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Art in Politics
I think a theme like ‘art and politics’ is one of the most suitable for the thematic Ovi magazine and there are so many angles I’m sure we will not even reach a fraction of them. But, after all, this has never been the role of Ovi magazine. You see, we at Ovi magazine, by exposing our opinions and ideas, want to start a conversation, provoke a conversation that will lead us on to a path of learning. That’s one more thing with us in Ovi magazine and I think all the contributors will agree with me when I say that in Ovi magazine we believe that the only thing we know is that we don’t know anything, as Socrates once said.

When we started Ovi magazine we asked ourselves if it was going to be a cultural or a political magazine and after a long conversation we came to the conclusion that the paths of culture and politics meet so often there is no way to separate them. So Ovi magazine is a cultural, artistic, political magazine and with this issue we celebrate its third year online.

Three years! It’s hard to believe. How we started and where we are now not even close to what we were originally dreaming for the Ovi magazine. We started monthly where half of the magazine was thematic and the other half was filled with contemporary news. That was till we decided that our contemporary news wasn’t contemporary enough and we became daily.

To keep both a daily magazine and a monthly thematic has proven a difficult task and that’s why it took nearly a year to publish the next thematic issue. But we first had to make sure that the daily works and that was a very difficult task, especially when all of it is volunteer work. We had to often put aside not only work obligations but family musts. But we did it, we did it and we celebrate our third birthday with a return to our thematic issues that have provoked many conversations in the past and we hope in the future as well.

Art and politics. A schizophrenic relationship to use a title of one of my articles, it is like they cannot live together while they cannot live apart either. And we have often mixed art, culture and politics in Ovi magazine. Even the cartoons we host sometimes show this schizophrenic relationship. And I think we did our best to offer you in many ways, including artistic, our opinions.

Thank you to all the contributors that stood by our side for these three years, thank you to the friends who contributed to this ‘art and politics’ issue and thank you all of you, the literally thousands of you who read daily Ovi magazine.

Enjoy our anniversary issue!

THANOS KALAMIDIAS & ASA BUTCHER
YOU ARE A LIAR

YOU ARE A LIAR

YOU ARE A LIAR

YOU ARE A LIAR

YOU ARE A LIAR

WHO? ME?
“Anthem of the Black Poet”

By Mbizo Chirasha

the succulent breast of Mother Africa ooze
with the milk of black renaissance
the rich womb of Africa germinate
seeds of black consciousness.
the black blood bubble with identity of Africaness
the sweat of my brows flow with the revolutions from
slavery to independence

i am the black poet
black valleys bloom with flowers of Nehandaness
african horizons shine with the rays of Nkurumahness
black streets coloured with rainbows of Mandelaness
black soil creamed with the wisdom of Mugabeness
black spears sharpened with the conscience of Bikoness

i am the black poet
i sing of black culture bleaching in oceans of Coca Cola
i sing of black culture fried in cauldrons of
Floridarization
i sing of black culture gambled
in dark streets of sunset hills
i sing of black culture burning in computer ages

i am the black poet
i sing of kings and their people
i sing of black kings and their people
i sing of the dead souls of black history
i sing of the rising spirits of black renaissance
i sing of the rising souls of black consciousness
i sing for the rising spirits of pan Africaness

i am the stone you left for the dead
i am the tree bark oozing with blood of age
i am the riverbed flowing with mucus of age

my mind is the drainage pipe pumping out
acids of mental suppression
my mind is a drainage pipe pumping out
cyanides of racial discrimination
my mind is a drainage pipe pumping
nitrates of economic dispossession.

i am the stone you left for the dead
i am the tree bark oozing with blood of age
i am the riverbed flowing with mucus of age

my gun is the rose of our freedom
my bullet is the nectar of our reconciliation
my bomb is the petal of our democracy
my gun is our 1980 celebrations
my bullet is our 1987 political revision.

i am the stone you left for the dead
i am the tree bark oozing with blood of age
i am the riverbed flowing with mucus of age

is abortion a solution to overpopulation
is demolition a solution to pollution
is corruption a short cut to poverty reduction
is balkanization a shortcut to colonization
is condomization a shortcut to HIV mitigation

HIV/AIDS has become business
an import and export product like Coca Cola
in America and NOKIA in Berlin.
i am the stone you left for the dead
i am the tree bark oozing with blood of age
i am the riverbed flowing with mucus of age.
It is strange to have an issue about art and politics and not identify what art and politics are, but, at the same time, in both case there are so many meanings, explanations and semantics behind the words and I was thinking about that while writing another article showing what a labyrinth the relationship between them two actually is.

The simplest way to identify art is to connect it with people. Leonardo Da Vinci did art, so did Andy Warhol and Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and let’s not stop at painting, Dickens and Shakespeare, Poe and Elliot, Becket and Miller or Dario Fo and I would most likely spend the rest of my day and a few hundred pages adding names. In the sense of expression each one of them is different but they have one thing in common, they all did art.

Painters used and use brushes, writers use a pen or computer, photographers use cameras but what makes all these people unique, what makes them artists, is that they gave life to their creation. It doesn’t matter if it is a novel, a painting or a photograph. Even in the most modern forms of art you can feel, you can feel either what the artist felt while creating or what you sense while seen their creation.

Art is not something you can place in a room with four walls; looking at Matisse paintings you have the sense that there is a story unveiling, an unwritten play, an invisible poem, a tragedy and a dance. Every stroke of the brush hides an aria, a folklore song, a communication strangle. Gradually the creation overcomes the creator and in the end the person is connected with his creation and not with his real persona. Sometimes the persona is a disgrace. Wagner’s racism doesn’t remove anything from his operas’ beauty; still the man supported the final solution long before Hitler turned it into practice.

Politics, on the other side, is the meaning. Democracy, socialism, communism, liberalism, anarchism are theories, meanings. And every single one of these theories has the same target, exactly the same target; a society with equality and chances to everybody that prospers the differences stands on the method - the way to get to the target. But then personas coming and ruin the theory. It’s not a case of difference between theory and practice but a case of the person, who handles the theory and the practice; I suppose it comes to the old question, the role of the persona in history.

Socialism, by definition, identifies a system with total equality but then Hitler used the name to create total separatism. Hitler’s socialism was hiding decay and a holocaust; millions of graves and wounds that over fifty years after haven’t healed. Stalin was to move from the dictatorship of the proletariat to socialism what he did was move thousands of people from their homes to gulags and eventually kill.
them. The numbers again count to thousands and thousands, a whole nation in the dark ages for decades since his heirs didn’t want to give up his dream. Kim Il-sung, the eternal president of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea follows the example. What an irony, Democratic People’s Republic, even the sequence of the words sounds so grotesque.

Don’t worry, there are always the contemporaries as well, Musharraf of Pakistan calls himself president of democracy and Pinochet in Chile did the same for decades. Their victims in the name of the anti-communism count to hundreds and hundreds and they are not thousands because their countries are much smaller. Mugabe in Zimbabwe has given a new meaning to the world slaughter; and there are more, in the name of democracy, socialism and I don’t know what else kids are sacrificed day after day in Sudan, in Somalia. Of course there are politicians that manage a balance between theory and practice, leaders that worked for peace and the prosperity of the people.

So where those two meet, where art meets politics. Politics has a love and hate relationship with arts. Politicians hate the unconventional free spirit of the artists. Most of the time they cannot understand it and that’s when they …burn. They burn paintings, books; history can give us plenty of examples. But when it comes to use art, the very same politicians can be proved champions. Hitler and Stalin proved the worst enemies of art; Hitler especially ordered the burn of books and pieces of art that disagreed to his opinion and taste of art and literature. Hundreds of unique publications were lost during his time but then again if it wasn’t Stalin and his soviet realism graphic design would have never come to the art level it is today. Politicians use art to promote or improve their image. Politicians see the persona behind the art.

Artists on the other side love to have causes and politics is full of big and petit causes. From give peace a chance of John Lennon to the ancient times and the fight against the dictators Sophocles gave defending democracy. And the more romantic and …unrealistic the cause the better it is. Artists are always ready to fight with windmills, ready to cross the earth to find the magic fruit that will give global peace and in their artistic ways they can give life to this cause. The artists see the theory behind the persona and that’s why they are often led to tragic mistakes.

However crazy might sounds the relationship between art and politics works better when there is no relationship. However this was not indented to be an essay, after all I have simplified everything, it was an intro to the labyrinth world of art and politics and their schizophrenic relationship.
The Nexus between Art and Politics in Four War Movies

By Emanuel L. Paparella

Abstract:
By fighting fire with fire, political propaganda runs the risk of prostituting not only truth but art itself. Even when an ideologically manipulated documentary shows some artistic merit, it rarely grapples with issues of peace and justice; neither does it shed light on the nexus between cultural imperialism and war. Paradoxically, it becomes integral part of that nexus.
I'd like to reflect upon four recent films that deal with the nexus between war, politics and art, and how the media often misperceives such a nexus, i.e., the meta-message of war reporting, for after all movie making is indeed an artistic enterprise. The four films, in order of appearance, are: István Szabó’s Taking Sides, which dwells on the so-called de-Nazification process of the immediate post World War II era; Errol Morris’ The Fog of War dealing with Robert McNamara’s lessons learned from the Vietnam war, both appearing in 2003; Michael Moore’s Fahrenheit 9/11, and Jehane Noujaim’s Control Room, both dealing with the reporting of the current Iraq war and appearing together in 2004. A brief description of each may benefit the readers who may not have viewed all four movies yet.
Taking Sides, focuses on the choices people make, or better, the choosing and changing of sides in pre and post war times, the particular circumstances that determine those choices, the attitudes toward those choices. The main protagonists of this movie are an American intelligence officer in post World War II occupied Germany, mandated with a tough assignment: the de-Nazification, i.e., the interrogation and investigation, of ex-Nazis and their collaborators, for possible rehabilitation and/or prosecution; and a famous German symphony conductor, Wilhelm Furtwangler, an extraordinarily gifted musician, on a par with an Arturo Toscanini, who is suspected of past Nazi collaboration. The American officer is convinced that Furtwangler was used by Hitler for propaganda purposes, as a sort of icon of German culture, and that Furtwangler, for his own ambitious motives and career advancement, willingly submitted to the exploitation, when he could have easily have left the Third Reich, as other luminaries had done.

The film focuses around the torturous interrogation process of Furtwangler and some of his former musicians. To a man they all offer ready made rationalizations; they either declare themselves anti-Nazis, at worst, neutral bystanders who never confused art with politics. None of them seem to even entertain the notion that there may be a nexus between politics and culture.

Some, among whom Furtwangler, maintain this stated position in good faith; others lie about it. It is important to keep in mind that the film is not a documentary but an historical movie objectively depicting real people and real events. However, those events are so authentically recreated that the viewer feels that she/he is watching a documentary.

The film’s director makes a point of alerting us to this in an interview which accompanies the DVD but is not part of the film.

The Fog of War is an actual documentary whose only character is Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defence under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. The questioning is done by the director who also assumes the role of interviewer; however, he never appears in the documentary. Throughout the film, his voice sounds distant, almost disincarnated. Hence, Mc Namara’s 107 minute narration feels more like a soliloquy than an interview, a sort of out loud rumination on the logic of war by a man, now 87 years old, who in the past has been involved in momentous decisions on war and peace. He ruminates on the nature of war and its glorification and romanticization, on the real politick rationalizations of entire nations, their ineluctable choices often leading down the slippery path of national disasters; on the compromises with personal integrity by national leaders who have initiated a war and from which they can no longer extricate themselves; on the miscommunications leading to misunderstandings.

The demonizing of the enemy and ultimately, to tragic wars that need not have happened. However, throughout the documentary Mc Namara appears as no vacillating Hamlet; rather, he projects the image of a competent, very cerebral leader, able to rationalize each and every choices he made in the light of
a real-politic paradigm (in this case that of the Cold War), and what he knew or did not know at the time. As the title of the film suggests, the fog and the confusion never seem to lie in Mac Namara’s mind but in the inherent nature of war. However, he does also imply that he is a bit wiser now at eighty three (his age at the time of the interview) than he was some forty years ago during the prime of his life; that is so because he has learned eleven lessons about war and peace which he wishes to share with the viewers.

Nevertheless, while taking responsibility for his decisions, at no time in the interview does Mac Namara express any feeling of guilt, or even mere regret for his momentous decisions on the Vietnam War? He refuses to answer the question as to whether or not he has any. It is up to the viewer to determine the answer. And here lies the ambiguity of the documentary: the viewer has to decide for her/himself if Mc Namara decisions were indeed determined by a Cold War paradigm over which he had little control; or whether he was merely taking orders from President Johnson. If the latter is the case, then it would appear that he has not learned the most important lesson of the Nuremberg trials: that “I was only taking orders” is no excuse in the court of public opinion and the international Court of Justice for alleged war crimes. Be that as it may, here too, the director of the documentary offers us no clues as to where he himself stands on the issue.

Fahrenheit 9/11 is a different beast altogether. It was produced on a 6 million dollar budget and a 10 million dollar advertising campaign; almost twice the production cost. It became at the time the highest grossing documentary film of all time. Talk show host Bill O’Reilly liked Moore to Nazi propagandist Josef Goebbels. That kind of charge only lent the movie more publicity sending Moore laughing all the way to the Bank. What is most intriguing, however, is that the film was also awarded the Cannes’ Palm d’Or for best documentary of the year. No doubt there is geniality at work here. Let us see.

Fahrenheit 9/11 delves into the motives behind the decision to go to war in Iraq, after the events of September 11, or perhaps before those events. Unlike The Fog of War, however, in this “documentary” the director-interviewer is very much in the film, almost as a protagonist. We not only hear his voice but see his face, even glimpse into his mind. How his mind works may indeed be more intriguing than the subject matter it deals with. Indeed, we know from the start of the film where Moore’s sympathies lie. There are no uncertainties here, no fog of war, no ambiguities, ambivalences or dilemmas of any kind. Even the interpretation of the events is simple and black and white, with clear demarcations between good and evil, truth and falsehood.

From the beginning we realize that we are not dealing with a documentary aiming at strict objectivity, but with a sort of prosecution by the shadow protagonists of the documentary, i.e., the director Michael Moore parading as an objective, if slightly clownish, observer of the...
facts. Here the messenger is the message, and he comes across not as an investigator, a seeker after truth, but as a sleek lawyer coyly trying to persuade us the jury, in the process becoming part of the trial’s content. Therefore, claiming documentary status for the film begins to appear rather fraudulent to the perceptive viewer. It is analogous to somebody showing us a photo as evidence for a crime, and reminding us that a picture is worth a thousand words; and indeed it is; for if the picture has been digitally doctored it will tell us, more than a thousand words ever could, something about the motives of the doctoring agent.

Be that as it may, what exactly is the charge here? It is this: there is a nefarious convergence of interests between the Bush family and the Saudis, not excluding the wealthy Bin Laden family, which has driven the political agenda and has led to the fabrication of false intelligence to push the nation in a war. These are very serious charges that even a sleek lawyer would not dare present without hard, irrefutable evidence, not mere insinuations, chronological juxtapositions narrated in a non-linear mode, circumstantial evidence, and dots that never get connected, as is the case here. **It all begs the questions: if the intent was prosecutorial, why was this film awarded a prize for best documentary? Would not “best propaganda film” have been a more appropriate description for the award? Was such an award given for art or for mere politics?** And what does that awarding say about those who granted it? Is it would appear that here not only truth but art got a good rub down. As Marshall McLuhan used to say, sometime the message is a massage. Can propaganda ever be passed on as art, the handmaiden of truth? We shall return to these thorny questions further down in the essay.

(Control Room also presents itself as a documentary on the reporting of the war in Iraq by the media. Unlike Fahrenheit 9/11 however, it is not prosecutorial; rather, it attempts to delve into the issue of what happens to the truth vis-à-vis the slippery news-reporting of war. Indeed, in the fog of war, truth often gets not only massaged but prostituted too. As such this is that rare documentary with a meta-message, i.e., behind the matter it deals with, there is an existential philo-political investigation concerned with the issue of culture, its nexus with political power, and the propaganda generated thereby. This is the kind of issue on which Antonio Gramsci used to ruminate behind the bars of Fascist jails where, to keep his mental sanity, he wrote a whole book on the subject on toilet paper (Literature and National Life), eventually perishing there.)

“**If we can’t persuade nations with comparable values of the merits of our cause, we’d better reexamine our reasoning.”**

Robert McNamara, *The Fog of War*
reting out the truth, without rhetori-
cal flourishes, as most good docu-
mentaries indeed do. By saying less
she ends up saying much more than
Moore. The viewer is likely to be
more persuaded by what the camera
has unobtrusively shown, than by a
verbose prosecution.

For example, the documentary re-
veals that while the American re-
porters that Noujaim surveys seem
critical-thinking challenged, in as
much as they are unduly affected
by Pentagon spinners, the feverish
ravings of an American academic
against “American imperialism” far
from being welcome, provoke this
reaction from the senior producer at
Al Jazeera, Samir Khader: “Where
did you get this guy? He is just a
crazy activist.” It is in this kind of
attempt at objectivity that the con-
trast between the two films (i.e.,
Moore and Noujaim’s) is most ap-
parent.

A caveat to the reader is in order at
this point: although I am a film buff
and have studied and taught neo-
realist Italian film within a liter-
ary framework, I am no film critic,
hence this analysis and critique is
not concerned with aesthetic mer-
its per se; I shall leave that to more
competent persons. As the same
title of this essay-review suggests,
my interest lies not in the message
but the meta-message: what these
four films reveal of the nexus be-
tween art, politics, propaganda,
within the overarching theme of the
search for truth. This is a complex
subject, to be sure. Hence, what fol-
dows is merely an exploration and a
challenging of the taken-for-grant-
ed conventional wisdom and “polit-
ically-correct” assumptions. Indeed
the etymology of the word essay
(i.e., attempt) suggests as much.

When we compare those four war
movies, we soon become aware that
the one that stands out like a sore
thumb is Moore’s self-declared doc-
umentary. The directors of Taking
Sides, The Fog of War and Control
Room have all taken themselves out
of the picture, so to speak. It is as if
the story is narrating itself through
the camera. This is in the nature of
a good documentary. It was integral
part of the Italian neo-realist movie
of the 40s reflecting the neo-realist
literature of a Giovanni Verga or Ig-
nazio Silone attempting to convey
the impression to the readers that
the story has no author, that the book
had written itself, as it were. This is
surely not the case with Fahrenheit
9/11 wherein the director’s ego is
narcissistically all over the place
as a clown in a circus, distracting
us from both the subject matter and
the issue of the documentary.

To return to the comparison with
Taking Sides, the title of the film re-
ers not only to the people portrayed
in the film, those who changed sides
after the war, but perhaps more im-
portantly, it also refers to us the
viewers who, after viewing the
movie, are also challenged to take
side pro or con Furtwangler. This
is so because its director refuses to
even hint at his own view or offer
us any sort of interpretation. The
viewer must come to his own con-
clusions in the matter, independent
of the director’s opinion. This is
diametrically opposed to Moore’s
propagandistic tactics.

In the second place, the same peo-
ple who work with the American
investigator (the translator and the
secretary) retain an ambiguous at-
titude throughout; contrary to the
contemptuous attitude of the inter-
rogating American officer, their
feelings seem to fall in between
admiration and pity. For after all,
Furtwangler, unlike some of the
musicians who lied about it, nev-
er actually joined the Nazi party;
moreover even if he somewhat dis-
ingenuously insists that he knew
nothing of the concentration camps,
he also alleges to have helped some
of his Jewish fellow-musicians. On
the other hand, he did bask in the
glory and notoriety that came his
way by propagandizing German
culture. Was it love of art or love
of glory? The ambiguity of it all is
what makes this a powerfully au-
thentic historical film.
We the viewers, if we are sensitive to that ambiguity, need to come to terms with our own feelings and vulnerabilities by asking ourselves not only if Furtwangler was sincere in his insistence that he always kept art and politics separate, or whether indeed it is possible to do so, but if we too would have acted like him under similar circumstances. This is the kind of ambivalence and ambiguity which is part of the existential internal struggle within each human heart, wholly lost on a Moore who seems to be perfectly happy with merely opposing unfairness to unfairness. To make his prosecutorial points, he likes to manipulate the medium while massaging the truth, to make up stories, to rearrange and juxtapose them by a false chronology. For example a letter to the editor becomes a newspaper’s headline. He dares call his films documentaries supported by facts. Norman Mailer had a name for those sorts of facts. He called them “factoids”: things that seem to be facts but they are not actually true. However, Mailer was more honest in this regard and never called his war novels historical writings.

To make his prosecutorial points, he likes to manipulate the medium while massaging the truth, to make up stories, to rearrange and juxtapose them by a false chronology. For example a letter to the editor becomes a newspaper’s headline. He dares call his films documentaries supported by facts. Norman Mailer had a name for those sorts of facts. He called them “factoids”: things that seem to be facts but they are not actually true. However, Mailer was more honest in this regard and never called his war novels historical writings.

There is however something in common between Moore and Mailer: they both have mistaken fleeting celebrity with lasting influence. Mailer thinks of himself as another Said, or perhaps another Umberto Eco. Moore thinks of himself as another Rossellini, or perhaps another Fellini. However, while Moore, like Fellini, plays the clown in the circus of life and makes us laugh, he has no ethical insights to offer, merely an ideology to defend and to sell. To borrow an image from Aristotle, the two resemble pugilists swinging away with no opponents, Michael Moore see themselves as thinkers. Intoxicated with celebrity status, they confuse their talent for fantasy with real-life significance. The prizes they win say more about the prize-givers than about the fantasizers they celebrate. Moore’s the pity.”

Moore wants to serve us the naked truth, at any cost, but as Umberto Eco has observed, truth is a very modest lady and loathes showing herself naked. Serious criticism, the kind that a Said or a Fallaci can dish out, is quite different from titillation or manufactured controversies, or straw arguments, or distorted facts or caricatures parading as the truth and ending up in sheer slander and arguments ad hominem. Which is to say, Moore has no alternatives to offer to what he obsessively inveighs against; his is merely the other side of the coin of evangelical fundamentalism, which he claims to disdain.

There is an essay by Andrew Breitbart and Mark Ebner which says it all much better. It is titled “Hollywood Interrupted: Insanity Chic in Babylon: The Case against Celebrity.” They make the case for hypocrisy among the entertainment elites of Hollywood. The problem is perhaps best expressed by an editorial op-ed piece in the Washington Times by Suzanne Fields which ends thus: “The likes of Barbara Streisand and Susan Sarandon, Sean Penn and
government condemns Al Jazeera for broadcasting a video of the mutilated bodies of American soldiers.

Rushing describes his distress at watching the video, then he frankly admits that when the next night the network showed wounded and dead Iraqis, he was less bothered; he finds this phenomenon rather disturbing. He then blurs out: “It makes me hate war.” So, while Noujaim, Szabó and Morris honour people by exploring their mixed motives and conflicting allegiances, Moore’s “documentaries” (whose production company is appropriately named “Dog eat Dog Films”), disrespect their intelligence. They appear in comparison mere propaganda weapons, pitting unfairness against unfairness, ideology against ideology. Now, this prosecutorial strategy may even be genial a la Leni Riefenstahl, but genial or not, it remains mere propaganda, offering no glimpse of a world without war, of a disinterested viewer, or a conflicted mind and heart.

This comparison in the end leaves us perplexed and begs the question: is propagandistic art devoid of ethics real art? In Noujaim’s closing scene we see an unexpected rain falling over the media outpost in the desert and Khader muses over the futility of trying to cover war in a fair way. He exclaims: “Victory, and that’s it. People like victory. You do not have to justify it. Once you are victorious, that’s it.” Indeed, as a close friend reminded me in an e-mail exchange, history is written by the victors, they have the final control room. My friend has no doubt that had the Germans or the Japanese won the war they would have been the ones to conduct Nuremberg war crime trials for the Dresden and the Hiroshima bombings, as well as the abandoning of the Warsaw insurgents by the Soviets. He certainly has a valid historical point which in a sense goes all the way back to Thucydides’ ruminations on the war of Athens against Thebes and the awful nature of war in general.

Be that as it may, what, if anything, can then the observing writer or film director do in the face of the sad reality of the nature of war? I would suggest nothing but observe and report, that’s his job. In that serene observation and reporting, the truth, as distinguished from mere propaganda, may appear as a sort of epiphany. In Nowjaim’s Control Room, there is an eloquent example of this: at one point one of the reporters, Hassan Ibrahim, frustrated by the American condemnation of Al Jazeera for showing Iraqi civilians wounded in bombing raids, exclaims angrily: “You are the most powerful nation on earth, I agree. You can defeat everybody, I agree. You can crush everyone, I agree. But don’t ask us to love it as well!” And yet, moments later when a colleague asks Ibrahim who is going to stop the Americans, he answers thus: “The United States is going to stop the United States. I have absolute confidence in the American Constitution. And I have absolute confidence in the ability of the American people.”

It is that confidence in the people that allows a good journalist or a good film director to shut his mouth and let the people speak through the camera. Try as you may, you will not find this kind of ambivalence and openness to ambiguity in any of Moore’s condescending documentaries. Noujaim, Szabó and Morris’ films imply that in the final analysis, all that can be done is to merely assert an idea and a model of truth and fairness, however doomed, and then put one’s mind at rest by letting it lie for a while, like a seed beneath the snow, in the hope that it will spring eternal in what Silone has dubbed the spring-time of the “the conspiracy of hope.” For indeed Hermes always reaches his destination, especially when his messages have the form of authentic art. While Silone’s message is all but lost on the arrogant Moores of this world in love with their shallow political certainties, there is an important lesson to be learned from Fahrenheit 9/11, a sort of twelfth lesson to be added to the eleven lessons on war of McNamara, and it is this: truth is always war’s first casualty.

“It makes me hate war, but it doesn’t make me believe that we’re in a world that can live without war yet.”

Lt. Josh Rushing, Control Room
“POLITICIAN” BY STEVE CARTWRIGHT
Politics at 24 frames-a-second

By Asa Butcher

As America psyches itself up for another Presidential Election, I will have to familiarise myself with American politics via the Hollywood Handbook once again. Thanks to movies I am able to follow the political system of the USA a little easier, although it has been a shock discovering that reality really does differ from fiction - for example, the underdog never seems to win.
I am English and I grew up among British politics, with its House of Commons, House of Lords and occasional House of Cards, and even that was confusing at times - well, until Thanos gave me Jeffrey Archer’s 1984 novel *First Among Equals* to read. However, when it came to America with its House of Representatives, Congress, Senators, Capitol Hill, Bill of Rights and controversy over chads I am thankful I am not among the US’s 142 million registered voters, although it seems that the 20 million that chose not to vote in the 2004 Presidential Election also wish they weren’t part of the system.

In the same way that movies have made American football and baseball accessible for non-American audiences around the world, they have given us a foundation upon which to build an understanding of the American political system beginning with the main two parties: the Democrats and the Republicans - if I am to follow President Russell P. Kramer’s statement (Jack Lemmon) in *My Fellow Americans*, also starring James Garner, Republicans are better: “Well, as usual, the Republican comes up with a plan while the Democrat just aimlessly wanders in the woods.”

However, I have my doubts because *The American President*, my personal favourite among films set in the White House, features Michael Douglas playing Democratic President Andrew Shepherd and he doesn’t seem to be ‘wandering in the woods’. To me, President Andrew Shepherd embodies all the qualities of a great leader, at least in movie terms, which are, if you are interested intelligent, fallible, maintains his integrity and has sense of humour. The screenplay of *The American President* was written by Aaron Sorkin and the film inspired his television drama “The West Wing” that features another strong president.

It is the comparison between Sorkin’s movie president and television president where some of my confusion over Democrats and Republicans begins. Martin Sheen’s President Bartlet in the “The West Wing” is a Republican, yet he has all the same qualities as President Shepherd, which must mean that there’s more to the ideals of each party than the personality of one man. Okay, I knew that really, since Tony Blair hardly represented the early ideologies of the British Labour Party - quite the opposite.

My question should be: what are the differences between the Democratic and Republican parties? The answer to this question could easily extend to a thesis and probably has many times, so it seems the basic difference is that Republicans follow a conservative philosophy and Democrats follow a liberal philosophy. Have I got this right? Was I following the movies and TV series closely enough? I am beginning to understand why 20 million people decided to waste their vote last US Election Day.

Is it really fair to expect our politi-
cal representatives to live up to the expectations we get from watching these movies? I don’t see why not, since reality is always stranger than fiction. How many movies and television series have shown the new president taking the Executive Oath of Office? “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

I had to check the exact wording, but I did know the general idea of the inauguration text, which may clarify why so many people are terrified of President George W. Bush - perhaps he really is trying to the best of his ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution; maybe his heart is in the right place, shame about his brain. Anyway, comparing President Bush to any of the fictional presidents already mentioned would be unfair to them all, so who could we use?

How about President George W. Bush in Michael Moore’s Fahrenheit 9/11? Yeah, the man who described himself as a ‘War President’, although his statement does remind me of Barry Levinson’s Wag the Dog. The film is about Conrad Brean (Robert De Niro), a Washington spin doctor, who distracts the electorate from a presidential sex scandal by hiring Hollywood producer Stanley Motss (Dustin Hoffman) to construct a fake war with Albania.

Stanley Motss: The President will be a hero. He brought peace. Conrad Brean: But there was never a war. Stanley Motss: All the greater accomplishment.
In another strange twist of reality being stranger than fiction, one month after the release of *Wag the Dog* real-life President Bill Clinton found himself entangled in the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal and as the scandal dominated the American press, the US engaged in three separate military operations. ‘Life imitating art’, would be a great cliché to employ here, but I shall refrain. On the subject of scandals, how many people born after 1972 would fully understand the President Nixon/Watergate scandal if it hadn’t been for Hollywood? 

*All the President’s Men* is the 1976 film based on the book by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, the two journalists responsible for investigating the Watergate scandal for the *Washington Post*, while *Oliver Stone’s Nixon* is the 1995 film that tells the story of his political and personal life, so between the two there is little room left for imagination. Thanks to these two movies, plus a reference in *Forrest Gump*, we all know about Deep Throat, secret tape recordings, break-ins and the dogged investigative journalism of Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford... I mean Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein.

While researching this article I was surprised to discover that President Nixon wasn’t a complete failure in office. In fact during the Nixon Administration, the US established the Environmental Protection Agency, the Drug Enforcement Administration and formed U.S. Postal Service after abolishing the Post Office Department. Unfortunately these have been forgotten due his unintentional contribution to Hollywood’s screenplays, plus he also disillusioned voters with the Republican Party. Poor President Bartlet!

Nixon hasn’t been the only political movie target, but not many are used with their original name. For example, the central character of Willie Stark in *All the King’s Men* is believed to have been based upon the life of Huey P. Long, a former governor of Louisiana and that state’s U.S. senator in the mid-1930s. The movie was based upon a book originally written by Robert Penn Warren seemingly inspired by the famous quote by John Dalberg-Acton, 1st Baron Acton, which says, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

The character of Willie Stark begins as an idealistic young lawyer fighting for a better life for those without a voice, but as his political career develops and he gains more power then his morals and ideologies shift in the opposite direction - in other words, he is an excellent movie character and we hope that not all of our leaders are too similar. As I mentioned earlier, we can’t help comparing the characteristics of the fictional with the real, which may explain why Californians elected Arnold Schwarzenegger as their Governor or why the people of Carmel, California, elected Clint Eastwood as mayor in 1986.

For every sleazy, low-down, cheating, corrupt... or to put it simply, a politician (that’s satire), Hollywood does serve an antidote. One, a very large one, can be found in Frank Capra’s 1939 drama *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* in the form of James Stewart as Jefferson Smith, a man so dedicated to the American ideal of freedom and democracy he holds the floor of the Senate refusing to yield until the corruption of certain Senators is revealed. Thankfully neither the Republican Party nor Democratic Party is mentioned in the film leaving it to our own political conscience to apply the applicable labels.

According to trivia, when *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* was initially released politicians in Congress and the Washington D.C. press labelled the film as “anti-American and pro-Communist for its portrayal of corruption in the American government.” However today, the film is...
Imagine a future in which cows are extinct. Imagine your children can only see them in books. Imagine you could have done something to save them. Don’t wait until it is too late.

Act now and protect our planet.
cited as a patriotic tribute to democracy, which just goes to show how politicians can never make up their mind. It is not often that you can go from the Capra classic *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* to *Legally Blonde 2: Red, White & Blonde* in just one step, but today we can.

Reese Witherspoon returns as Elle Woods, a blonde that forces you to reassess the stereotype of dumb blonde, as she heads to Washington D.C. to fight against animal testing, or as she says, “A voice for those who can’t speak!” The film gently guides you through the process of writing and submitting a Bill to Congress and reminds you of the backstabbing that also take place, but it is certainly one of the stranger political films to guide you through Capitol Hill.

As America’s attention is about to tighten its focus on the 2008 US Elections we can only hope that the Politician’s Speech Writers follow the same course as the Writers Guild of America and initiate strike action. Can you imagine how great it would be to hear what the candidates really have to say rather than the well-crafted words written by their writers, but now it seems that I am once again mixing up reality with fiction.

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I wonder why the world dress mercenaries in robes labelled democracy apartheid butcher men parading in plastic handcuffs
I was born when Alfonso and Dhlakama break fast Portuguese tea freedom bleaching in mercenary bleached minds
I was born years when Slobodan, waved goodbye to Saddam saddam waving back to Slobodan
I was born when conspiracy programs crucified torijos and jaime after the heart beating obituaries of Allende and Sarkaro after the freedom messiahs, Lumumba and Nkuruma kissed their rifles and Bibles goodbye.

when great crocodile prayed for the miracle of the rainbow nation to canvas genocide blisters
africa is tired of reaping apartheid strawberries.
Symbiotic or parasitic?

By Thanos Kalamidas

When you were young, before getting on this cynical carousel we are all in, I’m sure there were moments you imagined that there are no countries, nothing to kill or die for and that all the people live in peace. I have and sometimes I still do, you see I’m a dreamer, but I’m not the only one, just hope someday you’ll all join us and the world will be as one. Of course these are not my words or better these are my words just John Lennon expressed them much better than I would have ever done, he added music as well and often sang it. John Lennon made art with a political statement.
One of the most dramatic moments in European history of the last century was the bombardment of Guernica from the Nazi forces, they literally flatten the city killing thousands and destroying a beautiful city. Some years later Pablo Picasso painted the memorable Guernica making a simple statement, a political statement, never again. In this painting where surrealism meets cubism and reality, there is the death of the people and the history of a country not just the town from the worst the humanity had seen till then. So what the relationship between art and politics? Symbiotic or parasitic and even worse, in this relationship who is the symbiotic and who is the parasite? This is the third time I’m writing this article or at least I’m trying to do so and every time the same question drops and it’s always coming after an example. After thinking of Bob Dylan and Verdi for example I was sure that it is a symbiotic relationship but then contemporary news got on me to make me feel like it is parasitic. Reading that the US television superstar Oprah Winfrey is following presidential candidate Barack Obama in his campaign tour in Iowa it was seeing this parasitic role. Oprah Winfrey is known for her TV chat-show that sometimes reaches the limits of trash TV, however the very same woman in her past proved to be a superb actress in the film *The Color Purple* that nearly gave her an Academy Award. I’m not sure how I would call her today but her past for a lot of people show an artist. And this woman uses her TV popularity and her identifiable persona to promote a politician. Parasitically the politician is using all that to make sure his success! But again that’s one side; Bono uses his popularity, something he earned as artist, to save Africa or at least to show us what’s really going on in Africa. Politics again, but in this case Bono’s politics and art have a symbiotic relationship. Wagner was openly racist and perhaps you might have excuses thinking of the era and the semantics of the time, still Wagner was Nazis’ favourite composer, they loved Wagner so much that when they were sending their victims to the gas chambers they were accompany them with Wagner’s music. Again art in the service of the parasitic politics. Please be careful I’m not regarding all politicians as parasites, on the contrary I was very happy when all Hollywood stars, writers and all kind of artists stood next to the democratic candidate against George W. Bush and they did so openly hoping that their public faces will give an end to this administration. And I don’t want to stop in what happens in USA today. There is an artist in Greece who has put himself at the service of the people and democracy after the WWII, Mikis Theodorakis. Mikis is a well known international composer and his career is well known, even for his more …pop style compositions like “Zorba’s Dance”. The same time the man has lived exiles, torturing even the firing squad after the civil war in Greece. A lot of his compositions talk about the people of Greece during these difficult times and a lot of them were composed while he was in prison. One of the most beautiful poems of the Greek Nobel awarded poet, Odiseas Elitis is about Cyprus and the unfair destiny of the island either under the British or Under the Turks. All these are political. I can go further; Vladimir Mayakovsky was all about politics, all about the revolution until …he committed suicide disappointed! And it was Jean Paul Sartre, a supreme philosopher of the 20th century. Even further, Aristophanes; the ancient master of comedy where politics dominated every single of his plays and the Sophocles who writes for the beauty of democracy. But then with all the above examples is art that turns to politics in a symbiotic state and never politics that turns to art. When politics turns to art is to use art. The birth of the posters and graphics design stands in the Soviet Union and especially Stalin’s period. Major soviet designers at the service of the revolution, people who wouldn’t even dare to mention their names in these pieces of modern art. All for the glory of the worker. That doesn’t mean that the other side stayed behind, who had the inspiration of the poster, ‘I want you’ with the American marine …unknown! The only thing remaining is to end ones more with John Lennon lyrics, so it is Xmas, war is over!
"ANTHEM TO MY PEOPLE"
BY MBIZO CHIRASHA

AM THE BLISTER OF THE TIME TO RESURRECT SOULS FROM
DECADES OF SERVITUDE
I AM NOT A COMMERCIAL BREAK IN A FEMINIST MAGAZINE
I AM NOT A CONDOM ADVERT IN SEXIST NEWSLETTER
I AM NOT A DUMPING SITE OF RACIAL HOGWASH

I AM A DREAM OF TIME
I AM A DREAM OF TIME
I SING TO THE MESSIAH TURNED JUDAS
RACE OBSESSED TSARS OF THIS WORLD
READING BULLET SANCTIONED LETTERS
POSTING NEUROTOXIN SMEARED PARCELS
BUCKETS BRIMMING OF BULLETCRAFT
POCKETS EMPTY OF FREEDOMCRAFT
WHERE HEROES ARE CREATED BY PROPAGANDA
AND LEGENDS ARE MADE OF RUMOURS
EVERY ROSE BELONG THE STATE
EVERY CHILD BELONG THE SLUM
EVERY PRAYER BELONG TO THE GUTTER
EVERY STOMACH BELONG TO THE MILITIA

I AM A DREAM OF TIME
I AM A DREAM OF TIME
FREEDOM MOTHERS DOMESTICATED INTO BIRTH GIVING MACHINES
BEAUTIFUL SISTERS TAMED INTO MONEY GUZZLING SLOT MACHINES
BIBLE MISSIONARIES BAPTIZING THEMSELVES INTO MENTAL SODOMIZING MACHINES
DEMOCRACY PRIZE LAUREATES GAMBLED AS PASSPORTS OF POLITICAL EXPEDENCY

I AM NOT A FORGOTTEN ROTTING DREAM
FOR THE OPPRESSED BECOME THE PARENTS OF TIME
AND THE OPPRESSORS BECOME THE CHILDREN OF TIME
I AM THE FORMULAE OF PEACE AND FREEDOM
I AM A DREAM OF TIME
I AM A DREAM OF TIME.
This series is from my recent exhibition: “Bodies”. They were inspired by my trip to Hiroshima. The 4 Japanese atom bomb babies are directly referenced from lab photos of babies born after the atomic bomb (between 1945 and 1948). The lyrics that run across the paintings are from the 1957 song “Atom Bomb Baby” by U.S band The Five Stars.

The ‘nuclear future’ quote came from the Australian PM and the opposing party responded with “John Howard is living in a nuclear fairyland”. The 4 celebrity babies were born in the same years in the Western world.
EMANCIPATE YOURSELVES FROM MENTAL SLAVERY
none but our selves can free our minds

have no fear for

ATOMIC ENERGY

Andrews Liver Salt
Got a doll, baby, I love her so
Nothing else like her anywhere you go
Man, she’s anything but calm
A regular pint sized atom bomb

Atom bomb baby, little atom bomb
I want her in my wigwam
She’s just the way I want her to be
A million times hotter than TNT

Atom bomb baby loaded with power
Radioactive as a TV tower
A nuclear fission in her soul
Loves with electronic control

Atom bomb baby, boy she can start
One of those chain reactions in my heart
A big explosion, big and loud
Mushrooms me right up on a cloud

Atom bomb baby sweet as a plum
Carries more wallop than uranium
When she kisses, there’s no hitch
Zero power, she turns on the switch

Atom bomb baby, little atom bomb
I want her in my wigwam
She’s just the way I want her to be
A million times hotter than TNT
Atom bomb baby, little atom bomb!

"Atom Bomb Baby" - The Five Stars, 1957

This is the piece that started off my preoccupation with nuclear waste. John Howard (Australian PM) is pushing to strengthen Australia’s wealth and position in the energy crisis by mining the large reserves of uranium mainly for U.S export. Of course, the majority of the current and proposed mines (and dumping sites) are close to aboriginal territories, and far away from all the major cities. So hence, the aboriginal kids in this piece are wearing rather different sportswear brands, and their skin is broken up with insertions of damaged cells and DNA.
W.H. Auden: Poet of the Age of Anxiety
Wystan Hugh Auden, whose birth 100 years ago in 1907, is marked this year by two separate groups of poetry readers. Each group celebrates half of his poetic life and rather tries to forget about the other half, seeing one part of his life as the perfect image of the modern poet who lost his way.

There is the W.H. Auden (he rarely used his first names) of the 1930s, the English political poet who reported on the Spanish civil war and the start of the Sino-Japanese war in 1939. Then, there is the poet living in the USA during the 1940s who became a US citizen and became primarily concerned with what was called at the time “neo-orthodox Protestant” theology. Finally there is the writer largely of book reviews and short literary essays living much of the time in Italy and Austria until his death in 1973 in Vienna. The one constant running through his life and coloring his more personal writings was a homosexual bonding to men that he hoped would last and never did as reflected in his poem *It’s No Use raising a Shout*: It’s no use raising a shout.

No, Honey, you can cut that right out.
I don’t want any more hugs;
Make me some fresh tea.

In 1930, shortly after publishing his first book of poems, he went to live in Berlin. The Berlin of Weimar Germany was more tolerant of open homosexuality than was the England of his youth. In Berlin, he began an intensive literary and on-again-off-again sexual relationship with Christopher Isherwood (1904-1986). The two men had known each other slightly at Oxford University. The somewhat older Isherwood was already well introduced in the English publishing and art world. He helped Auden with introductions to editors. It was T.S. Eliot’s publisher Faber & Faber which published Auden on Eliot’s recommendation even if Eliot’s conservative religious and political positions were the opposite of Auden’s.

In Berlin, Auden and Isherwood became aware of social unrest and the clash between the Communists and the rising Nazi party. Auden became a Marxist because Marxism provided a ready-made structure to explain conflict. All his life Auden was interested in developing frameworks to interpret social and religious categories, and the Marxist dialectic was both a philosophy of history and a structure to understand current events. Auden, however, was never attracted to the political parties that were the manifestations of Marxist views.

With Isherwood, Auden wrote a number of verse plays that combined humor, irony with the issues of the day. It was a socially-con-
conscious art but they never departed from a certain ironic tone and a concern with language. Auden was always concerned with the impact of words, and his poems were usually clear and in a conversational style. He could recognize the importance of style and the use of words of other poets.

In the 1930s, confronted with social unrest, William Butler Yeats moved increasingly to the Right even urging “the despotic rule of the educated classes”. In 1933, Yeats was for a short time drawn towards General O’Duffy, leader of the Irish Fascists — the Blue Shirts. Fortunately, O’Duffy was a clown from whom Yeats separated quickly but not from some of O’Duffy’s ‘law and order’ ideas. Thus, although Yeats had become an opponent of Auden’s values, Auden’s tribute to Yeats on his death in 1939 is one of the most moving and just.

When the Spanish civil war broke out, Auden was immediately drawn to the Republican cause. He went to Spain thinking of becoming an ambulance driver. However, his literary talents were more needed in the information and propaganda services. In Spain, he saw that the political realities were more ambiguous and troubling than he thought, but he saw that war was ready to expand. He also saw the link between events in Europe and Asia. In 1938, Auden and Isherwood went to China to cover the Sino-Japanese conflict and jointly wrote a powerful account *Journey to a War*.

On their way back by boat from China, Auden and Isherwood decided to stay in the USA. Auden in *New Year Letter* reviews the political decade in which he had been the leading poetry voice of the Left:

*Who, thinking of the last ten years Does not hear howling in his ears The Asiatic cry of pain The shots of executing Spain See stumbling through his out-raged mind*

*The Abyssinians, blistered, blind, The dazed uncomprehending stare Of the Danubian despair The Jew wrecked in the German cell, Flat Poland frozen into hell.*

Once in the USA, the Auden-Isherwood couple broke. Auden wrote:

*If equal affection cannot be Let the more loving one be me.*

Isherwood moved to California and became part of the religious-mystical circle around Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard. Isherwood became a disciple of the Indian teacher Swami Prabhavananda and cooperated in the translations of a number of Indian religious texts. Later Isherwood’s memories of Berlin *Goodbye to Berlin* served as the basis of plays and films.

Meanwhile, Auden stayed on the East Coast, first teaching at Swarthmore, a Quaker college near Philadelphia from 1942 -45; he then lived in New York City in the literary fashionable St Marks Place. He began writing for US journals, in particular *The New Yorker* and *Vogue* both of which paid well so that he could write without having

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*Funeral Blues*, W.H. Auden, 1936

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone, Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone, Silence the pianos and with muffled drum Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.
E V E R Y  Y E A R  W E  F I G H T  T O
E N D  R A C I S M
And we will keep on fighting until we do.
a regular teaching job, though he was often asked to give lectures at universities.

Auden became increasingly influenced by the Protestant theologian and political analyst Reinhold Niebuhr who was teaching in New York City. Niebuhr combined a socialist-leaning politics with a Protestant theology which stressed that humans were always limited in their ability to do good by the reality of sin, which is self-centeredness.

In the Niebuhr spirit, Auden wrote “Man is not, as the romantics imagined, good by nature. Men are equal not in their capacities and virtues but in their natural bias toward evil. No individual or class therefore can claim an absolute right to impose its view of good upon them. Government must be democratic, the people must have a right to make their own mistakes and to suffer for them.”

In New York, Auden entered into a long-term literary and homosexual relationship with Chester Kallman, a younger poet and writer. The two together began writing opera libretti for the English composer Benjamin Britten, who also spent the war years in the USA. They wrote together the words for Britten’s opera Paul Bunyan – a folk hero that Britten used to deal with his newly-discovered American themes, as well as the words for many of Britten’s song cycles. Kallman and Auden wrote Rake’s Progress for Igor Stravinsky who had also moved to the USA as well as an opera of Hans Henze based on The Bacchae of Euripides.

To mark the war years and the start of the Cold War, Auden wrote The Age of Anxiety which won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1947. While the book was not that widely read, the title gave its name to a whole period and sections of it were often quoted.

By 1948, Auden was again attracted to life in Europe but largely places that were not associated in his mind with his experiences of the 1930s. He spent part of each year in Italy and later both Italy and Austria. He returned to Oxford University to give some lectures on poetry, but post-war England held out few attractions for him. Although he continued writing book reviews and short essays, his declining years never caught the spirit of the times as did his 1930s poems and his 1947 The Age of Anxiety. Nevertheless, his work merits being known, a voice of a time past.

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**“Tribute”**
By Mbizo Chirasha

my poetry sing of legends, legends of innocence
legends of conscience
legends of renaissance
LUTHER, SAROWIWA, MARLEY, NKURUMAH, SAMORA, FANON and others swallowed by the mercenary train

my poetry is angry
my poetry is pregnant with emotion
it spits global confusion
remember chimurenga
chant umvukela
sing mau-mau
sing maji maji
robin was not a garden of roses
it was a dungeon of blisters
rise MADIBA, TAMBO, LITHULI
these are not toys but heroes
rise BIKO, UMKONTO WE SIZWE
THE SPEAR OF AFRICA
“Goodbye Prague”
By Alexander Mikhaylov

Living in Prague for six years
Then moving away
Then
Returning a year later
For short stay
‘How do you feel about coming back to Prague?’
‘I don’t know... Well, actually...
I feel nothing’
Indeed
Nothing goes right
Failing to perform a grand entrance
Dead drunk in Berlin, spacing out
on a bench
Of the bus station
The Prague bus is late as usual
Finally it arrives
Climbing in, falling asleep
Being hauled outside

By border control
Two guys dressed in vomit green
Leafing through your passport
‘You have no Czech visa.’
‘No.’
‘You’ve got no stamp in Berlin.’
‘No.’
‘How long are you going to stay in
Prague?’
‘A week, maybe a bit longer.’
‘We’ll write down your passport number.’
‘All right.’
A day later
Walking down the street, scanning
the street,
Trying to feel sentimental but
failing at that too
Sitting in a pub, killing time
Shopping...
‘But I still feel nothing. How
come?’

Staying in somebody’s apartment
A front door is
Pregnant with industrial locks (and
none of them functions properly-
Even a landlord is having troubles
opening them)
Roar of a drill in an apartment
below at nine am
Dog shit lying on pavement
In short
Here they are:
All these familiar forms of local
madness but
These days they leave me
unperturbed
Once I hoped to find home here but
It seems to be all in the past, dead
and gone now
‘So what do you think?’
‘Oh well, I think it’s just
Some ordinary Central European
city.’
Last night I was watched *Clear and Present Danger* in which Harrison Ford plays a CIA Analyst whose actions eventually uncovers corruption at the highest level, namely the President of the United States. Donald Moffet plays the part this time, but my problem was I couldn’t stop seeing him as Steve Martin’s father in *Housesitter*, and to solve this distraction my mind began to think of the best movie presidents.

Naturally, Harrison Ford in *Air Force One* was the first that came to mind due to his face being forefront of my mind and, let’s face it, he was fantastic in the film, especially with the line, “Get off my plane!” The more you think about it, there has been a surprising amount of actors playing the part, plus a few real life presidents, such as JFK in *Forrest Gump* and *The Right Stuff* thanks to archive footage and CGI.

One of the earliest portrayals of the Commander in Chief of which I know was actually played by an Englishman by the name of Peter Sellers in 1964’s *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. For those who have never seen the film, watch it, and for those who have seen it, watch it again. It is a classic that does the US President genre proud, especially when Sellers utters the now immortal line, “Gentlemen, you can’t fight in here! This is the War Room.”

Following in the footsteps of *Dr. Strangelove* and the end-of-the-world movies are countless chances for actors to flex their furrowed brow as they give their Presidential motivational speeches (Bill Pullman in *Independence Day*), act comically bewildered (Jack Nicholson in *Mars Attacks!*), break racial frontiers (Morgan Freeman in *Deep Impact*) and simply die (Perry King in *The Day After Tomorrow*). It is sad that none of the presidents that appear in the X-Men trilogy were that memorable.
I have found it strange that Clint Eastwood has never been a movie president, although he was a Secret Service agent in Wolfgang Petersen’s *In the Line of Fire* and saved Jim Curley’s president from assassination. Michael Douglas has also been a Secret Service agent in *The Sentinel* protecting David “Sledge Hammer” Rasche’s president, although Douglas was also sleeping with the First Lady played by Kim Basinger. Douglas had already notched up his own presidential performance in *The American President*, which was the inspiration for the TV series “West Wing” and Martin Sheen’s phenomenal role as President Bartlett. Whenever I think of *The American President* I always pair it with *Dave* and Kevin Kline’s double role as president and his look-alike, which never fails to brighten a wet Sunday afternoon.

The mention of “West Wing” brings us nicely into *My Fellow Americans*, which co-starred Bradley “Josh Lyman” Whitford. *My Fellow Americans* has none other than Dan Aykroyd as president, plus Jack Lemmon and James Garner as former presidents. Another favourite of mine that features a president recently out of office is *Welcome to Mooseport* starring Gene Hackman as the former Air Force One owner. However, this is an article about movie presidents still in the Oval Office, so we can give honourable mentions to director Hugh Wilson’s voice in *Guarding Tess*, Tim Robbins in *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* and Donald Pleasance in *Escape from New York*, although technically he is not in the White House but trapped in Manhattan Island’s prison. It seems a Pandora’s Box has been opened because I keep remembering more, such as Billy Bob Thornton in *Love Actually*, Michael Keaton in *First Daughter* and, I must mention him, Anthony Hopkins in *Nixon* – I’m not sure if his Hannibal or Nixon was scarier.

To my knowledge there has yet to be a Hollywood film with a female president, although television has taken that step by giving Geena Davis the role in “Commander in Chief”. As I reach the end I would not forgive myself for missing Dennis Haysbert in his TV role as President David Palmer in “24” because he is one man with whom you really should not mess! Anyway, perhaps in a few years, once the Constitution has been changed, we will see President Arnold Schwarzenegger in the Oval Office and the fiction will become reality. Now, did I miss anybody?
“Letter from Haiti”
By Mbizo Chirasha

black sister whose blood flow in my veins
my wounds are your blisters
that boil with the fear of tomorrow
and the bitterness of yesterday
this letter is to convince stones and bones that my
blood flow in your veins
that you are my black sister
in bullets, in stars, in freedom, in flowers, in dust
for those who groan alone die alone
and those who weep together, laugh together
i am not Indian,
i am not Haitian,
not American, not Anglican
i am the daughter of the moon
and dust shipped up to
hear by the boat that missed
bullets during the exodus.
“Only takes one tree to make 1,000 matches
Only takes one match to burn a thousand trees”

- ‘A Thousand Trees’ by the Stereophonics
Nuclear fusion TEARS the world apart
SAY YES TO PEACE
THE DEAD PINKY by Theo Versten

“The thing was that it just freaked me out that she didn’t have a pinky finger on her right hand anymore…” Theo Versten’s intriguing opening line develops this physical mutilation into a college relationship with a difference. Be warned, it may not be suitable for the faint of heart…

Hemingway’s curse by Alexandra Pereira

The Compleat Angler Hotel on the island of Bimini, in the Bahamas, was destroyed by fire a few years ago. It was one of the refuges of Ernest Hemingway and it is believed he wrote a few novels there. Now, it has inspired a different kind of story. The author felt the news failed to reflect the extent of the fiery destruction and begins her journey to change all that.

RIP 2006 cartoons’ book by Thanos Kalamidas

Six-feet-under, two corpses voice their strong, yet humorous, opinions on contemporary events, plus they are occasionally joined by everybody’s favourite bloodsucker. Download the complete 2006 ‘R.I.P., including the Dracula’ today.

ShowBizz, Directing. Book #1 by Thanos K & Asa B

How many cocks have you ever seen? Perhaps I should rephrase that: how many roosters have you ever met? I have met one rooster in my life and it was a nasty day on the farm… if you want to see what happened just … read the first book with the adventures of Showbizz.
The Trunk by Bohdan Yuri

Bohdan Yuri has captured the emotion of a young girl’s decision to leave home and explore the waiting world, but a letter written by her recently deceased grandfather may change all that. Download this touching short story today.

A Mika Moose Christmas by Thanos K & Asa B

The Christmas adventure that has been on everybody’s lips. The simple story of a moose and a magpie saving Christmas - what more could you want?

Beautiful People #1 by Thanos Kalamidas

The Extraordinary Beautiful People is Thanos Kalamidas’ graphic novel debut and it is unlike anything you have ever seen before. Dark, surreal, stylish and thought provoking are just four adjectives that come to mind, but feel free to choose some of your own.

Beautiful People #2 by Thanos Kalamidas

Ovi proudly presents ‘The Extraordinary Beautiful People’ festive edition, which turns Christmas on its head, leaving you staring into empty darkness and wondering how it can still be so surreal, yet so cool.
How can I play hide & seek when 21 children die every minute? Who'll play football with me when 21 friends die every minute? If I close my eyes and count to a 100, 35 children are dead.

I had never heard of Welcome to Mooseport, but, as a fan of Ray Romano in the TV series “Everybody Loves Raymond” and the voice of Manfred in Ice Age, I felt obliged to watch him in this feature film along side the great Gene Hackman. The DVD cover featured both of these actors and the tagline: This town isn’t small enough for the both of them. I had a feeling what to expect.

The story begins when the divorced former President Monroe ‘Eagle’ Cole (Gene Hackman) moves Mooseport, a small town in Maine. The local council invite him to become their next mayor and he accepts, but Handy Harrison (Ray Romano), an unpretentious, honest local citizen, had already accepted. Handy backs out to avoid any embarrassment, but he changes his mind when Sally, his girlfriend (Maura Tierney), is asked out by Monroe. The campaign’s soon a war.

Well, that is what the synopsis reckoned, but it was certainly a one-sided war. Handy never really shows his teeth, remaining consistently nice and honest, which leaves Monroe looking even more egotistical and power hungry. The character of Handy is Ray Barone from “Everybody Loves Raymond”, even down to the clothes he wears and the jokes he makes, but he is still thoroughly likeable.

I guess that was part of the problem, I kept expecting both characters to show their teeth and enter into the mean-spirited political battle, but it never happens. Once I accepted that Handy was never going to give in to Eagle’s underhand tactics you enjoy the movie more. The best moment is when they decide to play a round of golf to decide who gets to date Sally and the ex-president is hit with a stinging revelation about his golfing life.

The film was never going to win any awards, but it wasn’t the worst way to spend a couple of hours on a Friday night. Gene Hackman is his usual fantastic self, as he tries to come to terms with the fact he is no longer the most powerful man in the world and his ex-wife is taking half of everything, including his book deal and speech-making money. A fun sub-plot is his Presidential Library that slowly diminishes in size as the money slowly runs out.

The remainder of the main characters do enough to keep the film moving, especially the town council members who are as eccentric as you would come to expect in a small town. My only problem was with “NewsRadio” and “E.R.”’s Maura Tierney who never smiles or looks as though she is having any fun, and she seems to be the same in whatever she stars.

In films such as these, it is always the minor characters that get the most laughs are the most enjoyable. Marcia Gay Harden, an actress who you can never remember where you have seen her before, is loveable as Monroe’s assistant, Fred Savage from “The Wonder Years” has suddenly become a man and the cracking Rip Torn steals every scene he appears in.

Welcome to Mooseport has its moments and isn’t too political to bore any popcorn-munchers, or as Hackman’s character regularly says, “You have the Eagle’s word!”

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**Everybody loves Gene**

*By Asa Butcher*

Directed by Donald Petrie

Starring
Gene Hackman
Ray Romano
Marcia Gay Harden
Maura Tierney

Released by 20th Century Fox, 2004

Running time 131 min approx.
How can I play hide & seek when 21 children die every minute?

Who’ll play football with me when 21 friends die every minute?

If I close my eyes and count to a 100. 35 children are dead.
Every month over 2,000 people are killed or maimed by mine explosions.

We believe there is nothing more disabling than pity.