

The Institute of Philosophy, Education and the Study of Religions, SDU,
The Danish Research School in Philosophy, History of Ideas and History of Science (PHIS),
and The Philosophy Meets Popular Culture Initiative (www.philpopculture.dk) present

PHILOSOPHY & POPULAR CULTURE

The Fifth Anniversary Edition

Friday, November 6, 2009

SDU-Odense in Auditorium 100, 10 - 18.



ART & or ENTERTAINMENT?

William Irwin

King's College, Pennsylvania, USA

William Westney

H.C. Andersen Guest Professor, SDU; Texas Tech University, USA

Kirsten Frandsen: Aarhus University

Cynthia M. Grund: University of Southern Denmark

Jørgen Dines Johansen: University of Southern Denmark

Carsten Fogh Nielsen: University of Copenhagen

Rikke Schubart: University of Southern Denmark.

**Art and/or Entertainment?
Fifth Anniversary Conference on Philosophy and Popular Culture
University of Southern Denmark, November 6, 2009.**

Though conceptually distinct, art and entertainment have always been intimately intertwined. At least some entertainment products clearly qualify as works of art, and much art is explicitly entertaining. At the same time entertainment products such as TV drama, Hollywood blockbusters, superhero comic books and music such as rock, pop and jazz standards have traditionally been regarded as different from and clearly inferior to “truly artistic” endeavors. Whereas art is often thought to embody the highest aspirations of human beings, entertainment has habitually been dismissed as commercial pandering to the lowest aspects of human nature.

The aim of the conference is to explore the strained relationship between art and entertainment. Through contributions from philosophy, literature, media studies and the performing arts, the goal of this conference is to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between art and entertainment and of the ways in which artistic and commercial interests can overlap and mutually enrich each other.

10.00-10.10

Welcome: Cynthia M. Grund and Carsten Fogh Nielsen

10.10-11.10

“Perception and Reception of Popular Culture: A Programmatic Sketch”

William Irwin

What makes the same artwork different? When we’re talking about a play the performance is different every time. But what about a popular song, television show, or movie? In this paper I sketch the conditions that affect our perception and reception of movies, television, and music particularly in light of TiVo (DVR), DVD, and iPod. Why do we particularly enjoy hearing a song on the radio or on iPod shuffle that we wouldn’t play on CD? What are the ideal viewing conditions for a television show? For example, is it better to watch *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* on DVD in marathon viewing sessions? Or is it better to watch it on a weekly basis? What do our initial and changing perceptions tell us about ourselves and about the popular arts we enjoy? Why do some popular artifacts endure while others disappear? Why has *Arrested Development* become a cult favorite while *Wings* has been forgotten? Popular culture has the reputation of being easily digested and easily disposed. In fact, though, enjoyment and evaluation have a lot to do with the conditions of perception.

11.20-12.10

**“Merely Entertainment?
-Art, Entertainment and Superhero Comic Books.”
Carsten Fogh Nielsen**

In his presentation Nielsen will examine the conceptual background assumptions underlying the distinction between art and entertainment. Using examples taken from the super hero comic book industry he will argue that there is good reason to question the plausibility of a too rigid understanding of this distinction.

12.10-13.00

Lunch

13.00-14.00

**“Popular . . .Schmopular. . .”
William Westney and Cynthia M. Grund**

This presentation examines the schism between popular music and art music. Hallmarks of musical quality such as virtuosity, harmonic sophistication and melodic poignancy are rife on both sides of this often questionable divide. By the same token, any style of music can be derivative, clumsy or trite.

Examples from the history of the debate will be performed at the piano with an eye (ear!) to challenging assumptions regarding standard classification of repertoire. Relevant background from the philosophy of music and the history of ideas will be brought to bear on the discussion.

14.10-15.00

**“Poul Henningsen and Cultural Radicalism”
Jørgen Dines Johansen**

The architect and world famous designer of lamps Poul Henningsen, known as PH, was in Denmark also a noted writer of songs for revues and cabarets from 1920-60. Politically he was attracted to the left. PH was, however, never a party member. Before the Second World War, even though he was critical of the Soviet Union, he did sympathize with the Communists. After the war, however, PH felt more affinity with the Social Democrats. He called his position *cultural radicalism* in the tradition of Georg Brandes. He was first and foremost an intellectual. In his song texts, he especially attacked conservatism and the role of traditions within society. This paper will attempt to characterize his points of view and argue that they add up to a unified doctrine.

15.00-15.30

Pause

15.30-16.20

“Media Entertainment: Aesthetics and Functionalities”

Kirsten Frandsen

Media are prominent providers of entertainment in modern society. Nevertheless, only very few researchers have addressed media entertainment as a communicative intention in its own right and discussed the aesthetics of media entertainment across genres.

In the first part of this presentation media entertainment will be discussed as a specific kind of aesthetic practice that by means of three distinct ways of “making special” establishes a particular zone. This zone is a prerequisite for the entertaining experience to take place and allows for different sorts of pleasurable imagination.

In the second part predominant views on the possible functions of media entertainment will be briefly outlined and discussed. These express more or less normative stands in research towards media entertainment and seem to question the functionality of media entertainment from either an individual or a societal perspective.

16.30-17.20

“Moving the Spectator – But Where To?”

-Art and Entertainment in the Contemporary War Movie”

Rikke Schubart

This presentation discusses the emergence of a new war aesthetics in the American war film in the nineties and the present decade. After having fought wars in the green jungles of Asia in the seventies and eighties, American soldiers are mobilized in the Middle East (Courage Under Fire, Three Kings, Jarhead) and Africa (Black Hawk Down). With the geographical relocation comes a new color palette, a new musical score and – we might argue – a new ‘feel’ of war. This presentation will ask whether there is a relation between the altered aesthetics of the war film and the affect, emotion, and meaning experienced by the audience. Is there such a thing as the art of a combat scene? Can war film be both art and entertainment?

17.20-18.00

Time for questions and discussion.