

WSWS readers comment on recent arts reviews

13 January 2000

I must say that the David Walsh review of *Man on the Moon* has been the only one that I have seen that makes sense. I have been following the peculiar "glorification" of the "genius" of Kaufman but the TV and print coverage and now the movie are unconvincing and ridiculous. It seemed that this "selling" of Kaufman was another attempt to fool the public with fantastic stories of Kaufman's "incredible talent" when he was obviously a less than mediocre entertainer. The media coverage of Kaufman seems to be in the same vein as Kaufman himself—that is, to deceive, infuriate and ultimately insult the audience. The media and "friends" seem to want to "put one over on the stupid audience" by trying to convince us that Kaufman's performance is somehow brilliant in being so terribly poor. Seems to be some kind of meanness and arrogance coming from Kaufman and his supporters.

One local newspaper here said "the squares" didn't get Kaufman's humor (I hadn't heard that terminology for a long time). I think the bigger picture of this Kaufman phenomenon is that some people with money, influence and fame are using the hoax of Kaufman's greatness as an expression of their own loathing of their public and ultimately their own self loathing—like some child's desire to lie and cheat the parents or public to make themselves more clever and to demonstrate their disdain for others.

The Kaufman phenomenon is really a hoax within a hoax. But what for, it's not clever or funny, it's stupid and demeaning. I see it very much like Amazon.com creating a huge money losing enterprise and becoming a great company by their clever use of losing money: Bezos always seems to be laughing and must be a Kaufman and Kaufman phenomenon fan.

Walsh seems to have found some meaning in Kaufman and this phenomenon which I have not seen

anywhere else. I think that the even bigger picture is mind control. Somehow through television, media and education they (whoever that may be) have gotten control of the minds of a large segment (perhaps a majority) of the population and twisted them to where black is white and silliness is talent. Where massacre is humanitarian. Where lies are truth. Where revenge and hatred is "the rule of law." Where perversity becomes creativity. This is the question: how has the public's mind become so easily manipulated?

LR

8 January 2000

To David Walsh:

Andy Kaufman's absurdist stuff was some of the most interesting stand-up comedy I've seen. To me, his work was akin to Ionesco in its flavor. There was a quiet anger and madness in his routines that I always found intriguing, a fine weirdness that occasionally drifted through his Latka Gravas character on *Taxi*. I first encountered his work on a short-lived variety series that Dick Van Dyke did in the late 1970s, and never missed a chance to see him if I knew of any stuff he had forthcoming. I actually found his early death disturbing, I dug a lot of the ways he chose to push the perimeters of his audience. Since then, we've been treated to the ravings of Sam Keniston and Andrew Dice Clay, two comics who were never able to find the more challenging areas of stand-performance and the theatre of rage. They, and many others, are just faint echoes of Kaufman's slyness.

I've held off on viewing the Forman film, and Carrey drives me nuts, I've never understood what all the fuss is about. He does everything the same way. However, maybe this is a little different. All the same, I think I'll wait until it's out on video.

And it would be good to see Kaufman's actual work documented, somehow.

MP

8 January 2000

After the death of Heller I read many articles about him that went on far longer than yours but said far less.

I'm glad you mentioned that part near the end of *Catch-22* where Yossarian walks around the deserted streets of Rome. I often mention that part to friends.

Thanks for the article, I'm e-mailing it everywhere.

T

10 January 2000

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