

25 January 97

Dear Phyllis —

Please accept my belated happy birthday wishes--it's only three weeks after the fact. At least I'm in the right month. I thought I'd wait until I got organized for the new year and then write you, but obviously I'm never going to get organized so no point in waiting.

I've enclosed the usual. You asked about Oliver Stone. For most of his career, a prototype "limousine liberal," still obsessed with Vietnam after all these years. Tends to make films based on recent political history (60's to present), seen through an inarticulate left/populist filter. Prey to Hollywood/New Age intellectual trends such as paranoid conspiracy theory. Talented, confused, disingenuous, aspires to be controversial but as the years pass, he's losing his ability to shock anyone but the geriatric set--the younger generation really don't identify with his particular historical hobby-horses and bugaboos. Great technique in the service of superficial, muddled thinking. Went against expectations to offer a curiously sympathetic film of Nixon. Responded to success of younger, casual-violence oriented filmmakers by making the sadistic, amoral Natural Born Killers, which was only partially redeemed by moments of sharp satire. Despite all the wrong moves, still capable of making a good--possibly even a great--movie. Time will tell.

Vietnam Memorial--see clipping photocopied from the encyclopaedia. It's become a holy site for American Vietnam War veterans who go on long pilgrimages, show up at the Memorial in their mouldy green Army jackets, feel the wall and weep. Don't ask me, I can't explain it, except that there seems to be some mixture of unresolved grief, guilt, pride and anomie, with a little nostalgia thrown in, as these guys relive their war experience and exorcise their demons. I'm tempted to dismiss them by saying, "they went and fought an unjust war of aggression, they lost, and for the last 20 years they've wanted everyone to feel sorry for them." In American mass media they're invariably glorified as heroes (by those on the right) and victims (by those on the left), roles assigned to them and accepted by them during the Reagan-era rewriting of Vietnam-era history. I've always considered them closer to being war criminals. Yes, I know--most of them were ill-educated working class guys who were easily hoodwinked by the real war criminals--cynical politicians who knew exactly how to manipulate misguided patriotism and drum up "war fever." Still, I can't take the Memorial serious until the Washington politicians put up a wall for suffering of the Vietnamese. Don't get me started.

How is the new year treating you? I'm fine. My resolution as usual is to use my time well, not waste it so much, I'm still preoccupied with that, same as ever. I keep thinking if I change this or that part of my weekly routine, I'll get ahead of the game or catch up. Can't help chasing a mirage...

love.

Jimbo