

POPULAR  

---

INQUIRY

The Journal of Kitsch, Camp and Mass Culture

Volume 2 / 2018

**ARTS & ENTS**

**James Hamilton**

Kansas State University, [hamilton@ksu.edu](mailto:hamilton@ksu.edu)

# ARTS & ENTS<sup>1</sup>

**James Hamilton**

## **1. Introduction: some caveats and the plan**

In this essay, I will not be talking about objects, events, activities, genres, or kinds that have cult followings and are presented as items in any sort of *avant-garde* movement. I want us to think about things that are non-controversially both entertaining and popular.

Moreover, for the purposes of this discussion I could have picked popular entertainments consumed by relatively large groups of people "live"—such as classical, rock, or hip hop concerts, or roller derby, or stand-up comedy, or shows by *Cirque du Soleil*. Just as easily I could have picked mass produced entertainments that are widely popular but usually consumed by individuals on their own schedules: magazines, video games, novels, and so on. Neither the form nor the distinction among various modes of consumption is relevant to my topic. Although the same problems can readily be described using other examples, I use certain movies because they are both entertaining and were popular, at least when they first came out.

Here is the plan. In the next three sections I will present and explain the first three problems. In the last section I draw out an uncomfortable implication of the conjunction of the second and third problems. The individuals who are made most uncomfortable by this implication are our colleagues who conduct cultural studies scholarship. I do not single out cultural studies scholars for invidious reasons, nor do all of them face this implication in their work. In fact, I hold that if we can see the nature of this implication by focusing on the activities of one particular group that wishes to take the contents of popular culture seriously, *in a certain way*, we can also see that the problem is quite general. For it besets that way of thinking about popular entertainments; and that way of thinking, I believe, is quite common.

## **2. The "high art versus low art" problem**

Many people have made crude equations among the items on the following list of allegedly deficient practices, or at least among some subsets of this list: popular activities, popular art, popular culture, entertainments, mass art, mass culture, low art, low culture. Terms like "popular" and "low" are terms of contrast with terms like "unpopular" (or "elite") and "high." What those con-

trasts consist of in each case has proved difficult to make out, even impossible in some cases. That is why I have characterized such equations as "crude." And that, I believe, is about the nicest thing one can say about them. To be sure we can make contrasting lists in particular cases: *Alien* in contrast to *The Seventh Seal*, *The Matrix* in contrast to *Blow Up*, and *Do the Right Thing* in contrast to *Night and Fog* perhaps. But that is a very different thing from explaining the contrast among such kinds, or classes, as low and high culture or popular culture and elite culture.

Here are some explanations that have been proposed, in the form of systematic differences between the up and down classes. It has been said that the high *versus* low distinction mirrors the distinction between art *versus* craft, or the distinction between what is sophisticated and difficult *versus* what is plain and easy, or that between what is mass marketed *versus* what is non-commercial, or that between what is familiarly conventional *versus* what is challengingly unconventional, or the distinction between things aimed at producing passive reaction *versus* those demanding active response, or the distinction between those things produced by an individual for her own goals and satisfaction *versus* those things aimed at satisfying others and reinforcing whatever other's goals already happen to be, or the distinction between politically manipulative art *versus* art that serves autonomous ends and respects autonomy in its audiences.<sup>2</sup> These proposals have been made by people with quite varied agendas – from High Modernists to Marxist critics – and by others with less worked out agendas.<sup>3</sup>

It is noteworthy that none of the foregoing proposals is successful. One reason is that each of the suggested explanatory proposals is susceptible to fairly obvious counter-examples.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, these counter-examples themselves are thought to be contentious; and, for sake of argument, let us agree that they might be. Instead, then, turn away from offering counter-examples and turn toward examining arguments.

Actually, two arguments are required if we are to make good on the contrasts just mentioned. One must argue that anything produced for entertainment is, for that reason, likely to be popular. And one must argue that there is some sort of plausible link between the *descriptive fact* that an entertainment is popular and the *normative claim* that it is morally, socially, or politically deficient, for the very reason that it is popular. But arguments for both a descriptively adequate equation and for a decisive normative judgment turn out to be very weak. Consider two examples, each of which begins from a widely accepted premise.

Consider the fact that many of us associate entertainment with what is produced or performed for an audience. Indeed this association is often stated as part of the standard meanings of "entertainment" in our dictionaries.<sup>5</sup> But here is an argument so bad that you'd have to think no one would credit it:

P1: If something is an “entertainment” it is aimed at being performed for an audience.

P2: If it is aimed at being performed for an audience, it falls within the scope of the popular.

----

C: Entertainments are aimed at falling within the scope of the popular.

The first premise is the widely-held belief just mentioned and the conclusion is the descriptive claim that is needed for us to go on (see below). The second premise fills in the necessary argument step between the widely-held belief and that conclusion. And the argument is valid.

But the second premise is false, as can be shown by considering only a few theatrical cases. Historically many theatrical entertainments that were aimed at audiences have not been aimed at large audiences nor considered fit or appropriate for popular consumption. “Closet dramas,” for example, are meant to either be un-staged and read privately or in small groups or are meant to be staged but only for small groups. The Kings Men was a theatre company that played only, or at least mostly, for the royal court of England from 1603 to 1608, when they began performing in the Blackfriars Theatre which probably had room for only several hundred spectators. In contrast the Globe, where they did not initially perform, held upwards of 2500-3000 spectators.

I am inclined to think, without further argument, that the connection between what is entertaining and what is popular is purely contingent. And I assume this contingent, non-conceptual, relationship in the rest of this essay. I do not deny that many entertainments are also popular – indeed it is those I wish to talk about in what follows. And this connection, when it *has* occurred, is an important historical fact. There is plenty of room for informative discussions of when and how entertainments have become widely popular. I just do not think the connection is conceptual; hence it is not more than a matter of historical contingency.

Consider next the normative argument. Why do many people think that there is something “low” or at least unseemly about *popular* entertainment? One reason is that they think if something is a popular entertainment, it must be aiming at producing or inducing specific effects which render whatever is performed easy for that audience to grasp. But now look at this as an actual argument.

P1: If something is a popular entertainment, it must be aiming at producing or inducing specific *effects* that render it easy to grasp.

P2: In producing or inducing *effects* that render it easy to grasp, its producers are *not* presenting a product for autonomous agents to consider accepting but rather at mere things occupying places in a causal chain.

----

C: If something is a popular entertainment, then it is *not* aimed at presenting a product for autonomous agents to consider accepting but rather at mere things occupying places in a causal chain.

Again, the first premise is just the widely-held belief and the conclusion is what we are supposed to be led to by that widely-held belief. Presumably, there is something “low” about causing an audience to respond in various ways in contrast to asking them, as autonomous agents, to consider accepting whatever is presented to them. And once again, the second premise is the necessary step to take us from the widely-held belief to the desired conclusion.

But this is a bad argument. It too is valid, but its second premise is false, and any variation on that premise that preserves the argument’s validity is also false. The problem with the second premise stems from thinking that either by aiming at inducing effects or by making the entertainment easy to grasp, the autonomy of each audience member is somehow subverted. This is a mistake.<sup>6</sup> The fact that some responses in audiences for art or entertainment are caused is not grounds for thinking every such response is caused. Moreover, causation of an effect inducing a response is very likely to be well below the level of consciousness. While the critic of causal effects thinks of such causes as subverting autonomy *for this very reason*, those critics have not given much thought to precisely *how* that response is configured in an audience member’s attempt to figure out the work of art or entertainment. In fact, once we ask how anything that is responded to sub-consciously gets into the conscious reasoning of audiences, the only plausible models are ones that treat the process as largely an exercise of critical reasoning, and hardly subversive of autonomy at all.

Thus, I conclude we should deny that, when the contingent connection between entertainment and popularity does obtain, by necessity it also has normative consequences.

Many think this conclusion is mistaken because they believe that audience passivity – and hence the purely causal story of entertainment effects – is simply part of what it is for something to be a popular entertainment.<sup>7</sup> This leads Stephen Bates and Anthony Ferri, for example, to offer the following tentative definition of “entertainment.”

We suggest that entertainment, defined in largely objective terms, entails communication via external stimuli, which reaches a generally passive audience and gives some portion of that audience pleasure.<sup>8</sup>

But this definition, because of its *a priori* inclusion of audience passivity, excludes more than it should. For one thing, there are many interactive entertainments. And, in any case, the relationship between popular entertainment and the passivity of audience perception, when it is passive, is as contingent a matter as that between entertainment and popularity itself. When or if there is a connection between the two is an empirical question; not one to be settled by *a priori* reasoning.

Given this state of affairs, the very attempt to provide principled, *a priori* grounds for the “high art *versus* low entertainment” distinction seems less than helpful, at best. And it may be much worse. For, attempting this kind of fruitless classification project can divert attention from what is interesting and possibly valuable in the particular issues, instances, genres, or kinds of entertainment that should interest us.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. The problem of figuring out how these cases work

One of those issues that should interest us is this problem: How, precisely, do we learn from works of art and entertainments when they express a deep philosophical insight? Here are two claims that many of us are likely to believe true. First, attending to cases of works of art with a reflective eye can tell us something about ourselves, our lives, our politics, our economics, our conceptual schemes. Second, this is as true of popular entertainments as it is of things that have been collected under the concept “Art.”

Since the second claim is perhaps not as obvious to everyone as it seems to me, consider Stephen Mulhall's analysis of *Alien*. Mulhall examines how this movie and its three sequels set forth themes of “the relation between human identity, integrity, and embodiment, as encountered in the field of our fantasies of sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and birth,” and thereby “evoke undismissable questions about what it is to be human.”<sup>10</sup> When reflecting on Mulhall's description and analysis of the *Alien* quartet, the claim that we can learn about ourselves from popular entertainment as well from art may seem entirely obvious.

However, there are two contrasting ways to take these claims, first as holding that movies can *illustrate* such issues as Mulhall suggests, or second as holding that movies can *examine* such issues. This contrast can be framed as between a pair of questions: “can a movie *be* philosophical?” and “can a movie *do* philosophy?”<sup>11</sup> Or the contrast can be framed as this pair of questions, “can a movie occupy the same reflective space as philosophy?” and “can a movie occupy the same reflective space as philosophy *in the way that philosophy does*?”<sup>12</sup> I will refer to the second members of these pairs of questions as “The Philosophy Question.”<sup>13</sup>

One strategy for defending an affirmative answer to The Philosophy Question is to regard movies as "thought experiments."<sup>14</sup> The point of both movies and thought experiments can be the same, some think, in that each can function as a device for teaching us about the application and limits of our concepts and, in particular, for teaching us how to get a clear view of some phenomena and expose inconsistencies or incoherencies in some alternative *conceptions* of those phenomena. In this way, a movie can stand in for an argument.<sup>15</sup>

In explaining the "thought experiment" strategy, Murray Smith references a thought experiment concerning the peasant and a king "switching places" that Bernard Williams offers as a way of examining mind-body dualism.<sup>16</sup> Smith comments that

Williams only needs to elaborate and extend the basic premise of the thought experiment over a few sentences in order to reveal the conceptual confusion on which (he argues) the dualistic conception of personal identity-of the self as a disembodied soul-rests.<sup>17</sup>

However, when Smith employs the strategy for thinking about how the movie *All of Me* examines mind-body dualism, he concludes the proposed strategy is mistaken. And this is because *this* movie's "thought experiment," if we can call it that, does not aim at clarifying the limits of our concepts but at presenting such things as "complexity, ingenuity, inventiveness, density, ambiguity, ... profundity," and above all "paradox."<sup>18</sup> To achieve that, one will have to extend the thought experiment well beyond only a very few sentences. Smith cautions that not all movies presenting thought experiments aim at presenting just that particular set of features. He argues that the aims of philosophical thought experiments, such as Williams' are to limn concepts whereas the aims of the thought experiments, when they occur in movies, have to be analyzed in terms of aiming at presenting *artistic* features.

However, others have claimed that some movies *do* aim at examining the limits of our concepts. So it is, some have claimed, with *The Matrix*.<sup>19</sup> It displays and examines the grounds for Cartesian skepticism and 'runs' a variant on Descartes' "evil demon" hypothesis to see how it plays out.

A second strategy for responding to The Philosophy Question is to regard movies as the special kind of thought experiment that Daniel Dennett has called "intuition pumps," that subset of thought experiments useful for (often illicitly) getting us to agree to judgments we might not have thought to agree to before and thus to be prepared to accept one sort of theory over another.<sup>20</sup> For example, up through *Alien3* (1992) the lines between humans and aliens have been transgressed, to be sure, but they have been restored and are in order; and so far as we were concerned that was the end of the matter. But then *Alien: Resurrection*, it might be said, prompts us to consider judgments about Ripley we would not have considered making had she been a hybrid in one

of the first two movies. And that may get us to look more deeply at our theories of what it is to be human.<sup>21</sup> In this way we might think the movie acts like an intuition pump, not by standing in for arguments, but by clearing conceptual space and demonstrating the need for arguments.

Both of these strategies hold that the only real difference between thought experiments and intuition pumps with which philosophers are familiar and the things we engage when watching movies, reading novels, playing video games and the like has to do with the level of detail. Popular entertainments just contain more complex and sophisticated stories than those philosophers usually appeal to when they do philosophy. This observation holds that the difference, although real, is of minimal importance. Of course if Smith is right, that the aims of thought experiments in movies are to present artistic concepts and that to fulfill those aims movies must be replete with detail, then this is not a difference with minimal importance. But I do not know that Smith is right.

However, to assess these strategies, we should ask how thought experiments and intuition pumps actually work. In particular, I suggest we should examine the difference between the way *they* work and the way a parable works. This is because narratives come in kinds, or “genres,” and each genre sets up different expectations. And it could be that all that thought experiments and intuition pumps share with more complicated items of popular entertainment is the simple fact they are frequently structured as narratives. And this, I believe, is too simple, even if true.

Accordingly, let me remind you of a Biblical parable – the parable Nathan told to King David. David, you may recall, had sent a rival captain to war so that he could seduce his rival’s wife, Bathsheba. The prophet Nathan’s story, however, concerned a man stealing his neighbor’s sheep. At the end of the parable, having secured King David’s condemnation of the thief, Nathan exclaims, “Thou art the man.”

That’s part of how parables work. They end with one person saying to another something like “Thou art the man” with the one hoping to get the other to see *herself* in the story. This is something quite different from getting her to recognize her intuitions could be very different from what she might have thought they were or from getting her to recognize the limits of a favored conception of this or that sort of thing. In those cases what we hope to achieve has nothing in particular to do with *her*. But parables are personal even when they are broadcast.

So it is, I think, that Dan Flory shows us how Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* invites us to see ourselves, at least those of us who are white males of a certain age, as racists of the same kind and in the same way as Danny Aiello's character, Sal.<sup>22</sup> It is not a failing of the story or of its mode of presentation if I am not able to grasp the fact. It is, instead, more like the way the “seed sewn” in parables “falls upon stony ground,” as the Bible has it.



Now for some, regarding the way we learn from movies as being like the way we learn about ourselves from parables will not be an attractive response to The Philosophy Question. For, if we think the parable analysis is right, we also have to accept the fact it does *not* show us that movies can reflect on our lives in the same way that philosophy does. Parables do not stand in for arguments, nor do they clear the ground for arguments; they convict us of our conditions.

In addition, parables frequently function by having us sympathize with characters. A familiar pattern is for us to sympathize with one character only to be confronted by the fact that in the story we are depicted in the role of the unsympathetic asshole. And this, or something like it, happens all the time, especially in popular narrative entertainment. In contrast, there are typically no appeals to sympathy for anyone in thought experiments or intuition pumps. In the famous "trolley cases," for example, we have as much reason to sympathize with unfortunate one caught on one track ahead as we do to sympathize with those on the other track who will surely die if you or I do not throw the switch and divert the trolley onto the first track. This is not to say one just couldn't come up with a thought experiment or an intuition pump that depended on appeals to sympathy; but such cases are likely to involve examinations of the concept referred to be the word "sympathy" itself.

These reflections might suggest to us the empirical guess that there are very few works of art or of popular movies that function as thought experiments or intuition pumps. And one option not considered so far is that, when movies tell their audiences what they have to tell them, it might be in the form of a parable rather than a thought experiment or an intuition pump. For such movies seem to be saying something like this: "Get out of here and do this or be like that."

Notice, however, that if *any* of these analyses is on the right track, we will be pushed to reassess another familiar claim about popular entertainments, namely, that the ease of access so frequently characteristic of them makes them systematically *defective*. In contrast, one thing we know makes thought experiments, intuition pumps, *and* parables effective is their *perspicuity*. And any way we have of unpacking that thought suggests that ease of access may be, and in some cases and on some occasions must be, a *positive feature*. To be sure, there are differences between pleasures attending to ease of access and pleasures attending to difficulty of access. But, as Timothy Gould reminds us, it is not as though the relation between the ease of access and the easiness of the pleasures taken in that which is easily accessed is a straightforward matter.<sup>23</sup>

#### **4. The "two-audiences" problem**

The "two-audiences" problem arises from the simple fact that there are cases of popular entertainment that are attended to both by people who normally attend only to traditional instances

of art *and* by people who normally only attend to popular entertainments. When this simple fact is conjoined to a plausible back-story about how we determine what the audience for a particular art form or bit of entertainment is, we get the problem.

I rely on some work of Ted Cohen's for the back-story.<sup>24</sup> There are several parts to Cohen's story. First, when we respond to works of art we respond with others and form with others the audiences for those works. Second, what we respond to in the role of audience for a thing is largely determined by who we are, where we come from, what our ambitions are, and so on. Third, responding in the role of audience to one kind of thing as opposed to another also partially determines our own *sense* of who we are, of what audiences we belong to, and with. This combination of claims, Cohen thinks, partially explains why our taste in movies, music, TV programs, and in jokes matters so much to us.

Against that background, what are we to make of the simple fact that there are cases of popular entertainment that are attended to both by people who normally attend only to traditional instances of art *and* by people who normally only attend to popular entertainments? In a different article Cohen calls these "fancy" and "plain" audiences. To be sure, as Cohen reminds us, "fancy audiences often like both high and low movies, and ... at least some very high movies appeal to both fancy and plain audiences." But the fact of the existence of two audiences, he also observes, can lead to a problem, for it can "lead us to wonder (1) whether it is exactly the same auditor who likes Bach's unaccompanied cello music and Leon Redbone's blues, and (2) whether *North by Northwest* is the same work for the fellow who enjoys it as a nice example of Hollywood fluff and for the one who finds it a profound meditation on American identity."<sup>25</sup>

A caveat and an observation are in order. Resolving the second of Cohen's worries turns on defending some story about work-identity. I pass on that metaphysical project in this essay and focus only on the first of his concerns. I simply try to determine what Cohen means by asking "Is it the same auditor"?

The observation is that, although the question Cohen raises – "is it the same auditor...?" – is framed as a question about high and low art, it is not dependent on a high *versus* low distinction nor on talk about art, *per se*. For the question could arise with exactly the same force, and for the same reasons, were his examples that of liking both Bach's unaccompanied cello suites and Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, or were they that of liking both Leon Redbone's blues and Muddy Waters's, or were his examples that of liking both *WWE* and *Rollergirls*. Any pair of examples sufficiently different in aim, medium, style, function, or content will do.

So, am I the same auditor when I "like" Bach's unaccompanied cello suites and I also "like" Leon Redbone's blues – or any other pair of sufficiently disparate objects? Well, yes, of

course. But it is also true that I have some work to do in order to maintain a coherent sense of my beliefs and attitudes. This challenge arises because I will have enjoyed the pair of disparate objects for different reasons and in different ways.

It is important that these are *considered* preferences. The pleasure I derive from each “is not,” as Stephen Davies reminds us about the enjoyment of music, “some *frisson* to which the music...stands *merely* as the cause or occasion, for whereas such pleasure is indifferent to its cause, the pleasure of appreciating a [piece of music]...is not indifferent to the individuality of its object.”<sup>26</sup> But precisely because I have deeply enjoyed some disparate objects for significantly different reasons, as I might well deeply enjoy different kinds of music, novels, movies, TV, and jokes, I *can be* torn between the audiences to which I belong. At the very least, in order to think that through, I will have to think a good deal harder about *myself* than I may have done hitherto. This challenge to think my way through to a coherent self when my *considered* preferences vary so widely from one another is the root of the two-audiences problem.

### 5. A “*perfect storm*” of sorts

One variant of the two-audiences problem seems especially important for understanding the position of some scholars working in cultural studies – including both philosophers and others more routinely associated with cultural studies programs.

Not a few papers and workshops presented in conferences I have attended have concerned social groups and the popular activities or institutions that bind them together, whether they know that or not. Some papers and workshops have been about the techniques of building works of art, popular or otherwise. But the majority of papers and panels have been about novels, plays, genres, or performances or performance kinds and how certain “readings,” or interpretations, of them show that those objects provide or prevent access to strategies “for resistance to dominant ideological constructions of...class, gender, [race] and family.”<sup>27</sup>

Often, the scholars working in those presentations have also taken up a certain kind of role as audience for those objects that is different from the role taken up for those same objects by the people who make those objects instances of popular entertainment. But, if Cohen is right, this should strike us as odd. Timothy Gould puts a related point this way:

...most investigators of popular culture do not belong to the classes of modern society for whom popular culture is the only form of culture. Investigating popular art requires certain sorts of decisions – including, frequently, career decisions. [And so,] we find ourselves having to justify, or at least extenuate, the forms in which we pursue our interests.<sup>28</sup>

And Gould suggests we should be cautious about these investigations because the academic investigator of popular entertainment must be *self-conscious* in her engagement with that entertainment in a way the popular audience for it never is *and* because we should have worries about the distortions of objects, activities, *and of ourselves* that can take place in the self-conscious engagement with objects or activities of any kind. Whether this latter conclusion is warranted or not, a particular combination of the parable account of how works of art and popular entertainments teach us and a plausible account of how we determine what audience we belong with *can* create an intellectual and practical “perfect storm.”

The teller of a parable is not in the same relation to the subject at hand as the person at whom the parable is directed: someone telling a parable will say “*thou* art the man” or “go *thou* and do likewise” but not “hey, that’s *me!*!” In contrast, the person who provides an intuition pump or a thought experiment is explicitly aiming at saying “hey, look at this, this is *us*.” Although in different epistemic positions, the person providing a thought experiment or intuition pump is in the exact same relation of possession to the matter at hand as the persons for whom the experiment or pump is provided. Although the person for whom it is provided may not see clearly how some aspect of her concepts plays out, the concepts involved are still *her* concepts every bit as much as they are the concepts of the person who provides the case and asks her to examine how it plays out. Moreover, thought experiments and intuition pumps do not routinely issue in normative judgments; parables always do. Finally, one can just as easily offer a thought experiment or an intuition pump for oneself as for others; indeed that is usually the temporal order in which they *are* presented. None of this works well for parables.

These thoughts suggest that, if the parable analysis of how we learn about ourselves from art and entertainment is the right way to explicate how they inform us of important philosophical insights, there could be a deep question here about who is doing the learning and who is being taught when “*we*” focus on popular entertainments, and provide analyses or interpretations of any work of art or item of popular entertainment. Who, in these cases, is “the man”? *Who* could be the referent of “*thou*” in “go *thou* and do likewise”? What is the proper identity-establishing *audience* for such analyses?

Quasi-formally, the situation looks like this:

- (A) Artwork *A* functions as a parable convicting *S* and people like *S* of their condition.
- (B) I am the presenter of artwork *A* and I endorse the message of *A* (hence, I am *not-S* or *not-S-like*).<sup>29</sup>
- (C) I am the target of artwork *A* (hence, I *am S* or *S-like*).

Temporally considered, of course, this might be consistent, as follows:

(A), (then) $\Rightarrow$  (B), (then) $\Rightarrow$  (C).

But when considered *atemporally*, we get the inconsistent set,

{(A), (B), (C)}.

To be sure, in analyzing what a movie can teach us about ourselves, the philosopher or cultural studies scholar need not be *telling* that parable even if she might also endorse it. Nor in telling it need she be *endorsing* it. That is, even if she is explaining how *Do the Right Thing* convicts some in its popular audience of its condition, or at least leads them to insights about themselves they had resisted, *she* need not be making a normative judgment of the “go thou and do likewise” form. Her work does have normative content, to be sure, but it can be descriptive of that content. And, of course, we may not be interested in holding a coherent sense of our beliefs and attitudes. It may also be the case that some works of art or of popular entertainment are, as Cohen himself suggests, “coded” to be given different interpretations by differently situated individuals. If either of these is true, then the problem I have been describing goes away.<sup>30</sup> But, if we do engage in telling the parable and endorsing its normative stance, if and to the degree we are interested in holding on to a coherent sense of self, and if the work of art or popular entertainment does not code for various interpretations in any obvious way, then anyone can find themselves stuck in the problem I have described.

The problem, in short, arises most acutely for those who wish not only to think through a work of art or a popular entertainment to a normative judgment but also to *endorse* a judgment of the kind made through that entertainment, rendering the analysis and the parable one. It seems to arise especially for those who focus their analyses on why “we” are drawn to such entertainments. It is entirely unclear for whom or to whom they *could be* speaking. And although that just seems an odd result, I do not know how to avoid it.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A quick word about the title: it is common among newspapers in England, especially (apparently) among the tabloid presses, to name the pages in which one finds arts reviews and art-critical essays along with parallel essays on the local entertainments on offer “Arts&Ents.” I chose this as a title not because I thought many people would actually know this fact but because it is a colloquialism and, as such, fit in with many of the themes of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> John A. Fisher, “High Art Versus Low Art,” *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Berys Gaut and Dominic MacIver Lopes, eds. (Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 473-484.

<sup>3</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” In *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, ed., Edmund Jephcott, trans., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 94-136. Theodor W. Adorno, “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” *New German Critique* 6,

(1975), pp. 12-19. Adorno is merely the most salient of the figures who have held this view, and not only because he was both a modernist and a Marxist.

<sup>4</sup> David Novitz, "The Aesthetics of Popular Art," *Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Revised Edition, Jerrold Levinson, ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 734-735, 738-739; John Fisher, 2013, 473-484; and Richard Shusterman, "popular art," *Blackwell's Companion to Aesthetics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Stephen Davies, Kathleen Marie Higgins, Robert Hopkins, Robert Stecker, and David E. Cooper, eds. (Oxford, UK and Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 476-478.

<sup>5</sup> For examples, the Merriam Webster Online Dictionary: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/entertainment>, and Wikipedia's entry on "Entertainment," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entertainment>, (both accessed on October 11, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). Ref. is to pp. 15-109.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy C. Brock and Stephen D. Livingston, "The Need for Entertainment Scale," *The Psychology of Entertainment Media: Blurring the Lines between Entertainment and Persuasion*, L. J. Shrum, ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2000), pp. 255-274.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Bates and Anthony J. Ferri, "What's Entertainment? Notes Toward a Definition," *Studies in Popular Culture* 33, 1 (2010), pp. 1-20; Ref. is to p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Novitz, 2005, 740; Timothy Gould, "Pursuing the Popular," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, 2, (1999), 119-135; the reference is to p. 120.

<sup>10</sup> Stephan Mulhall, "The Impersonation of Personality," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, 1, (2006), pp. 97-110. Stephan Mulhall, "Part I," and "Part II," *On Film*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (London: Routledge Publishers, 2015), pp. 1-124.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Shaw, "On Being Philosophical and 'Being John Malkovich'," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, 1 (2006), pp. 111-118.

<sup>12</sup> Murray Smith, "Film Art, Argument, and Ambiguity," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, 1 (2006), pp. 33-42.

<sup>13</sup> The second way of framing the contrast is a bit more revealing than the first, I believe; but I am indifferent to that issue here.

<sup>14</sup> Noël Carroll, "The Wheel of Virtue," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, 1 (2002), pp. 3-26.

<sup>15</sup> Nor is this the only way that movies, and other thought experiments, might be said to stand in for arguments. Noël Carroll does argue for this way of defending the view; but Elke Brendel (in her 2004 essay, "Intuition Pumps and the Proper Use of Thought Experiments," *Dialectica* 58/1: 89-108) holds that because thought experiments study "the functional dependencies of variables by planned and controlled data change...[and] depend on some background assumptions or background theories," they are best seen as arguments with premises that can be directly challenged or supported. (Brendel, 91.)

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Williams, "Personal Identity and Individuation," in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956-72* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 11-12.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, 2006, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, 2006, pp. 36-40.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas E. Wartenburg, "Beyond Mere Illustration," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, 1 (2006), pp. 19-32.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, "Intuition Pumps", In *The Third Culture: Beyond the Scientific Revolution*, J. Brockman, ed. (New York City: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1995), pp. 180-197.

<sup>21</sup> Stephan Mulhall, "Film as Philosophy: the very idea," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 107, 3 (2007), pp. 279-294.

<sup>22</sup> Dan Flory, "Spike Lee and the Sympathetic Racist," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, 1 (2006), pp. 67-79.

<sup>23</sup> Gould, 1999, 121.

<sup>24</sup> Ted Cohen, "Jokes," in *Pleasure, Preference, and Values* Eva Schaper, ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 120-136.

<sup>25</sup> Ted Cohen, "High and Low Art: High and Low Audiences," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, 1 (1999), pp. 137-143.

---

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Davies, "The Evolution of Music," In *What is Music?* Philip Alperson, ed. (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), pp. 303-326; ref. is to 316.

<sup>27</sup> Deborah Knight, "Aesthetics and Cultural Studies," *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, Jerrold Levinson, ed. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 783-795; Ref. is to p. 789.

<sup>28</sup> Gould, 1999, 122.

<sup>29</sup> An earlier version of this quasi-formal representation of the problem, as David Davies pointed out to me, had "or" where "and" should be (and now is) in statement (B).

<sup>30</sup> I am grateful to Ted Gracyk for reminding me of this aspect of Cohen's own "solution."

<sup>31</sup> This paper was originally written for and presented to the Cultural Studies Symposium at Kansas State University in 2007. A slightly revised version was presented at the Theatre Studies International conference at Leeds, United Kingdom, in 2013. Subsequently, I have presented later versions of this work at the Pacific Division of the American Society for Aesthetics in 2015, at Auburn University in 2016, and to the conference on the Aesthetics of Popular Culture in Warsaw, Poland, in 2018. The two early versions were crafted for presentations to cultural studies conferences. The later three versions were substantially re-written for philosophical audiences. I am grateful for the comments I received at all these venues. All of them have improved the paper. And I am especially grateful in this regard for the comments of Ted Gracyk made at the Pacific Division of the American Society for Aesthetics in 2015 and David Davies at the conference on the Aesthetics of Popular Culture in Warsaw, Poland, in 2018.