

Letters from our readers

18 January 2014

On "London: Fire station closures endanger lives"

After reading the article regarding the closure of London fire stations, I thought I would just drop a quick note regarding the planned closure in the North East of the main fire station in Sunderland with the loss of six fire engines and the loss of 131 firefighters' posts.

This closure is part of the same process as the one carried out in London by Boris Johnson of slowly dismantling the remains of the welfare state.

Given these savage attacks, the response from the FBU has been confined to isolated pickets lasting six hours. This action will serve only to demoralise the firefighters and keep them isolated. What should be happening is coordinated strike action across the public sector linking up with working class communities to force the government into a climb down.

However, to achieve this objective, it will require activity outside of the control of the so-called labour movement and will involve engaging with workers and winning the argument for workers committees, mass meetings with open political discussion.

The decision will be made to close the station on Monday by Tyne and Wear Fire Authority.

Dave T

UK

16 January 2014

On "Saudi Arabia executes young Sri Lankan housemaid"

I wonder and am curious to understand the idea of "punishment" of someone for any undesired event. Why is it such a prevalent belief that someone must be punished if anything wrong was done? Is it the loss is recovered, or retribution or "deterrent" to others? Assuming a person did something wrong, sometimes it appears that a mere reprimand, counseling or training or change in the prevailing conditions would do. Why kill someone? In many situations, a deeper analysis and resolution of causes including methods, procedures,

resources, social conditions, etc., is necessary. I request you to throw light on this concept of "punishment".

JP

India

13 January 2014

On "Corruption scandal threatens to implode Turkish regime"

Dear comrade Jean,

My knowledge of the region is very limited, to put it mildly, but the growing conflict in Iraq, in particular the KRG, and the increasing likelihood of a breakaway statelet must be heightening the crisis within Turkey and the demands by the PKK and other Kurdish tendencies for an independent Kurdish state.

John

14 January 2014

On "Her: A lonely man falls in love with his computer"

A great review of a generally harmless, yet unmemorable movie.

However, I disagree with David Walsh regarding Samantha's lack of a physical shape. I thought it added a unique dimension, and the movie would be oddly incomplete otherwise. Of course, that brings us to the question of the film's overall merits, which Mr. Walsh addressed quite well. Could this have been a substantially more meaningful movie? I think so.

The challenges of a romantic relationship between a human and an AI were inadequately examined. Speaking personally, this lies at the heart of my misgivings about the movie. It dwelt too long and in quite a shallow manner on the carnal aspect of the relationship. Understandably, some in the audience would be greatly interested in that, but a romance is much, much more, as anyone who has been in a long-term relationship can attest.

On the other hand, the seemingly more mundane question of how to stay connected to a formless lover was treated as a mere formality. These and other more

earthbound issues, like aging, cultural differences, money, and even having children (even if only bearing down on one partner), became an afterthought as Jonze built up to the ostensibly shocking climax and the point of no return.

It was disappointing, because these are exactly the tensions in relationships both big and small that lead to moments of immense emotional release. They should not have been cut out so unceremoniously from the movie.

The implications of networked AI that were brought up near the end were fascinating though, in especially marked contrast to something like James Cameron's *Terminator* series. My mind was going a mile a minute racing through all the possibilities of what truly is possible for the human psyche and the human body. Given all we now know of the mechanics of the human form, it is exhilarating to imagine the prospect of our minds functioning independently of a physical body.

At the same time, throughout the movie, I couldn't escape the overall aura of complacency that pervaded every scene. Aesthetically, it felt like an advertisement for Apple. Jonze and cinematographer went to great pains to remove the colour blue from the palette, supposedly rendering every scene warm and fuzzy.

Seemingly, the extent of negative emotion experienced by the world's inhabitants was discomfort or social awkwardness. Anyone with a social sensitivity would be absolutely astounded by the movie's lack of real strife that is ever-present in our own flesh-and-blood world.

Mr. Walsh summed it up quite well:

"...it remains painful at times to watch and analyze films that have an essentially insubstantial and unserious character, at a time of substantial and serious crisis, in which millions and millions of people are suffering."

Peter R

15 January 2014



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