

Letters to the World Socialist Web Site

21 July 2001

On the hijacking of the 2000 US election

Thank you for the article on the Florida election. So far it is the most detailed about the farce that is Florida. When is the rest of the country going to start paying attention to something so important? Call it destiny, if Gore made those remarks, it proves to me he is not up to the job, neither is Lieberman. So hopefully in the next election, we will have two Democrats with guts. God knows big Al and cowardly Joe are sadly lacking in that department.

Kind regards,

MW

19 July 2001

Dear WWSWS,

Thank you for your continuing exploration of the 2000 American presidential election. I find it bizarre that both the mass media and the Democratic Party appear to have no interest in the deliberate truncation of democracy within their own country. The ruling class here might be making their ultimate mistake.

GS

19 July 2001

Dover, NH

On the disenfranchisement of US voters

Thank you for the article on the college students who were disenfranchised. I agree that when anyone loses their right to vote it is a blow against us all. All of us must see that the voting rights act of 1964 and 1965 is honored. We also must work to eradicate all segregation everywhere. By the way, I am white and outraged about the disenfranchisement of voters in Florida.

JK

18 July 2001

On low wages in the US

Will the leaders of the free world ever recognize the fact that the USA is a consumer nation and we cannot consume at minimum wage, and the rest of the world cannot supply if we don't consume? Most Americans with cash in their pocket are hunting something to spend it on, i.e., "Lets go to Wal-Mart to look around and see if they have something we want." Countries around the world will collapse if Americans have to exist on substandard wages. The race to the bottom will pull us all down.

So to alleviate the problem may I suggest that y'all immediately give all your employees a pay increase and time off to spend it.

JC

17 July 2001

On the "modest proposal" of Philip Morris

Dear editor,

If a country can make considerable "health care savings due to early mortality," just think of the savings that can be made by liquidating not only the elderly, but the mentally and physically ill, the disabled, the unemployed and the poor. I'm sure Philip Morris and other multinationals could significantly boost their profits by developing a

range of lethal products that could be used to dispose of all this surplus humanity. As Philip Morris has pointed out, the ethical problems are far outweighed by the financial savings for governments in this age of reduced public spending and growing unemployment.

Yours

EG

19 July 2001

On A.I. Artificial Intelligence

To arts editor David Walsh,

Thank you for the great job you do in the WWSWS. Your articles are always insightful. A reply by a certain PB from France about your article on *A.I.* attracted my attention. He seems to draw a distinction between the works of Stanley Kubrick and Steven Spielberg. For him, Kubrick is an artist, an auteur, and Spielberg is a deliverer of fast food commercial movies. He adds that Kubrick's movies will be remembered in 100 years, but Spielberg will be forgotten soon earlier.

I am sorry to say that I strongly disagree with Mr. PB. I think the distinction of directors in this way is both snobbish and misleading. I have always thought that Kubrick and Spielberg work in the same sphere. They may have different sensibilities (Spielberg is driven into Americana sentimentality, Kubrick insists on turning everything and everyone to ice), but they have something fundamentally in common. They both have impressive technique, they create spaces of fantasies, but they fail to deliver an honest and engaging view on human beings living together. I do not think their collaboration in *A.I.* is a mere coincidence, nor do I see it as odd or isolated. Treating Kubrick as a misunderstood artist and Spielberg as a producer of rubbish does not create a healthy discussion environment. This distinction reveals the simplistic misconception some people have regarding high and low art.

I would love to hear Mr. Walsh's thoughts about this subject, and of course any reply from PB is more than welcome. Polemic is where art takes its finest form.

JJ

19 July 2001

Dear Editor,

In my view, David Walsh's review of *A.I.* was right on the money. I, too, felt that the movie's political perspective was reactionary. Namely, that despite ecological catastrophe, the political economy of capitalism would proceed unabated. Moreover, instead of disposable people, as we have now, in the future we will have disposable robots. What is perhaps most disturbing about this film is that published reviewers, as well as other observers, view the future as posited in *A.I.* as a creditable one. In other words, instead of stating the obvious—that an ecological disaster along the lines described in the movie would realistically bring about radical economic and political change—it is taken as a given that capitalism, with all of its destructive tendencies, will "naturally" continue. Again, thanks for a great review.

Parenthetically, I'm wondering if you've ever considered

publishing a review on “Star Trek”—either its movie or television series form. These shows/movies have a very optimistic view of humanity’s ability to utilize the techniques of modernity in a democratic and socially just manner. Moreover, “Star Trek” is about human relations among interesting things.

Appreciatively yours,

GG

19 July 2001

On acting and Hollywood

Once again Mr. Walsh proves to be an accurate observer of American films in his review of *crazy/beautiful*.

He devotes a great deal of time to actors and how they are not the problem with most films. Were it not for their talents, most Hollywood films—and now a great many foreign films as well—would not even approach the level of art.

I have been an actor in Hollywood for over 12 years now (and 25 years overall) and believe me, it has not been an easy life as an artist. I would even say that most actors, despite their reputation as narcissists, are very much into using their talents for bringing some sort of illumination to the audience about the state of humanity. But getting a role in Hollywood, even a one-liner, is sometimes more difficult than finding the proverbial needle in the haystack. So, most actors, given a role after the arduous—and sometimes undignified—task of auditioning for producers and directors who haven’t the least idea of what acting is all about, jump at the opportunity to play any role, even if it’s demeaning or beneath their talents.

Some actors, of course, have enormous resources and will refuse roles they consider demeaning either to themselves or to humanity. Economic pressures being what they are, however, these are few. Actors’ need to act, to express themselves as artists, is only matched by the competition, the lack of opportunity that the industry offers, and, last but not least, the incredible lack of honesty that has its roots in the quicksand of insecurity which is Hollywood. If anything, what most actors get is a great deal of rejection (no news here), even when they’re supremely talented. All these pressures open many of them to the crudest opportunism. They will act in something, anything, by God, even if it means betraying their best friend, lying about their credits, or breaking union rules.

Then there are those of us who, dying to act, to offer our talents, ask ourselves, especially when watching television: “Do I really want to be in that?”

Of course, I’m talking about the non-stars, the vast majority of whom—maybe 90 percent of the Screen Actors Guild—make less than \$5,000 a year!

It is all a rather pitiful situation. The stars, with the exception of a few socially conscious individuals—Hollywood-style, mind you—are of little help. They are awash in money, yet they consistently choose vehicles which have nothing to say or that have no edge to them. Yet, even here it’s understandable. Do you have any idea what it’s like to be a star, that is, a valuable commodity? It is to be constantly afraid of losing one’s standing in the Hollywood community, fearful of losing one’s appeal or popularity and, therefore, work (and a lavish lifestyle, of course). And if that happens, which studio conglomerate is going to finance your next film?

You’d better believe these are not going to be films with a strong social message, much less a subversive one, about our capitalist society, of which the film industry is an important cogwheel, both financially and ideologically.

So much for this aspect of Mr. Walsh’s comments. I would like to

turn now to the art of acting, which he seems to understand rather well, but not entirely. As much as Mr. Walsh admires the work of actors in film, he makes one mistake when he describes it as “imitative” of human behavior. No—acting, if it’s to be an art form at all, is never imitative. Many actors are excellent at doing “realistic” gestures, at expressing themselves physically and verbally in a way that seems relaxed or natural. But acting at its finest is not realistic, which many times is just another word for “imitative.” Nor is it naturalistic, which also imitates the surface reality of behavior. Great acting, acting that moves us, that makes our brain and emotions spin, that, in the words of playwright Peter Weiss, “pulls us by the hair, turns our eyes inside out, and makes us look at the world afresh,” is organic; that is, it springs from the innermost self of the actor’s personality.

In a certain sense, the good actor should always be playing himself, or at least drawing from himself, not imitating. If one imitates crying, feeling depressed, being in love, the audience, no matter how unsophisticated, will be left cold. But if the actor feels all the emotions he’s supposed to feel, then the audience will experience the same thing and perhaps be taken on a voyage of discovery. And the actor can only draw those emotions from his/her inner being, from his material self, not from ideas about this or that emotion or observations of how people cry, etc.(which can help, of course).

Acting—organic acting, that is—is very much grounded in materialism, in the material reality and being of the actor—his body, his mind, his emotions—and not on ideas or conceptions of the world.

How does one avoid repeating oneself in different roles? Ah, it’s not difficult. Just as matter is infinite in the forms it takes, so is the human personality, material as it is. All individuals are different from one another, true; yet, because the unity of the world is material, everyone feels, in one degree or another, the same emotions.

True acting is not acting at all; it is not pretending. It is not imitation. It is being. In fact, as the actors go from emotional state to another, it is really changing from one state of being to another. Frankly, I wish we could do away with the word “acting.” It is anything but.

RNR

20 July 2001



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