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The Political Impact of Film

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No. 40

Political Science and General Education

Bridging Metaphysics, Theory and Practice

by David C. Leege, University of Notre Dame

The thesis of this article is simple: the primary function of political scientists is to nurture civic skills and political understanding within our students and those who read our literature. The principal component of both skill and understanding is the capacity to visualize and interpret events through several quite different metaphors. Sensitivity to alternate metaphors comes through liberal education, as traditionally defined. A capacity to recognize the limitations to any given metaphor depends, first, on puzzling life experiences, secondly, on a reservoir of alternate ways of viewing the world, and thirdly, on educational experiences that cultivate deep analytical thought and build self-confidence with thinking differently than other people do. If it is true that a liberal education frees people to recognize perspective, predisposition, and prejudice, and if politics is indeed the art and science that must integrate into courses of action values about nature, humanity, society, and the Divine, then political scientists have an enormous stake in the general education curricula of our universities and colleges. How we dispatch that responsibility, in turn, has enormous implications for civil society.

That thesis propounded in the abstract, I now want to turn into a raconteur. In the telling of stories about ourselves or others, we often-times shed light on the forces that close our minds to events or open our minds to new understanding. For it is really in our life experiences as civic actors that we bridge metaphysics, theory, and practice. And it is in reflecting on these life experiences that we draw lessons for curricular objectives and professional performance that may help others bridge metaphysics, theory, and practice. As some readers recognize, this autobiographical device is similar to that used by contemporary theologians to sharpen an hermeneutic. To the stories:

Story 1

Twenty-odd years ago I left graduate school in deep confusion. I had set unattainable goals: I wanted to have a Ph.D. in hand and be administrative assistant to the Governor of Indiana, both by age 26. I was unmarried, celibate, and single-mindedly devoted to my studies and my politics. However, some terrible fears caught up with me that fall and I couldn't function in school. As a last resort I went home, the family doctor diagnosed my case as severe mononucleosis, and put me to bed for two months. (Mononucleosis is a clinical diagnosis but is probably often used as a gentle euphemism for psychological malaise or breakdown.) From my bed I gradually finished off the passel of incompletes I, like so many graduate students, had accumulated. I decided to take a job dealing with other people's problems. I was going to be the Northern Indiana field examiner for the newly-created Indiana Civil Rights Commission. Even though the appointment was wired, I needed six months' experience in the public welfare field before I could meet minimum qualification standards. I took the civil service exam for case-worker, ended up twenty-fourth of twenty-eight candidates, but this being Indiana, the first twenty-three were bumped on technicalities by my political patron, and I arrived at the Lake County Department of Public Welfare in Gary on a bitter cold day in January 1962. I guess I grew up on the streets of the Central District of Gary but I wouldn't advise it as a form of psychotherapy.

Why bother with all the autobiographical stuff? Because out of confusion comes confusion. Sometimes you cannot puzzle over events that deserve puzzling unless you are already disoriented. Alternate metaphors seldom present themselves when experience already makes sense. Back to Gary.
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Teaching Politics With Films

by Michael A. Genovese
Loyola Marymount University

Film is the greatest teacher, because it teaches not only through the brain, but through the whole body.

— Vsevolod Pudovkin

The Scene is unforgettable. Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator* plays Adenoid Hynkel, a Fuhrer-figure, modeled comically after Adolf Hitler. Hynkel, alone in a large room, wanders over to a world-globe, picks it up, and begins to playfully bounce the world into the air, buoyantly kicking and tapping the world into the air like his little toy balloon. Suddenly, the balloon explodes.

The comical image is powerful. Here is Chaplin, the Little Tramp, holding Hitler up to ridicule, mocking his desires to do with the real world, what Hynkel does with the globe. Chaplin makes a forceful political statement through his comic talents. In this brief scene, Hitler's power-hungry drives are conveyed to the audience while Hitler is being ridiculed at the same time.

There are many ways to make political statements. Speeches, statistics, songs, books, and articles all are used as conveyors of political messages. As *The Great Dictator* illustrates, movies can also serve as political statements. Through the dramatic or comical presentation of ideas and events, film makers can — and often do — present political issues to the public. To be effective, these messages must also be entertaining, but within this context, political issues can be presented.

In *Duck Soup*, the Marx Brothers are not only funny, they are also making statements about the absurdity of war and diplomacy. In *Citizen Kane*, Orson Welles is not only presenting the story of a personal tragedy, he is also making statements about power and influence in America. In *Ninotchka*, Ernst Lubitsch is not only presenting an endearing romantic-comedy, he is also reinforcing the predominant prejudices concerning life in the Soviet Union versus life in Western culture. All of these movies are entertaining; all are political.

(continued on p. 4)

Examining First Principles and Political Understanding

(continued from p.3)

But there is one point I would like to reinforce: development of facility with alternate metaphors is not an argument for subjectivism and relativity in the classroom. Quite the contrary: it is a very demanding intellectual process. A metaphor can be left at the intuitive level of the poet's pastiche. Or it can be teased, analyzed, tested for its utility in portraying a chunk of reality. All metaphors are not created equal. The teacher must push the student to ask: (1) is the metaphor sufficiently clear that it is possible to look for evidence substantiating it or discrediting it as a useful representation of something we puzzle about; (2) how does this metaphor stand up to other metaphors historically; and (3) what is the primary function of this metaphor — to persuade or to explain? Such questions differ little from the questions scientists address to a model: scientists are concerned to some extent with the degree to which a model corresponds to what it purports to represent, but they are far more concerned with the fruitfulness of a model for dismissing inappropriate conclusions, for suggesting new relationships, and for orienting us toward appropriate strategies for measuring and accessing evidence. Most importantly, the discipline of such intellectual effort sensitizes students to "deep metaphors," i.e., metaphors that are so fundamental to accepted thought ways that we do not normally question them. The teleology of time assumed in the third story was an illustration of a "deep metaphor."

Still others may respond that the level of understanding that surfaced in the three earlier stories is far beyond anything we could hope for in general education courses. There is something of a disjuncture between the thesis of this article and the tool used to entice the reader. This contention, however, loses sight of another central point. Most politically compelling metaphors are at a rather elementary level; their primary function is subtle persuasion or thought-inhibiting reinforcement. This is the world where our students debut as citizens. Consider a collection of TV spots from the election past: (1) a cow defends Doc Melcher from Eastern money and helps the voter recognize what that money is spreading — you had better not step in it; (2) an elephant is loose in the 1776 China Shop — you had better protect those rare dishes; (3) stagflation took 50 years of New Deal mismanagement to reach its current illness — so don't quickly get rid of the doctor who has prescribed the right remedy; let the remedy have time to take hold; or (4) stay the course! Just as this is the stuff of electoral campaigns, (5) dominoes are the stuff of military preparedness.

There is not a metaphor used in this list that is beyond the ken of the college freshman. Yet consider how compelling they are in structuring the political agenda and linking politicians and voters to a resolute course of action. From Edelman's *Symbolic Uses of Politics* to Nimmo and Combs' recent *Mediated Political Reality*, there is substantial evidence

that the stuff of politics is more accessible to dramaturgical explanation than to other modes of representation. And that is why facility in dealing with metaphors — whether shallow and persuasive metaphor or deep and explanatory metaphor — must come in the curriculum that reaches the largest proportion of the academy.

Perhaps one of the most promising curricula advances is the increasing use of the Freshman Seminar. Many universities and colleges are concentrating top faculty talent from all fields of learning in the small — usually 15 members — seminars in the first two semesters of college. Aimed at developing writing, oral expressions, and analytical reading skills, these seminars are an ideal location for experienced teachers to embark toward the general education objective described earlier. But it's only the beginning.

Finally, the thesis of this article has consequences for another of our endeavors: public policy analysis and program evaluation has increasingly found its way into our curriculum. Political science, except for the halcyon days of behavioralism, has always been close to public administration and public policy. In recent years many of us have been involved with joint programs in policy analysis/program evaluation. If indeed the metaphor locks and unlocks reality and if we want to help others bridge metaphysics, theory, and practice, we must recognize that policy and program evaluation involves not simply a set of scientific skills but, more importantly, an educative art. A program evaluator is not only a detached outside scientist who pokes around probes in an effort to produce a creditable analytical study. He or she is foremost a facilitator. The evaluator knows that self-understanding is more important than expert advice; thus, if he or she can nudge the administrator to think about the organization, the policy, or the program in a different way — through a different metaphor — greater organizational adaptation and change are likely to occur. And that is as it should be. In a democracy, we do not need an elite corps of scientific investigators telling us how to run our society or our programs. We need a broad body of politicians and administrators who have the capability and self-esteem to think disturbing thoughts about their own programs and performance. In short, they need education year in and year out, not answers.

I suppose coming from a man who once wrote that Green's Index of Consistency-B is an omnibus internal consistency test to be preferred over Cronbach's alpha, these are curious words. But no doors of my understanding were ever locked or unlocked by a statistical measure of reliability. Do not misunderstand: tools are important and must be taught; they are extensions of the strong logics, such as mathematics, found in the general education curriculum. Tools too, however, make sense only in relationship to the specific model of space, or time, or whatever they summarize. If this is a plea for a much more philosophical-ly-oriented curriculum, so be it. Metaphysics, as a critical examination of first principles, is a reasonable place to begin the understanding of actions political. It is well nigh impossible to bridge theory and practice, political science and political life, without an understanding of forces meta-

Films as Aids in Teaching

(continued from p. 1)

Motion pictures present themes shared by a common, worldwide audience. The significance of these common shared experiences is yet to be fully determined, and there are some conflicts in the images presented (some liberal, some conservative), but we are being exposed to many common forms of stimulation, and these shared experiences do something "to us." As Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. writes:

...the American movie has provided a common dream life, a common fund of reference and fantasy, to a society divided by ethnic distinctions and economic disparities. At the same time, it may well have excited and even incited the oppressed by displaying the abundance presumably available to their masters. One may guess that movies have generated as much discontent as they have acquiescence.¹

And Max Lerner has written in his *Study America as a Civilization*:

Never in history has so great an industry as the movies been so nakedly and directly built out of the dreams of a people. Any hour of the day or the evening you can go into a darkened theater...and as the figures move across the screen you sail off on storm-tossed seas of sex, action, and violence, crime and death...When you come home to sleep, your dreams are woven around the symbols which themselves have been woven out of your dreams, for the movies are the stuff American dreams are made of.²

Movies can extend our experiences. We can see, and even feel things seemingly withdrawn from our daily lives. We may vicariously take part in any number of human activities. Through movies we can "escape" into other worlds, other experiences, other life styles. While we normally view "escape" as a derogatory activity, it is not necessarily a bad thing. As Hortense Powdermaker writes:

...escape per se, is neither good nor bad. All forms of art offer some kind of escape, and it may well be that escape is a necessary part of living. The real question is the quality of what one escapes into. One can escape into a world of imagination and come from it refreshed and with new understanding. One can expand limited experiences into broad ones. One can escape into saccharine sentimentality or into fantasies which exaggerate existing fears. Hollywood provides ready-made fantasies or daydreams; the problem is whether these are productive or nonproductive; whether the audience is psychologically enriched or impoverished.³

Indeed, the question is the quality of the escape. Do movies enrich or impoverish? Do the political messages contained in the film help make us slaves to the state or do they liberate us? Do they educate and enlighten, or do they numb our senses? Films can be influential in both a positive and a negative way.

Can films "teach"? No. Teaching and learning require time, reflection,

exchange, thought. Films are not conducive to this type of learning. But films can be very effective aids in teaching. They can present ideas, situations, conflicts. They can serve as discussion-generating tools. Beyond question, the finest discussions I have had took place in my Political Films classes.

Through films, one can convey to the student a variety of important social and political messages. Nationalism, and the struggle for independence can be conveyed by using *The Battle of Algiers* (1966); Presidential politics can be seen in *The Best Man* (1964); crisis decision-making is brought out in *The Missiles of October* (1975); political recruitment can be seen in *The Last Hurrah* (1958) and *All The King's Men* (1950); the blacklist and McCarthy era⁴ are portrayed in *My Son John* (1952) and *The Front* (1976); the need for social order is presented in *Lord of the Flies* (1976); propaganda⁵ can be seen in *Triumph of the Will* (Germany, 1935), *The Battleship Potemkin* (Soviet Union, 1925), and *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (U.S., 1951). Other films can likewise be used to aid in teaching. For example, Depression politics⁶ is brought out in *American Madness* (1932); the politics of women is portrayed in *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (1979); power is seen in *Citizen Kane* (1940); electoral politics is presented in *The Candidate* (1972); and nuclear politics⁷ can be seen in *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), or *Fail-Safe* (1964). Questions dealing with constitutional law can be explored by investigating censorship of movies.⁸

The way "reality" is portrayed in film may have an effect upon the way we view the world around us, thus the images on the screen may help shape our perception of the world. If films tend to portray certain types of people in consistent and repeated ways, this image may become our view of reality. In this respect, the way political ideas and politicians are portrayed in films can be quite important. For example, Hollywood films have never been very kind in portraying politicians. Rarely are they pictured as decent, honorable men intent on doing good. Rather, as Rob Edelman writes:

...throughout its brief history, Hollywood has consistently depicted politicians as either ruthless, gutless scoundrels or pompous, bumbling idiots concerned not with serving their constituents but with mouthing meaningless rhetoric, making deals to get elected or obtaining the fast buck.⁹

When one thinks of the Hollywood-style politician, the name of Edward Arnold comes to mind. The incessant "heavy," Arnold was the bad-guy politician personified. And in the strict "bad guys must always be punished" code of film, Arnold always lost in the end (a far cry from reality to be sure). But whether it was Edward Arnold, Edwin Maxwell or Claude Rains, the politician was rarely the good guy in American films.

Films which deal with political issues are commonly referred to as "problem films." While many in the movie industry have shied away from dealings with controversial topics ("movies are entertainment"... (continued on p.5)

Film—

Elitist or Democratic?

(continued from p.4)

you have a message, send it by Western Union.") such issues cannot long be ignored. Matters of consequence cannot help but creep into films. Most of the criticism of the lack of meaning in film content has come from the left, with suggestions that films avoid dealing squarely with such issues as racism, fascism, imperialism, etc., but though these criticisms have merit, they are only partially correct. Films avoid more issues than they confront, but on occasion, they do confront serious and controversial issues. For example, during the 1920's, it was unusual to find films attacking the "American Dream". Yet, such films as Von Stroheim's *Greed* (1923), Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* (1925), and King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928) did indeed attack aspects of the American Dream.

Those who say that a movie is no place for a political statement suggest that a theatre is a place for "dreaming, not learning." Maybe so, but in our dreams are revealed a good deal about who we are, what we want, and what we wish to be. Our dreams are a part of us, and those dreams reveal a truth which is important. Movies cannot long avoid presenting matters of social significance, for such matters are at the core of drama and human existence.

Certainly there have been periods in which the major issues of the day were avoided: the Depression years offer escape more than illumination, and the 1950's saw Hollywood running with fear in the face of Communist investigations by the House Un-American Activities Committee. But in spite of their momentary lapses, films express many of the social conflicts at work in society. Their record is not admirable, but it may be defensible. For even in the escape offered by Hollywood and films from around the world, we can see the hopes and dreams being offered to people, and being accepted by people.

Richard MacCann notes the three major problems which producers confront when making a film of social consequences: First, most people prefer "lighter" films—musicals, spectacles, comedies, etc. Consequently, the potential audience is perceived (mistakenly, I think) to be somewhat small. Second, the issue may be a thing of the past before the movie can be completed. Finally, there is the problem of dramatic treatment: How do you present your topic in an entertaining and convincing way?¹⁰

To these three, I would add a fourth reason: money. Studios and individuals with the amount of money needed to finance the production and distribution of movies are not interested in stirring up the hearts and minds of the general public. Better to keep them in a state of mindless bliss; than present political ideas which might ultimately be used to arouse the public to action, action which might be directed against those with wealth and power.

Making problem films is thus a difficult matter, and one wonders about their effect on public attitudes. The escapist films of the 1930's were thought to relieve some of the tension brought on by the Depression, but have the problem films brought about social change? Dore Schary, the producer of a number of

problem films has said that:

...movies seldom lead public opinion: they merely reflect public opinion and perhaps occasionally accelerate it. . . . No motion picture ever started a trend of public opinion or thinking. Pictures merely dramatize these trends and keep them going.¹¹

Whether films change peoples' minds, reinforce already held beliefs, or numb peoples' senses is uncertain. Film content is a mixed bag of images and ideas aimed at a variety of audiences with a variety of purposes.

It is clear that films can and do present audiences with a host of political and social themes. The effect of these themes on the audience is hard to determine. But clearly, the potential exists for films to have a major impact on their audiences. In light of this "potential" power of film, we must ask, is the proper role of the film in relations to our social/political life?

Is film, as John Simon suggests, a medium or art form whose purpose is to "elevate" the viewer, to sharpen the audience's critical, artistic, and intellectual skills and standards? Should films thus serve to elevate the masses to aristocratic levels, as de Tocqueville hoped democracy might do? Or is film, as Garth Jowett suggests, "the democratic art" designed to reflect and embody "the people"?

Is film, an elitist or democratic art? It is, of course, both. Financed almost exclusively by the "elites" of our society, it does reflect the tastes and interests of America's monied class. But at the same time, for these films to be financially successful (the ever present "bottom line"), they must appeal to the general public. This symbiotic relationship gives films a special, almost contradictory relationship to the political world. The constant tensions which exist between "elites and masses" is played out in celluloid where elite preferences meet mass tastes. In this respect, it is a microcosm of the American political system itself.

Notes

¹Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Forward to John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson, *American History, American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image* (New York: Ungar Film Library, 1979) p. xii.

²Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957) p. 820.

³Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood and the Dream Factory* (Boston: Little Brown, 1950) pp. 12-13.

⁴John Cogley, *Report on Blacklisting, I, Movies* (New York: Arno, 1956); Peter H. Brown, "Blacklist: The Black Tale of Turmoil in Filmiland," *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1981, Calendar p. 3; Lillian Hellman, *Scoundrel Time* (New York: Bantam, 1976).

⁵Baxter Phillips, Swastika: *Cinema of Oppression* (New York: Warner Books, 1976); Richard A. Maynard, *Propaganda on Film: A Nation at War* (Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden, 1975).

⁶Andrew Bergman, *We're in the Money* (New York: Ungar, 1979).

⁷Jack G. Shahee, ed., *Nuclear War Films* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978).

⁸Richard S. Randall, *Censorship of the Movies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); Edward de Grazia and Roger K. Newman, *Banned Films: Movies, Censors, and the First Amendment* (New York: R.R. Bowker, Co., 1982).

⁹Rob Edelman, "The Politician in Film," *Film in Review*, November, 1976, p. 53.

¹⁰Richard Dyer MacCann, *Film and Society* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 58.

¹¹Dore Schary, "Motion Pictures and Their Influence on the Modern World," speech to National Conference of Controllers, Los Angeles, California, 1955.

Simulating an International Crisis in an Introductory Foreign Policy Course

by Edwina S. Campbell and Stephen Percy
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Introduction

Teaching a large introductory course at the undergraduate level is always a challenge. Except in discussion sections, students seldom have the opportunity to be more than passive notetakers in a large lecture hall. One means of increasing student participation and interest in these courses is to simulate a decisionmaking situation, providing students the opportunity to become involved directly in a hypothetical decisionmaking forum. This type of exercise can be expected to enhance student interest in the course, comprehension of course topics, and verbal skills. Unfortunately, this type of simulation has often been restricted to smaller classes, often graduate seminars. This, however, need not be the case: a simulation exercise can also be conducted in a large undergraduate course that has discussion sessions. This article describes how a simulation of an international crisis was used as an effective teaching device in an introductory course on American foreign policy.

The Simulation as a Teaching Exercise

The Hong Kong simulation was designed to be part of an undergraduate course on U.S. Foreign Policy in the Woodrow Wilson Department of Government and Foreign Affairs at the University of Virginia. The course focused on U.S. foreign relations with all parts of the world since World War II, although the first month was devoted to the historical development of American foreign policy during the period 1776 to 1945. Course structure included lectures twice a week for 50 minutes, supplemented by weekly 50-minute discussion sections conducted by graduate teaching assistants (TAs). Course requirements included a 500-1,000 word "decisionmaking paper" analyzing a past crisis, mid-term and final examinations, and a reading load of four books, four articles, and excerpts from several books and articles.

The simulation served as an integral part of the course because the instructor felt that students of foreign affairs should be exposed to the realities and dilemmas of the decisionmaking process. Despite the considerable time given to these issues in class lectures and readings, the exercise provided first-hand, personal experience with decisionmaking to reinforce the theoretical lessons. Through the simulation exercise, the instructor hoped that students would gain comprehension of the constraint of time pressures in trying to solve a crisis; the difficulties of operating with incomplete and conflicting information; the role of personalities in crisis management and diplomatic relations; the importance of domestic political constraints in foreign policy formulation; the role of ideology; and the way historical memory can color a nation's view of current events. It was also hoped that students would begin to grasp how nations other than the United States would perceive a crisis and respond to it, and to rec-

ognize that other nations also respond to domestic constraints and historical memory.

On a more immediate level, the simulation provided the instructor of this large class an opportunity to get better acquainted with both students and teaching assistants. It was the instructor's hope that the exercise would provide normally reticent students a chance to speak up, stimulate greater give and take during the lectures, and encourage students to seek the instructor out for discussion outside of class. The simulation provided an opportunity for teaching assistants, who played very active roles, to become more directly involved in the conduct of the course. Finally, the exercise provided the instructor with another perspective on students beyond the sea of faces in a lecture room. As a result of impressions generated by the simulation, the instructor felt better equipped to grade students and to write letters of recommendation.

In the fall 1982 semester when this simulation was conducted, the course had an enrollment of 158, representing a diverse group of students. About three-quarters of the students were in their second or third year (as expected for a course at this level), although some first and fourth year students were also enrolled. Sixty percent of students were departmental majors (20 percent in Government and 40 percent in Foreign Affairs), 24 percent were majoring in another social science, 5 percent in natural sciences, and 12 percent in other departments. About a third of the students had no previous coursework in foreign affairs, a third had one previous course, and a third had participated in some form of a simulation previous to this exercise.

Description of the Simulation

The simulation exercise revolved around hypothetical events arising from the expiration of the United Kingdom's agreement with China to lease territories which are currently part of the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong. The lease is scheduled to expire in 1997, and speculation has already begun as to what the parties involved will choose to do about it. There has been limited coverage of the issue in the American media. This coverage has focused on the visit of British Prime Minister Thatcher to the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) in August 1982, and on speculation on the future of British colonialism in Hong Kong and Gibraltar, as a result of the British-Argentine War over the Falkland Islands.

Consideration of the future of Hong Kong was chosen for a number of practical reasons related to the purposes of the exercise. In searching for a topic, the designers of the simulation looked for an issue which would not immediately be perceived as a threat to American security, and in which major powers other than the United States would be involved. A conscious effort was made to isolate a foreign policy situation affecting China, as a way to (continued on p.8)