based on F. Scott Fitzgerald's final, uncompleted novel; playwright Harold Pinter wrote the screenplay. Robert De Niro intelligently portrays a film studio head, patterned by Fitzgerald on MGM executive Irving Thalberg. The film was not successful, but its subdued and slightly depressed tone seems appropriate to Kazan's final film effort.

On the whole, in my view, there are more minuses than pluses in Kazan's work. Stylistically, he borrowed from a number of sources--Eisenstein, Ford, Welles, neo-Realism, the *Nouvelle Vague* et al--without ever seeming to establish a definite artistic viewpoint. One feels that, alongside the legitimate desire to communicate what he knows and thinks about the world, the director is always seeking to impress the spectator, to establish his, Kazan's, credentials, above all.

I do not think there's any question about Kazan's 'touch' with actors, but there is some question as to what precisely that touch involved. Brando has some interesting things to say on this subject. He writes in his autobiography: 'I've never seen a director who became as deeply and emotionally involved in a scene as Gadg [Kazan's nickname].... On *Streetcar* ... I discovered he was the rarest of directors, one with the wisdom to know when to leave actors alone. He understood intuitively what they could bring to a performance and he gave them freedom.'

I do not question Brando's judgment, or the results Kazan achieved with him and others of or near his caliber, but one feels obliged to point out a number of things. First, Brando is as humble about his own abilities as Kazan is ordinarily overconfident about his. But even so, what is the actor fundamentally saying? That Kazan was one of the few who gave him room to apply his artistry.

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In his autobiography, *A Life*, Kazan has the grace to credit of his work with finding the 'tone of reproach that is so loving and so melancholy' in the taxicab scene in *On the Waterfront*. He writes: 'I didn't direct that; Marlon showed me, as he often did, how the scene should be performed.... Marlon was always presenting me with these small miracles; he was more often than not better than I, and I could only be grateful for him.' I suspect that points to an elementary truth, which is nothing for Kazan to be ashamed about: that Brando was a more significant figure in relation to film acting, than Kazan was to film directing.

This is not to deny or denigrate the latter's role. He was there, he presided over some extraordinary moments, he encouraged them. He possessed in full measure that critical ingredient of the film director's art. But there are other ingredients. One is the ability, while allowing each actor and technician to make the richest contribution he or she can, to stamp one's personality and conceptions on every performance and image. Kazan was an extraordinary director of the extraordinary actor, Brando, but why are there are so many poor performances in his films, even by remarkable performers? Why were Zero Mostel and Jack Palance permitted to chew up the scenery in *Panic in the Streets*? Or Vivien Leigh in *Streetcar*? What was Kazan thinking when he directed Griffith in *A Face in the Crowd* and Pat Hingle in *Splendor in the Grass* to bellow at the tops of their voices to no useful effect?

One might easily be accused of interpreting Kazan's art in the light of his performance in the political and moral realm, but I think there is a certain short-sightedness and 'opportunism' to his direction. Everything is thrown into the effort to achieve a particular effect without adequate thought to the whole, not simply to the whole film, but to the *body of work* as a whole.

To be considered an 'actor's director' is a double-edged sword. Actors are the human material of drama. The best give of themselves wholeheartedly and produce results that far exceed the mere sum of a human brain and body and preexisting lines of dialog. But the actor's viewpoint, bound up with the obligation to concentrate on the truth of self, is almost always a partial and even *necessarily* distorted one. (The relative strength of the acting and relative weakness of the writing in the American theater of the 1930s and 1940s hints at an underlying problem: the shallowness and provincialism of a good deal of the artistic Leftism of the day in the US, the degree to which it became trapped either within 'socialist realist' conventions, or, after that had run its course, a somewhat tepid, self-absorbed expressionism.)

Moreover, there is cause to mistrust directors who are legendary, as Kazan was, for manipulating performers to get a desired reaction, i.e., angering or exciting or causing them anxiety by artificial means. (For example, during the filming of *Viva Zapata*, Kazan apparently told Anthony Quinn that Brando was saying things about him behind his back to sharpen the conflict between their two characters on screen. Brando calls the director, approvingly, an 'arch-manipulator of actors' feelings.') Such maneuvers may be necessary occasionally, but as a pattern they suggest cynicism and a lack of confidence in one's ability to convince actors of the emotional truth of a scene and provide the means to arrive at it.

A Hawks or a Welles or a Visconti or a Fassbinder is not primarily known as an 'actor's director,' but as a film artist who integrates the work of his actors into a larger and all-sided aesthetic effort. One of their films is instantly recognizable in a fashion that a Kazan film never is. His films, in style and subject, go all over the map in search of something the director never found. In a January 1964 review of *America America*, Sarris observed that 'Kazan is generally better with individual scenes than with a whole scenario, and ... his players are remembered long after the import of their playing has been forgotten.' I would subscribe to that view. A genuine talent, yes; a 'genius,' by no means. His career considered as a whole, Kazan belongs in the second or third rank of Hollywood directors

Is there, speaking generally, a link between Kazan's artistic weaknesses and his role in the 1950s? This, it seems to me, is somewhat shaky ground. There were, after all, far less complete artists who acted with principle and courage. It might be said that in Kazan one finds a particularly unfavorable constellation of personal and intellectual flaws: a relatively superficial political radicalism; a genuine artistic talent sufficient to gain him recognition, but inadequate to the task of fully working problems through; and an extremely powerful desire to maintain his position and reputation.

In *America America* Kazan portrays a man prepared to go to any length to reach the shores of the Promised Land. He slaves, steals, betrays to make his way to the US. When he reaches New York City he kneels and kisses the ground. Kazan, the ambitious immigrant's son, learned some bitter lessons about America in the early 1930s and was radicalized by the experience. The country, above all, had disappointed him. But why, he must have felt a decade later, should he maintain that resentment when America had, at long last, fulfilled its promise--at least to him? And, moreover, under conditions in which to continue opposing the status quo threatened his continued prominence and celebrity. From the point of succeeding in America, who would dispute Kazan's claim that he had his 'own good reasons,' as he called them, for turning informer?

Part 2:

Anticommunism and the film industry

'Now I have contaminated myself, thought Hendrik. Now there is a stain on my hand that I can never wash off ... Now I have sold myself ... Now I am marked for life ...' -- Mephisto, *Klaus Mann*

At least from the onset of the great economic crisis of the early 1930s, the authorities in the US have been alert to the potential danger represented by motion pictures. They consistently acted to weaken or, if necessary, suppress any radical or socially critical tendencies in filmmaking. One historian has asserted that the Production Code imposed in 1934 was intended both to exclude sexual conduct and violence from the screens and to 'use popular entertainment films to reinforce conservative moral and political values.' Adherence to the Code, for example, required such changes that MGM dropped plans to film Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, the author's vision of the rise of American fascism. The Production Code Administration insisted that Fritz Lang's anti-lynching film, *Fury* (1936), not include a black victim or any criticism of the Jim Crow South.

House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) was formed in May 1938. Under the chairmanship of Rep. Martin Dies (D-Tex.), the committee pioneered many of the techniques later used by Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy: indiscriminate accusations, pressure on witnesses to name former associates, hearings in which being questioned or mentioned became an indication of guilt, guilt by association. The committee was permanently established by the House of Representatives in 1945; two years later a federal appeals court upheld its power to cite uncooperative witnesses for contempt of Congress.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s HUAC and State Senator Jack Tenney's California Joint Fact-finding Committee on Un-American Activities launched attacks on left-wingers in the film industry. Dies spearheaded an attack on the Federal Theatre Project, which succeeded in getting its funds cut off in June 1939. When leading liberal and radical figures in Hollywood attacked his committee's operations, the Texas congressman told the press that the movie industry was a 'hotbed of communism.' On February 27, 1940 2,500 people gathered at the

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Philharmonic Auditorium in Los Angeles to protest this outburst.

The following year, Tenney--Dies' California counterpart--announced that he was going to launch an investigation of 'Reds in movies.' The inquiry was in part a union-busting operation. Walt Disney, whose operations had recently been struck by cartoonists and animators, was particularly anxious to root out radicals. Tenney's hearings proved something of a fiasco.

In the campaign to suppress *Citizen Kane* in 1941, William Randolph Hearst and the gossip columnists who did his dirty work set an important precedent by smearing Orson Welles as a radical and a 'red.'

The US-USSR alliance during the Second World War led to a temporary suspension of such activities. Interestingly, on the eve of US intervention, an attempt by right-wing, isolationist senators to probe individuals and groups in Hollywood who were urging American entry into the war, including 'anti-fascist' and Stalinist elements, was rebuffed by the film studios and unfavorably treated by the press. The film producers retained Wendell Wilkie to represent them before the Senate Subcommittee. In the war years Hollywood even produced a few vaguely or not so vaguely pro-Soviet films, such as *Mission to Moscow* (1943), *The North Star* (1943) and *Song of Russia* (1944).

The witch-hunt began in earnest in the film industry in October 1947 when HUAC held a series of hearings on the subject of 'subversives' in the film industry. After several days of testimony from 'friendly' witnesses--anticommunist producers, directors, actors--HUAC began its questioning of 'unfriendly' witnesses, the group that became known as the Hollywood Ten. These leftist screenwriters and directors--CP members or supporters--refused to cooperate and were cited a few weeks later for contempt of Congress. (Many of them later served one-year prison terms.) In the face of HUAC's determination, backed up by the media, liberal support for the Ten in Hollywood rapidly evaporated.

Film producers meeting November 24-25 at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York adopted a resolution, declaring, 'We will not knowingly employ a Communist.' The blacklist was officially on, or, rather, unofficially on, since there was no authoritative list of unemployables. As historian Ellen Schrecker puts it, 'writers stopped getting calls for work, actors were told they were 'too good for the part." A variety of reactionary organizations, including the American Legion, and Hollywood's own network of anticommunists and informers worked closely with the studios to enforce the blacklist. From this point onward, the combined efforts of the government, industry, and right-wing and church groups did not let up until a systematic purging of left-wing and radical elements from the filmmaking ranks had been effected.

This was only part of a much larger effort by the American ruling class, after decades of political instability, to settle accounts with radicalism and socialism. Anticommunism became virtually a state religion in the United States in this period. In 1947 President Harry Truman established a loyalty program for federal employees and asked the attorney general to draw up a list of 'subversive' organizations. Between March 1947 and December 1952 some 6.6 million government employees were investigated. During that same period, 1947-52, Congressional committees held 84 hearings into 'Communist subversion.' HUAC provided data on 60,000 people to employers. At least 15,000 federal employees were fired or forced to resign by government loyalty boards. By one estimate 13.5 million Americans came within the scope of federal, state and private loyalty programs. Approximately 20 percent of the working population had to take an oath or receive clearance as a condition of employment.

There was a general ideological assault on the American population--intended to stigmatize concepts such as Socialism, Marxism and Revolution--to encourage their identification in the popular consciousness with infinite wickedness and social catastrophe and, more generally, to cultivate an atmosphere of stifling conformity. A Communist, according to the official version, was un-American, non-Christian, an alien, a creature from hell.

The assault took a variety of forms. HUAC distributed millions of copies of a pamphlet, 'One Hundred Things You Should Know About Communism' ('Where can Communists be found? Everywhere.') A dramatic series, based on the career of FBI informer Herbert Philbrick, *I Led Three Lives*, ran for three years on television. Hollywood churned out a series of 'anti-Red' films: for example, *The Red Menace* (1949), *I Married a Communist* (1950), *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951), *Walk East on Beacon* (1952), *My Son John* (1952), *Big Jim McClain* (1952) and *Trial* (1952).

The last of the Hollywood Ten went to prison in September 1950. The HUAC inquisitors returned to Hollywood in the spring of 1951. As Ceplair and Englund write in their history of political life in the film industry from 1930 to 1960, the new hearings followed a series of events that strengthened the committee's position: 'the conviction of Alger Hiss, the fall of China to the Communists, the first successful atomic explosion by the Soviet Union, the arrest of atomic spy Klaus Fuchs in England, the dawning of Joseph McCarthy's special brand of anti-communism, the passage of the McCarran Internal Security Act, ... the outbreak of the Korean War, the Supreme Court's approval of the Smith Act [under which the Trotskyists had been persecuted in 1941] ... and the arrest of the Rosenbergs.'

One hundred and ten men and women were subpoenaed during the second set of HUAC hearings from 1951 to 1953; fifty-eight turned informer. The more prominent ones--31 individuals with at least four film credits--gave an average of 29 names to the committee. Most gave way abjectly. The first witness, actor Larry Parks, 'reduced himself nearly to groveling and pleading' in face of the committee's demand for names. In the end, after a certain amount of public soul-searching, he identified 10 individuals. The price of hesitation was high. A headline in the *Los Angeles Examiner* two days later read: LARRY PARKS LOSES $75,000 SCREEN ROLE. Parks's career was more or less finished. The lesson was not lost on most of the others who testified.

Four prominent directors became informers: Frank Tuttle, a dependable journeyman, perhaps best known for *This Gun For Hire* (1942) with Alan Ladd and Veronica Lake; Edward Dmytryk, the 'Judas' of the Hollywood Ten, director of *Murder My Sweet* (1944) and *Cornered* (1945); Robert Rossen (*Body and Soul* (1947) and *The Hustler* (1961)), who refused to name names in 1951, capitulated in 1953, and was apparently tortured by the decision the rest of his life; and Kazan.

Of the four and perhaps the entire group of informers, Kazan certainly possessed the greatest stature as an artist and intellectual. His decision to collaborate with the witch-hunters had far-reaching consequences. One 'director-victim' told Victor Navasky, for his book *Naming Names*, 'If Kazan had refused to cooperate ... he couldn't have derailed the Committee, but he might well have broken the blacklist. He was too important to be ignored.' Navasky comments: 'Probably no single individual could have broken the blacklist in April 1952, and yet no person was in a better strategic position to try than Kazan, by virtue of his prestige and economic invulnerability, to mount a symbolic campaign against it, and by this example inspire hundreds of fence sitters to come over to the opposition.'

As it turned out, Kazan did not have it in him to do that. In the various attempts at self-justification he has made over the years, he asserts that matters of principle--opposition to the conspiratorial methods of the Communist Party and the crimes of Stalin--impelled him to name names. In his autobiography Kazan denied doing it 'for the money.' He writes: 'It [saving his career in Hollywood] was not the reason. In the end, when I did what I did, it was for my own good reasons and after much thought about my own experiences.'

Testimony from his contemporaries suggests otherwise. Lillian Hellman, not the most reliable of witnesses it must be admitted, claimed

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that Kazan told her, 'I earned over $400,000 last year from theater. But [Twentieth Century-Fox president Spyros] Skouras says I'll never make another movie [if I don't cooperate].' Theater producer Kermit Bloomgarden informed Navasky that Kazan 'told me he'd been to Washington and met with J. Edgar Hoover and Spyros Skouras and they wanted him to give names.... He said 'I've got to think of my kids.' And I said, 'This too shall pass, and then you'll be an informer in the eyes of your kids, think of that." Kazan refers in his autobiography to Skouras's proposing a meeting with Hoover, but never specifies whether or not it took place.

In that same work, the director makes fairly plain his own frame of mind, citing a diary entry from 1952 that described a conversation with Arthur Miller: 'I mentioned that Skouras had implied I couldn't work in pictures anymore if I didn't name the other lefties in the Group, then told Art I'd prepared myself for a period of no movie work or money ... But that I didn't feel altogether good about such a decision. That I'd say (to myself) what the hell am I giving all this up for? To defend a secrecy I didn't think right and to defend people who'd already been named or soon would be by someone else? I said I'd hated the Communists for many years and didn't feel right about giving up my career to defend them.'

Some gave names to the Committee with obvious reluctance, a few later repudiated their conduct (actor Sterling Hayden, for example), others were deeply troubled by the decision. Kazan obviously had to see himself acting not out of self-interest, but in defense of principle. Two days after his HUAC appearance, Kazan took out an ad--written, he says in his autobiography, by his late first wife--in the *New York Times* justifying his behavior. It is a fairly filthy document.

Kazan's essential claim is that 'Communist activities' represent 'a dangerous and alien conspiracy' that needs to be exposed. The American people 'can solve this problem wisely only if they have the facts about Communism.' He asserts that 'any American who is in possession of such facts has the obligation to make them known, either to the public or to the appropriate Government agency.' This is apparently what Kazan has done by placing the facts about his own life 'before the House Committee on Un-American Activities without reserve.'

He explains, in his ad, that up until this point he has refrained from telling his story sooner because he has been held back by 'a piece of specious reasoning which has silenced many liberals. It goes like this: 'You may hate the Communists, but you must not attack them or expose them, because if you do you are attacking the right to hold unpopular opinions and you are joining the people who attack civil liberties."

This argument, he has come to realize, is 'a lie. Secrecy serves the Communists. At the other pole, it serves those who are interested in silencing liberal voices. The employment of a lot of good liberals is threatened because they have allowed themselves to become associated with or silenced by the Communists. Liberals must speak out.'

Kazan's membership in the Communist Party has given him 'Firsthand experience of dictatorship and thought control.... It left me with an abiding hatred of Communist philosophy and methods and the conviction that these must be resisted always.'

The contention that the Communist Party was nothing more than a GPU conspiracy is gutter political reaction of the McCarthy type. Budd Schulberg, Kazan's co-informer and screenwriter, tried to put a more exalted twist on his own testimony in conversations with Victor Navasky. He claimed that the tragic fate of Soviet artists motivated him and that he acted to block the growth of a totalitarian movement in the US. The informers, he said, were 'premature anti-Stalinists.'

The genuine anti-Stalinists, as anyone who has studied the history of this century knows, were the Trotskyists, and they did not discover the cause in 1952. Trotsky and his co-thinkers fought for the regeneration of the Soviet regime and the Communist International from 1923 until 1933, when the latter organization's worthlessness from the point of view of social revolution became manifest, and thereafter for political revolution in the USSR and the building of a new socialist international. Their opposition to Stalinism was of a Marxist character, an opposition from the left. They explained that the regime in the Soviet Union had betrayed the October Revolution and that its crimes did not result from the growth of socialism in the USSR, but from its opposite, the growth of tendencies that would lead to the restoration of capitalism. Subsequent events have vindicated that view.

Marxists in the USSR by the tens of thousands paid for their opposition to the bureaucratic dictatorship with their lives. On the other hand, many of the social types who had denounced the Bolshevik-led revolution in 1917, with its perspective of world revolution, flocked to support the Stalin regime in the 1930s, precisely because it had abandoned the path of social revolution. One has only to remember the support given by such respected liberal organs as the *New York Times* and the *Nation* to the infamous Moscow purge trials of the late 1930s.

Kazan, Schulberg and others aligned themselves with the Soviet bureaucracy and the American party during the era of the Popular Front, when the Stalinists were supporters of Roosevelt and held significant positions in the CIO unions. Stalinists or fellow travelers controlled theater companies, publishing houses and a variety of publications. Kazan and many others like him were never by any stretch of the imagination Marxists, but left reformists. Whether the political evolution of these individuals was predetermined, whether some other prospect might have opened up for them if the Communist parties had not been thoroughly Stalinized, is now a moot point.

Schulberg's notion that oppressed Soviet artists would be served by the strengthening of the American state rested on a fundamental political lie: that American 'democracy' and Stalinist 'totalitarianism' were deadly enemies. This vulgar, false and self-serving notion served to justify a whole host of perfidious deeds during the Cold War. Schulberg never bothered to explain how ceding the struggle against totalitarianism to Joseph McCarthy, John Foster Dulles, Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon, the CIA, the FBI and the US military would advance the cause of human liberation.

What were the consequences of McCarthyism within the US? In his *Times* ad, Kazan claimed he valued 'free speech, a free press.' Under the cover of pursuing the Communist menace, right-wing and corporate interests consolidated their hold over the media, helping establish a conformist, pro-capitalist climate unlike anything that exists in any European country. The paralyzing narrowness of American political life, with its minuscule differences between two big business parties, can be traced back to this period.

However, for all the rubbish that was produced in Hollywood in the 1950s it would not be correct to argue that the immediate impact of the witch-hunt was the artistic collapse of the American film industry. Classical studio directors, whose careers predated the McCarthy era and who had largely remained aloof from the political controversies of the early 1950s, continued to produce serious works for at least another decade. The generations that have come after them, however, have had progressively less to say and have possessed, in general, neither political nor artistic principles.

In any event, I suspect the powers that be had already grasped that another medium had supplanted film as the most powerful and direct influence on the populace: television. Although some blacklisted writers got jobs in the new industry, under assumed names, as a whole, television programs of the 1950s promoted some of the most repressive conceptions ever advanced about the human condition.

Kazan also pledged his commitment to the 'rights of labor' in his declaration. However, eliminating radicals from the labor movement and thereby weakening workers' resistance was a top priority of the McCarthyites. While the ruling class was in no position to drive workers

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back to the economic conditions of the 1930s, it was determined to render the unions politically harmless. The bourgeoisie was prepared to make sizable concessions in the form of wages and improved living conditions if it could ensure the dominance of a pro-capitalist bureaucracy in the labor movement.

Employers worked closely with various state investigative bodies to identify 'troublemakers.' Unions that refused to purge CP leaders were expelled; in some industries, mass dismissals took place. In the auto industry, UAW leader Walter Reuther took advantage of the Stalinists' unpopularity due to their role as policemen of the no-strike pledge during the war to whip up a pogrom-like atmosphere against left-wingers.

The overall result of this process was the political neutering of the labor movement and, ultimately, the establishment within the unions and factories of a virtual dictatorship presided over by right-wing thugs. This had immense and disastrous consequences for American society. Working people are continuing to pay, in the form of steadily worsening living standards and a variety of other ways, for their failure to organize themselves as an independent political force and their general acceptance of the framework of capitalism. And there have been consequences for humanity as a whole. After all, would it not have been far more difficult for the American state to implement its foreign policy--from its support for bloody dictatorships in Asia, Africa and Latin America, to its decade-long war in Southeast Asia, to its direct role in mass murder in Indonesia, Chile and elsewhere--without the existence of an entirely docile, pro-imperialist AFL-CIO, an organization, in fact, intimately tied to the intelligence and military apparatuses?

Part 3:

Conclusion: Some behavior is inexcusable

'Each knew what the other was thinking. Höfgen thought of Ihrig and Ihrig of Höfgen: Yes, yes, my friend, you're just as great a bastard as I am.' -- Mephisto, *Klaus Mann*

The citations at the beginning of each section of this piece come from *Mephisto*, the remarkable novel written in 1936 by Klaus Mann, German novelist Thomas Mann's son. The book's central character is Hendrik Höfgen, in whose figure, a recent English-language edition explains, the author painted a 'thinly veiled portrait of his former brother-in-law, the actor Gustaf Gründgens. Gründgens, who had been married to [Klaus] Mann's favorite sister, Erika, and had once been a flamboyant champion of Communism, had a magnificent career in Nazi Germany under the auspices of Field Marshal Hermann Göring.' Höfgen found himself unable to resist careerism, self-delusion and opportunism. Nor was he the only artist or intellectual to heed the siren song of National Socialism. The choice Kazan faced in the early 1950s--opposition or acquiescence to reaction--was posed in the sharpest fashion in the artists' experience with German fascism.

Reviewing Kazan's fate, a number of questions pose themselves, none of which can be answered exhaustively here: From the point of view of the ruling class, why was McCarthyism necessary? Why did this very reactionary trend meet so relatively little resistance? And, more generally, why is it so difficult to take a principled stand in America?

Contrary to the superficial notions of bourgeois historians of the liberal or conservative persuasion, the American population is not by nature hostile to radical change or even social revolution. The US came far closer to social revolution in the 1930s than the experts would care to admit. Significant layers of the population came into contact with left-wing ideas for the first time and found them appealing. The entire experience was frightening and chastening for the bourgeoisie. The argument that McCarthyism was simply an eruption of paranoia that bore no relation to the actual strength of the radical movement is not substantiated by the facts. The Communist Party, the Trotskyist movement, the social democratic parties may have been relatively small numerically, but the commitment of the population, emerging from a war with fascism, to what it perceived to be progressive and democratic social change was genuine.

After all, the history of the United States has left a peculiar ideological patrimony. For the purposes of bamboozling the population, the political establishment finds it helpful to refer to past struggles for 'freedom,' 'equality' and 'democracy,' and falsely claim their heritage. The difficulty, of course, is that struggles over those principles did take place, great sacrifices were made, and there is always the danger that people will take them seriously and, moreover, want to continue and deepen them.

In no country in the world is there a greater discrepancy between the promise, on the one hand, and the social and political reality, on the other. Given an opportunity to examine the problem, masses of people would have no difficulty working out that the overthrow of capitalism follows logically upon the great eighteenth and nineteenth century battles against monarchy, colonialism and slavery. Indeed, one could argue that the powers that be make unrelenting war on socialism, given the highly proletarianized population and advanced economic conditions of the US, precisely because, all things being equal, it is such a rational and attractive proposition.

Social development, of course, does not take place in this manner, through formally logical sequences, but through living struggles in which the consciousness, preparedness and self-confidence of the various contending parties play crucial roles. To explain why the McCarthyites had such a relatively easy time of it, despite the strong democratic traditions of the American population and its potential sympathy for socialism, certain social and cultural questions have to be considered.

It should be kept in mind that while the witch-hunt was a sustained and zealously pursued campaign, it was not for the most part accompanied by physical repression. There was, of course, the horrifying example of the Rosenbergs. Some Communist Party members went to jail; many left-wingers lost their livelihoods. But large numbers of people, like Kazan, capitulated without fear of any particular reprisals. Many commentators note that Kazan could have pursued a career in the theater or in Europe. This makes his behavior all the more revealing.

Why did so few, particularly in the liberal and artistic intelligentsia, play honorable roles? One cannot simply cite personal weakness, singly or collectively, by way of answer.

An irony is surely at work here. The US is famously the land of individualism, yet perhaps nowhere else is there such an intense, unrelenting pressure to conform. Kazan is probably telling the truth when he says he did not inform 'for the money.' It is more likely that he testified from fear of social ostracism and the loss of recognition.

In the final analysis, the immense rewards for conforming and the high price of resisting have been bound up with the condition of US capitalism. The American bourgeoisie launched its ideological scorched-earth policy in the late 1940s in part because it *could*. It emerged from the war the most powerful ruling class in the world, with nearly unchallenged economic hegemony and enormous financial resources. Its state had the credibility of having played a major role in defeating Nazi Germany, a credibility reinforced by the US Communist Party with its dreadful super-patriotic line ('Communism is 20th century Americanism.') The ruling class in the US was in a unique position to combine bribery, flattery and intimidation to neutralize real or potential opposition.

The ideological weaknesses of the population came into play as well. Their lack of strong socialist traditions, relatively low level of class consciousness and difficulty in drawing generalized political conclusions from experiences rendered large numbers of people vulnerable to anticommunist propaganda, particularly under conditions of generally

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rising living standards and economic prosperity. Within the intelligentsia specifically, the absence of traditions of opposition along clearly defined social and class lines played a damaging role. Stalinism had contributed significantly to this problem, with its cynical promotion among intellectuals and artists in the late 1930s of 'friendship for the Soviet Union' (i.e., 'friendship' for the bureaucracy and silence about Stalin's crimes) instead of socialist politics.

Figures like Kazan went along with an anti-capitalist social wave at the height of the Depression. Everything these individuals lacked, however, everything that was unthought out and uncritical, proved their undoing when the current dramatically shifted. Now (by the late 1940s) prosperous or on the road to being prosperous, recognized, even feted by the entertainment industry, Kazan and others were not inclined to remember responsibilities to the working class or the social cause in which they had once believed. Having tasted of celebrity, the thought of isolation was most terrifying. In America, after all, if you are not an immense success, a star, you are nothing, a human zero. To take a stand against official society means, above all, leading a life out of the limelight.

In asking, why is it so hard to take a principled stand in the US, one is also hinting at a related question: why is it so hard to be a great artist in the US? Because great art requires extraordinary mental independence and rigor, immense powers of resistance to external pressures and unyielding commitment to the truth of one's inner self. Where these qualities are in short supply artistic work will not rise to the highest levels.

Kazan, Budd Schulberg and the rest of the informers acted like scoundrels and cowards to save their careers. Sterling Hayden in his autobiography had the elementary honesty to acknowledge this. 'I think of Larry Parks,' he wrote, '[who] consigned himself to oblivion. Well, I hadn't made that mistake. Not by a goddamned sight. I was a real daddy longlegs of a worm when it came to crawling.... I [then] swung like a goon from role to role.... They were all made back to back in an effort to cash in fast on my new status as a sanitary culture hero.' Kazan saved his skin and made another 11 films after his informing. But what was left of him?

I may be accused of concerning myself excessively about the fate of someone who acted in such a disgraceful manner, but a concern for art and the artist obliges me to make some kind of accounting. Acts committed against one's better self, like Kazan's, set off a process, lengthy or otherwise depending upon the moral state of the individual, of inner annihilation. Marlon Brando, perhaps the greatest performer with whom he worked, underestimates the damage the filmmaker did, but there is something at least profoundly humane in his observation that Kazan 'has done great injury to others, but mostly to himself.'

'Kazan' and 'informer' became forever inseparably linked. From the point of view of Kazan's own intellectual and artistic development, the most terrible thing about his deed was that it ineluctably condemned him to a life that would be largely devoted from then on to self-justification. He would never again have the luxury of being able to devote himself single-mindedly to any other problem. He effectively destroyed his own freedom of artistic movement.

No doubt Kazan simply wished to rid himself of a past toward which he no longer felt any attachment or sympathy and which threatened to disrupt his promising career. No one is obliged to hang on to ideas he or she rejects. Going over to the side of the most deadly enemies of social progress is another matter. Kazan thought he could play games with history and escape unscathed. But if there is one lesson that might be drawn from the debacle of his life and career, it is that such actions have consequences.

A perusal of Kazan's autobiography leaves a peculiarly unpleasant taste in one's mouth. It contains a number of relatively acute observations about this or that individual, this or that artistic effort, as well as a good deal of name-dropping and a good many stories about women he's slept with. At its heart, however, the book is an exercise in self-pity, self-absorption and self-justification. 'Everyone has his reasons,' he writes. This phrase, popularized by Jean Renoir, in Kazan's hands has sinister implications. What he means is: Everyone has his reasons to be a swine.

A Life is written along somewhat provocative lines. It's a style of artistic confessional that has become fashionable in the past few decades. The author recounts all the vile things he's done, and, more or less, taunts the reader: Yes, I'm a bastard, what are you going to make of it? The implication always being that swinishness is intrinsic to the artistic personality, and indeed that the greater the artistic genius, the greater the swinishness. Kazan would have us believe, and perhaps he believes it himself, that informing on his former comrades was no more dishonorable than manipulating an actor on a film set or cheating on his wife.

In any event, talent or even genius does not excuse everything. Marxists emphasize the need to make an objective assessment of artistic achievement. This inevitably requires making a certain distinction between the artist and his or her art. We do not go searching through garbage cans for all the ways in which the writer, painter or composer falls short. But the distinction is a relative, not an absolute one. Humanity has the right to expect that the artists have its concerns, in the most general sense, at heart. Here we are not speaking of official society with its empty and philistine moralizing, but suffering and for the most part inarticulate humanity. Compassion, a democratic spirit, even a kind of nobility--these do not seem too much to ask.

Naturally, imperfect human beings produce art, along with everything else. They inevitably sin against others and against themselves. But why make a virtue out of those inevitable errors and misdeeds, much less a program? History teaches us that class society occasionally mutilates very gifted people beyond recognition, so that artistic genius and personal vileness coexist within a single human being. Why not simply recognize this as an unfortunate fact of that society, another sign of its incompatibility with the demands of human happiness, and not as a proof that genius feeds on vileness?

Art counts for a good deal, but not everything. We listen to Richard Wagner's music (or some of it) with enjoyment, but that does not dissipate the stench of his anti-Semitism and generally filthy ideas. He is remembered, frankly, for both his music and his ideas. Doesn't it mean something that humanity is more likely to cherish in its collective memory a Mozart and not a Wagner, a Van Gogh and not a Degas, a Döblin and not a Céline, a Breton and not an Eliot?

As for Kazan, somewhere around page 600 in his autobiography he sums things up fairly well: 'For years I declared myself an ardent liberal in politics, made all the popular declarations of faith, but the truth was—and is—that I am, like most of you, a bourgeois. I go along disarming people, but when it gets to a crunch, I am revealed to be a person interested only in what most artists are interested in, himself.'

A remarkable comment. Kazan thinks he is being very clever here, that he is revealing an essential, if unpalatable, universal truth. In reality, he only displays his extraordinary philistinism. What is the logic of his comment? Life is, first and foremost, about taking care of oneself; art presumably serves a function insofar as it enables one to do that. The individual who considers art as a means, as something extraneous to the purpose of his or her existence, is not a serious figure. The great artist, one might say the *truly ambitious* artist, is one who understands that the fate of his art is of far greater consequence than his personal destiny.

Marx, writing in 1844, understood this: 'In no sense does the writer regard his works as a means. They are ends in themselves; so little are they means for him and others that, when necessary, he sacrifices his existence to theirs, and like the preacher of religion, though in another way, he takes as his principle: 'God is to be obeyed before men'.'

Kazan's comment is a libel against art and an attempt to minimize his own sins by suggesting that anyone might be capable of committing them. Not anyone, *a certain type*. To the extent that the current cultural

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landscape is over-populated with artists who think only of themselves, it is in part due to the example and legacy of Elia Kazan and those like him. The media praise Kazan because he fits their idea of the artist: a man or woman capable of sophisticated work--but nothing overly disturbing; prepared to stand on political principle--as long as it does not create problems with the authorities; dedicated to art--unless it demands too much.

The honoring of Kazan is part of a trend, the general rehabilitation of anticommunism and McCarthyism. It was fashionable for a time in some circles to be on the 'left.' Now one senses a deep hunger, an irrepressible impulse on the part of some erstwhile liberals and radicals to ingratiate themselves, after the fact, with the witch-hunters, to be, at last, on the 'winning side.' This is a prelude to and a justification in advance for a new and serious assault on democratic rights.

In applauding Kazan the members of the Academy are applauding themselves. What are they saying? 'In similar circumstances, we would behave in precisely the same way.' The film industry establishment is setting up the artist-informer as a model for the present and the future. Nothing good can come from such a celebration. We condemn the decision of the Academy. Beware of those who reward cowardice and lack of principle! As James P. Cannon, a genuine anti-Stalinist, observed two months after Kazan's HUAC testimony, in regard to another specimen of the McCarthy days, Whittaker Chambers: 'American capitalism, turning rotten before it got fully ripe, acclaims the stool pigeons and informers, who squeal and enrich themselves, as the embodiments of the highest good they know. By their heroes ye shall know them.'

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