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Sailing the Seas of Cheese*

Erik Anderson

Abstract
Memphis Elvis is cool; Vegas Elvis is cheesy. How come? To call something cheesy is, ostensibly, to disparage it, and yet cheesy acts are some of the most popular in popular culture today. How is this possible? The concepts of cheese, cheesy, and cheesiness play an important and increasingly ubiquitous role in popular culture today. I offer an analysis of these concepts, distinguishing them from nearby concepts like kitchy and campy. Along the way I draw attention to the important roles of cultural/historical context, background knowledge, and especially artist's intentions as they are relevant to aesthetic assessments involving cheese and related concepts. I go on to contend that these concepts, properly understood, serve as helpful test cases concerning some important issues in contemporary aesthetics, such as the paradox of negative art and the contentious debate between intentionalists and anti-intentionalists.

Key Words
anti-intentionalism, camp, cheesiness, kitsch, high art, intention, intentionalism, low art, paradox of negative art, performance, popular culture

1. Introduction

It would be difficult to understand many aesthetic assessments in popular culture these days without a good grasp of the concepts of cheese, cheesy and cheesiness. Part of the reason is that the high art/low art distinction upon which aesthetic assessments depend in the modern tradition following Hume and Kant is not operative within contemporary popular culture.[1] It would be a bit too strong to assert that there are no sets of "disproportionate pairs"[2] of artworks at all to serve as standards by which to orient our aesthetic assessments. But this is precisely what makes the concept of cheese useful, and that is perhaps what explains its ubiquity. Cheesiness is relative, and the conditions for applying the term are subjective in just the right way to make it useful in a sea of relativity. My hope is that by shedding light on the nature of cheese and cheesiness, we will, indirectly, shed light on what it is for a work to be good art in contemporary popular culture.[3]

Consider an initial example. Bill Murray's subtly brilliant bad

lounge singer skits from early *Saturday Night Live* episodes are a beautiful parody of cheesy hotel-lounge entertainment. But Murray's act itself is not cheesy at all. Rather, it is a parody of the cheese or cheesiness of bad lounge acts found across the United States but probably most often associated with the ones found in Las Vegas and Atlantic City. There is something embarrassing, perhaps painful, and almost contemptible about such acts, even though they are completely and utterly harmless. They are harmless, and yet the parody works because of a shared sense of derision we direct toward the targets: *real* lounge acts. On the way out of a hotel hosting such a real act we might advise people on the way in: "Whatever you do, don't go near the lounge. The singer in there is the biggest cheeseball we've ever seen."

Cheese abounds in popular culture. Consider a few obvious examples: Celine Dion's over the top big-tent Vegas act that sold out nightly for over three years from 2003-7; much of what appears on "American Idol," the most popular show on American television; as well as just about anything by Barry Manilow, Pat Boone, Michael Bolton, and Kenny G, just to name a precious few. And cheese isn't restricted to music. Cheese and cheesiness appear in all forms of popular culture: music, movies, books, painting, photography, sculpture and architecture—and this list is certainly not exhaustive. Examples might include a pandering political speech, a gold chain on a hairy chest, the Rock and Roll McDonald's in Chicago, some Anne Geddes works, many Hallmark greeting cards, special effects in some movies, precious photos of cute little baby tigers wearing hats, and so on and so forth.

The purely aesthetic senses of 'cheese,' ' cheesy' and 'cheesiness' which I'm interested in are distinct from some other perhaps related senses of the terms. So distinguish this sense of 'cheese' from some others. For example, someone might say, "Wipe that cheesy grin off your face." to indicate mock-disapproval of but wry appreciation for a shared in-joke. Of course one might also use that same expression to indicate genuine disapproval for an inauthentic or disingenuous smile. I've heard the term used in another alternative sense as well: "Cover up those cheesy legs; you're blinding us!" This is an aesthetic sense of the term, but not the one I'll be addressing here.

Use of the term 'cheesy' is widening rapidly. Witness an editorial in the *New York Times* on October 16, 2008:

> The nation still doesn't know the full extent of President Bush's obsession with eavesdropping on citizens, but here's a cheesy new aspect: Phone calls home from American soldiers, aid workers and journalists in Iraq were reported to have been tapped and stored by military agents supposedly searching for terrorist intelligence leads.

I'm not even sure that this is a legitimate sense of the term 'cheesy,' but in any case it is not the sense of the term I'm interested in. Further examples will help to clarify this point.

A more legitimate use of the concept and one much closer to the sense of the term I have in mind appeared in *USA Today* just after the election of Barack Obama. On the subject of

Senator Claire McCaskill's early endorsement of Obama:

> She was the first female senator to back Obama over Hillary Clinton. McCaskill said her daughter had pushed her to take a stand and not be "a cheesy politician who's playing it safe."[4]

A similar use comes from Maureen Dowd, in the *New York Times*, November 19, 2008, on involving the Clintons in his new administration:

> Obama is overlooking all his cherished dictums against drama and leaking and his lofty vetting standards to try and create a situation where the country can benefit from the talent of the Clintons while curbing their cheesy excesses, like their cash flow from foreigners.

The point is fairly clear: cheesy politicians take the easy way out, securing their position by clinging to what is safe, refusing to take political risks that might constitute or precipitate genuine progress. Here is Maureen Dowd again on March 19, 2008:

> With the Clintons, we expect them to be cheesy on ethics, so no one is ever surprised when they are.

These examples shed some light on the seemingly odd use of the concept in *USA Today*, which we saw above: Bush's obsession with eavesdropping on his own citizens can be seen as cheesy because a clear violation of civil rights is being defended, not in some subtle, innovative or even devious way, but instead by invoking the tired and lame old excuse that "it's in the interest of our national security." Now, that's cheesy. It's not cheesy in the aesthetic sense, but we're getting there.

Here are some further examples of cheesiness: Pick-up lines are almost always cheesy. Cheating at video games, or at least winning unfairly over and over in the same mechanical way is cheesy. A friend of mine recently complained about how cheesy it was to hold a tropical-themed wedding reception at a chain hotel in the Poconos. Similar uses of the concept are ubiquitous in contemporary popular culture. "Did you see Burt Reynolds? He still has that cheesy porno mustache."

Cheese Whiz is cheesy but not in the relevant sense. However, the contrast with cheese, the dairy product, is instructive. On the one hand, there is no food product cheesier than Cheese Whiz. On the other hand, there is nothing about Cheese Whiz itself that is cheesy in the aesthetic sense. Of course it might be strikingly cheesy to serve Cheese Whiz at a cocktail party or something like that, in which case, Cheese Whiz would be cheesy in both senses of the term. What it is to be cheese in the former sense is to be a sample of a dairy product of a certain kind, and what it is to be such a sample is a matter of its composition. Thus 'cheesy' in this sense indicates something intrinsic; it expresses an *intrinsic* property. But what it is to be cheesy in the aesthetic sense is something relational. Thus to be 'cheesy' in the sense I am interested in is a matter of the possession of a *relational* property. For this reason, to someone from a country like France, where much natural cheese is produced, Cheese Whiz might indeed seem strikingly cheesy in the relevant sense: as unnecessarily

processed food, almost as a snack packaged for children and marketed to adults.

Some object's being cheesy, then, involves, obviously, its relations to other things that may or may not themselves be cheesy. Take this piece of ripe Camembert I have in my pocket. It's mine; I stole it fair and square from my friend Philippe, who made it. But it could exist without me, or Philippe, for that matter. Imagine now a possible world in which this piece of Camembert exists alone, not just in Philippe's and my absence, but all by itself—in a "lonely world."[5] This is just a way of saying that the property of being (a sample of) Camembert cheese is an intrinsic property. Things are different for the aesthetic sense of 'cheese'. Cheesiness of this kind is relational. Something whose intrinsic properties remained the same might change in its aesthetic cheesiness depending on its relations to other things. Burt Reynold's mustache would not have been cheesy had he lived in the Civil War era, and it might not even be cheesy today, if he moved, say, to Baghdad.

Cheesiness is also, obviously, a matter of taste. The popularity of KISS, Celine Dion and *American Idol* make this point almost too obvious to mention. However, although cheesiness is relational and a matter of taste, change with respect to cheesiness is still genuine change, and not mere "Cambridge change,"[6] as they say.

2. Nearby Concepts

To get a better grip on 'cheese,' 'cheesy' and 'cheesiness,' it will be helpful to distinguish them from some other some similar concepts that are easily confused with them.

'Unpleasant'

People find atonal music unpleasant but none call it cheesy, unless there are other things about it that make it so aside from its unpleasantness. So to say that something is cheesy is not *simply* to say that we dislike it because we find it unpleasant. Not all cheese is unpleasant, anyway. Kenny G's "Forever in Love" is moderately pleasant. In fact, it is this simple or simplistic pleasantness that, in combination with other things about it, makes it cheesy. Obviously, not everything unpleasant is cheesy. Dentist office visits are not cheesy, although the décor found in dentist's offices certainly can be.

'Tacky'

Something can be tacky without being cheesy. For example, the use of fluorescent paints in a barroom or a dance hall can be tacky without being cheesy. During a KISS concert, when Gene Simmons spits blood out of his mouth, it's certainly tacky, but it's debatable whether it's cheesy. A choreographer, set designer, or costume designer might dress his or her dancers in overly revealing outfits, which we would call tacky but might not call cheesy. Similarly, something can be cheesy without being tacky. A cheesy picture of cute, little, cuddling, baby tigers hung on a dorm room wall is cheesy but it's not tacky, unless they are up to something vulgar.

'Cheap' or *'Chintzy'*

We might complain about the cheesiness of some exurban Mexican restaurant: its frozen margaritas with mini-sombreros, its gaudy piñatas, red vinyl booths, neon Corona Beer signs, looping *vals mexicanos* and wait staff dressed daily in outfits appropriate only for Cinco de Mayo. Certainly part of our complaint is that the restaurant is a cheap substitute for the genuine article, something built out of the easiest and chintziest stereotypical elements that exurbanites might associate with Mexico. But although we might want to say that something is cheesy because it looks poorly constructed or slapped-together, and hence looks cheap or chintzy, 'cheesy' is not synonymous with either 'cheap' or 'chintzy.' There are many examples of expensive, bloated-budget films that are prime examples of Grade A cheese: John Travolta's *Battleship* Earth, a veritable feast of cheese, is a most obvious example. Nothing stands in the way of producing very expensive cheese. In fact, and *Battleship Earth* is a good example of this, something's being costly might add to rather than subtract from its cheesiness.

'Tasteless'

This is harder. Judgments about cheesiness are judgments of taste, and cheesiness is intrinsically derogatory. So to describe something as cheesy in the aesthetic sense is to charge that the work, or the performers or producers of the work, are lacking in taste. But it would be a bit too strong to say that something's being cheesy makes it or its producers taste*less*. Similarly, not everything tasteless is cheesy. Sexual jokes can make a screenplay tasteless without making it cheesy. Andrew Dice Clay's act from the 1980s is a good example of tasteless non-cheese.

'Trite'

What is trite is commonplace, stale and tired; hackneyed, corny and clichéd. At least that's what my *Word* thesaurus says. 'Trite' is certainly in the immediate neighborhood of 'cheesy'. But it is too harsh. When Celine Dion breaks into her "air-guitar" routine, squinting her eyes and pouting her lips in an attempt to inject emotive force into her performance, the result is cheesy, certainly, but it would be overly harsh to describe it as trite. It invites eye-rolling but not the same derision we direct at something trite like playing "Stairway to Heaven" in a guitar store.

'Crass'

For similar reasons, 'crass' doesn't capture what it is to be cheesy. What is crass is insensitive and is typically morally objectionable. The guy who insists on injecting, "That's what she said," at every opening in a conversation is being crass, not cheesy. Cheesiness is harmless, although objectionable for other reasons. The cute little baby tigers on the dorm room wall are cheesy but not crass because there isn't really anything insensitive or morally objectionable about them.

'Schlock'

People say that 'schlock' is the Yiddish term for cheese. I can't claim any kind of authority here, but this doesn't seem to be quite right. 'Schlock' implies sloppiness in construction. This is

sometimes the case with cheese too. But it need not be; cheese can be very carefully crafted. Again, Kenny G is a great example of very carefully handcrafted, Grade-A Cheese. So something might be cheesy and yet fail to be schlocky.

'Schlock Rock' which applies to "Hair Metal" bands of the 1980s, such as Poison and Winger, as well as to contemporary acts modeled after the originals, provides a good example of the ground on which the two concepts converge: the big hair, the spandex, the three-power-chord-progressions, the fluorescent guitars with the acute angles, the smoke, the pyrotechnics, the towering banks of amplifiers, the twenty-five-piece drum kit . . . .it's all too much to take seriously, and this is surely some of the appeal. Aesthetic and artistic quality are sacrificed in order to make room for the grossly over-the-top presentation.

'Corny'

The concept of corniness is obviously very close to the concept of 'cheesiness.' First of all, there is the food connection, and there is certainly an overlap in application of the two concepts. What is cornball might just as well be described as cheeseball. In some cases, the two terms are interchangeable: corny special effects are cheesy special effects. Yet 'corny' might have an application to certain cheap and silly jokes that wouldn't typically be termed 'cheesy'. The former is more playful than the latter, and the latter implies an inauthenticity not part of corniness. A speech at a wedding reception might be corny because of its sentimentality or silly humor but fail to be cheesy because the sentiment or humor involved is not invoked for manipulative effect.

'Cliché'

A natural suggestion might be that we react negatively to cheesy art because "it's so 1999."[7] But cheesy isn't the same as cliché either. Consider the contrast between cool Memphis Elvis and cheesy Vegas Elvis. The problem with the rhinestones and the bellbottoms and the giant collars and the throwing of the sweaty scarves isn't that it's so 1950s. We don't say, "I can't believe Elvis wheeled out that old chestnut of an act." The act is cheesy but not cliché. Of course someone who covers his Vegas-era act now is almost doomed to cliché. But his own act, in 1972 Las Vegas, was not cliché.

Similarly, cliché is not sufficient for cheese. An eight-year-old child at the school talent show might sing "Good Ship Lollipop" and it would be, of course, cliché but not necessarily cheesy. If the act included in addition lots of make-up and *American Idol*-style over-singing and over-acting, then it would be approaching cheesiness. But being simply cliché is not enough to be cheesy. In fact, if Elvis had simply recycled his 1950s act for the shows of 1970s Las Vegas, this would have been preferable simply because it would have been *merely* cliché and not cheesy, as well.

'Showy'

Cheese can result from something's being overly showy. There is evidence that at one stage in the evolution of the term, 'cheesy' did just mean 'showy', descending ultimately from

"the big cheese."[8] But the two concepts have since diverged. Memphis Elvis and Vegas Elvis are both showy, but only the latter is cheesy. For that matter, the Taj Mahal is showy but it's not cheesy. Similarly, not everything cheesy is showy. Neither Bobby Darin's version of "Mack the Knife" nor Sonny Rollins' "Moriat," based on the same tune, is particularly showy, but only the former is cheesy.

One especially revealing and instructive use of the concept of cheesiness I found while listening to a recent playoff series on the radio. The announcer gleefully but, paradoxically, also slightly peevishly charged that "Tonight the pitcher has been painting the corners of the plate with cheese." Here the term is used to indicate a pitch that has an allure similar to that of a specious argument. On the surface it looks good, but it is misleadingly good-looking. In the end, it's what leads to the batter's demise: "Struck him out with the high cheese!?"

3. Kitsch, Camp and Cheese

'Kitsch'

If I give you a piece of kitsch art, perhaps as a gift or a joke, what I give you is an inferior, tasteless copy which I know will produce in you an easy sentimental response. But that's not necessarily a bad thing. It's complicated. There is a voluminous literature devoted to kitsch and kitsch art,[9] but apparently, the term was used originally to refer to cheap and sentimental imitative art, popular among the *Nuevo Riche* in mid-to-late nineteenth century Munich. Over time the term came to connote artwork of such poor construction, bad taste, pretentiousness and, especially, melodramatic sentimentality, as to be considered immoral. At least this is the conclusion drawn by Robert Solomon,

> One of several suggested etymologies is that the word is German for "smear" or "playing with mud," and, toying with this, we might speculate that the "mud" in question is emotion and mucking around with emotions inevitably makes a person "dirty."[10]

We might level an obvious objection here, pointing to the fact that lots of what goes by the name 'kitsch' is, although certainly sentimental, nevertheless sweet and harmless. Pink Flamingoes, lava lamps and lawn jockeys are kitschy but, surely, are not immoral.

There is a genuine dispute here. Some authors adhere to what Deborah Knight calls "the standard view" that kitsch objects are of such poor taste that they deserve our moral derision.[11] Others attempt to deflate such claims, noting either that there are value-neutral instances of sentimentality or that there are genuinely morally laudable ones.[12] The fulcrum of the dispute seems to be a matter, first, of the magnitude of the sentiments involved and, second, the manner and degree to which they are exploited for the purposes of manipulation of the intended audience. The complaint about kitsch art is that it traffics in reproduction, sentiment and cliché, and that this makes its appeal purely superficial, and potentially dangerous by making the audience vulnerable to easy manipulation.[13] The purely superficial appeal of kitschy objects, it is claimed, fails to engage the

intellect in the way needed for genuine art-appreciation. Of course kitsch art and kitsch art-appreciation are not much concerned with non-aesthetic but art-relevant properties—things like originality and genius. As kitsch-object, a pink flamingo purchased at Wal-Mart for $5 is just as good—just as valuable—as one handmade by Picasso.[14]

Because cheese is similarly wrapped-up in sentimentality, reproduction and cliché, an analogous and equally genuine dispute arises in the case of cheesy art. But cheese and kitsch are not the same thing. 'Kitsch' can be used as a term of aesthetic approval, as when applied to works of art that embrace the sentimentality for what it is. I might complain about the Velvet Elvis above your fireplace: "Why do you have that horrible, tacky thing up there? I thought you had good taste." You might correct me: "No, it's kitschy; I love it." But 'cheese' is a derogatory term. After I complain about your Velvet Elvis, "What's that horrible tacky thing doing up there?" it would be a misuse of the concept to reply, "No, it's cheesy; I love it."[15]

So something can be kitschy but not cheesy. The Velvet Elvis on the dorm room wall, the lawn jockey in the front yard, the garden gnome in the back yard, the studiously retro décor in the corner café are some examples. Similarly one and the same thing might be cheesy but not kitschy. Pick-up lines are like this. The music of Kenny G is another good example. Although unquestionably cheesy, Kenny G is way too uncool to be kitschy; someone might collect Kenny G music as a joke but not for its kitsch value.

To pick a different example, of course the music of Dean Martin is or was at one time very popular, and a great number of people actually listen to it deliberately and for the purpose of enjoyment. Isn't that a counterexample to the claim that 'cheesy' is a derogatory term? No. The distinction with kitschiness supplies the difference. A person can enjoy kitschy art while at the same time recognizing *that* it is kitschy. But no one simultaneously enjoys cheesy art while recognizing *that* it is cheesy. If they thought it was cheesy, they wouldn't enjoy it. The claim is simply that no one simultaneously enjoys and judges as cheesy, say, Dean Martin's "Volare"-- although one might find it kitschy and enjoy it that way.

But mightn't someone enjoy an artwork *despite* its cheesiness? What then? It is common to say things like, "I know it's a little cheesy, but I still love it…" But this is not a counterexample either. Something's being a little cheesy doesn't make it cheesy. My grandmother is a good person even though she speeds occasionally. Nobody's perfect.

One possible suggestion is that cheese is unintended kitsch. In other words, the claim would be that cheese is tacky, unoriginal, tasteless, sentimental art that is *intended* to be refined, original, tasteful and intellectually engaging art. There is something correct here, but although cheese involves a failed intention, this failure is not itself enough to make something cheesy. If it were enough, then all cases of failed art would be cases of cheese, and this conclusion is surely too strong.

This fits with Milan Kundera's famous remark about kitsch:

> Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch.[16]

This does suggest an analogy or a least a similarity with cheese, but cheese is not mere sentimentality, not even a complex, self-reflexive sentimentality. Cheese lacks an authenticity present in kitsch. Kitsch is sincere, whereas cheese involves a kind of insincerity in that it aspires to a level of appreciation it does not warrant.[17] So cheese cannot simply be unintended kitsch. That way of thinking about it gets the intention wrong. Cheese arises not from a lack of intention, but rather from a *failed* intention. Success or failure, of course, depends upon the receptivity of an audience. Thus, for example, whether a pick-up line is cheesy or not depends at least in part on the receptivity of the audience. Similarly, much of the dialogue in the recent teen book and movie sensation *Twilight* can be understood this way.

For similar reasons, the accordion music of Weird Al Jankovic is kitschy but not cheesy. Although it is unoriginal, unsubtle and showy, it is too self-aware to count as cheesy, and the intention is not right. The intention is subtle and self-aware, involving the equally self-aware, winking complicity of the audience, neither of which is involved in deceptive inauthenticity.

Not all cheese is kitsch. Hair Metal from the 1980s is cheesy but not kitschy. Hair Metal trades in the "power ballad" designed to produce sentimentality of the amorphous sexual desire variety. It does produce in its audience an authentic response, as intended, and so its intention succeeds to this extent. There is nothing intrinsically cheesy about grown men sharing in the production and consumption of such sentiments, but when it is for an audience composed chiefly of teenage girls, the result is pure cheese -- creamy Velveeta.

'Camp'

Many consider Hollywood and Broadway musicals paradigm cases of either kitsch or cheese. All of that overly-cheery singing and dancing and over-acting, the melodrama, the gaudy wardrobes, the ever-so-clever lyrics are really all too much to bear, and so people often consider the result cheesy or kitschy. But they are typically wrong. Similarly, Ru Paul' outlandishly over the top drag queen act is neither kitschy nor cheesy, although it shares many of the elements of both. It certainly shares the winking self-awareness of certain kitschy acts like Weird Al Yankovic's parodic accordion playing, and Paul's studious frivolity resembles in those respects Gene Simmons' spectacularly cheesy blood-spitting KISS routine. But in other ways Paul's act itself, the audience's response to it, and the intentions and expectations involved are distinct from those involved in kitsch and cheese. Paul's act is more accurately described as "camp".

As with kitsch, there is a voluminous literature devoted to camp[18], but the *locus classicus* of camp literature is Susan Sontag's "Notes on 'Camp'."[19]

> Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. That way, the way of Camp, is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization.[20]

> The essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: artifice and exaggeration.[21]

> Camp arises when "we can enjoy, instead of be frustrated by, the failure of the attempt" to create something serious or of high-quality.[22]

> Many examples of Camp are things which, from a "serious" point of view, are either bad art or kitsch.[23]

> The ultimate camp statement: It's good *because* it's awful.[24]

Camp results from the presentation of what appeals to naïve, wholesome, middle-class sensibilities but in a way that exhibits an exaggerated degree of artifice, stylization, and extravagance, or even grandiosity to the point of frivolity. Camp sensibility involves the love of all of this. Thus it requires, importantly, authenticity. But it also involves the appreciation of a dual-effect generated: the over-theaticalized earnestness makes way for an ironic sensibility. Campy performance thus involves a wry self-awareness, a winking at the audience who winks back: It's good *because* it's so bad. In this way, camp both enjoys and employs the gaudy and the flamboyant.

> Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a "lamp;" not a woman, but a "woman."[25]

The best examples of camp, according to Sontag, come from Rococo and Art Nouveau styles[26] that employ the appropriate high degree of artifice and exaggeration. They are, she says, cases of "pure" camp, which tend to be more satisfying than the "deliberate" variety because of their naïveté.

The pure examples of Camp are unintentional; they are dead serious.[27]

Of course, not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as Camp. Only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve.[28]

Classical works of the art nouveau genre are "dead serious," and the camp effect achieved is more pronounced when the artist is working earnestly but producing camp unintentionally. Sontag here is not making a conceptual claim about camp but is simply making a psychological observation: better examples of camp are produced unintentionally when the performers or artists are utterly serious. It is a seriousness that fails in its pretentions to greatness but succeeds, unintentionally, in producing something that can be appreciated in a wholly different way: as campy marginalia.[29]

This claim about the respective qualities of pure and deliberate camp may not hold up forty years after the publication of "Notes on 'Camp'". Consider the Australian sitcom, *Kath &*

Kim, which has already become something of a camp cult-classic. Its over-the-top parody of suburban middle class life in all of its lovable hypocrisy is pure camp fun. It is clearly intended to be such and it can only be truly appreciated as campy satire. But it is nevertheless camp of the highest quality and it produces the most satisfying effect. Further examples of high-quality deliberate camp are easy to find. Steven Cohan makes the case that the classical MGM musicals starring Judy Garland are both textbook examples of camp and deliberately produced as such.[30] Cohan's claim, though not uncontestable, is certainly plausible.[31] And it is not really that important anyway: in distinguishing between "pure" and "deliberate" camp, Sontag is not making a conceptual claim but is, instead, dividing up the evidence from empirical cases and drawing some evaluative conclusions.

In any case, camp is not to be confused with cheese. Something can be campy without being cheesy. Again, although many elitist-types might be inclined to dismiss Broadway musicals like *Hairspray* as exercises in cheese, this would be a mistake because these productions are more properly understood and appreciated for their campy celebration of their own awfulness . Similarly, no one would mistake Monty Python's "Camp Square-Bashing" sketch, another camp cult-classic, for an instance of cheese, although no one mistakes it for high art either. Conversely, something can be cheesy without being campy. The recent Baz Luhrmann film, *Australia*, starring Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman, offers an interesting illustration. Its cheesy CGI backgrounds, just part of that film's overall failed attempt to produce a grand epic on the scale of *Gone with the Wind*, does not result in camp. It is a failed attempt at seriousness which, although it does have a mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate and the naïve, nevertheless fails as camp, and results instead merely in cheese. Even Hugh Jackman's softly lit, soapy, rippling-muscled shower scene fails as camp and simply adds to the net cheese effect. Similarly, the Sean Daniel and James Jacks cheese vehicle, *The Mummy* series, is an exercise in cheese. It is enjoyable cheese, to be sure, but not intellectually charged enough or flamboyant in the right way to count as campy.

'Cheese'

Cheese, then, is closely related to but is distinct from both kitsch and camp. Unlike 'kitsch,' 'cheese' is a derogatory term, and cheesiness, unlike kitschiness, involves a failed intention to move an audience in a certain way. Cheese, like camp, is bad. But unlike camp, cheese is inauthentic and manipulative, in that it attempts to pass off its badness as something good, which it is not. Camp, although it certainly dwells in the land of complicated and multiple levels of meaning, does not suffer from this kind of inauthenticity. Thus some cheese can be seen as failed camp.

As I mentioned earlier, there is evidence that the current sense of the term 'cheese' derives from the expression 'the big cheese,' whose source ultimately is the Persian or Hindi word 'chiz'.[32]

> Originally it had nothing to do with cheese — the source is the Persian or Hindi word *chiz*, meaning a thing. Sir

> Henry Yule wrote it up in *Hobson-Jobson*, his famous Anglo-Indian Dictionary of 1886. He said that the expression "used to be common among Anglo-Indians" and cites expressions such as "My new Arab is the real chiz" and "These cheroots are the real chiz." Another expression with the same meaning that predated *the real chiz* was *the real thing*, so it's highly probable that Anglo-Indians changed *thing* to *chiz* as a bilingual joke. Once returnees from India started to use it in Britain, hearers naturally enough converted the unfamiliar foreign word into something more recognizable, and it became *cheese*.
>
> The phrase *big cheese* developed from it in early twentieth-century America, as a term to describe the most influential or important person in a group. The first written example we know about is in Ring Lardner's *Haircut* of 1914. It followed on several other American phrases containing *big* to describe a person of this kind, most with animal or vegetable associations — *big bug*, *big potato*, *big fish* and *big toad*, of which the oldest is probably the British English *bigwig* of the eighteenth century (more recent examples are *big shot*, *big enchilada* and *big banana*). Like the others, *big cheese* was by no means always complimentary and often had derisive undertones, no doubt helped along by the influence of other slang meanings of *cheese*.[33]

Among the latter are 'cheesed off,' 'cheesed,' 'cheesy grin' and 'cut the cheese.' Especially important for the present discussion, there is also evidence that the practice of saying 'cheese' when posing for photographs indicates the disingenuousness of a forced smile: a 'cheesy grin.'[34]

Let us now gather some examples of cheese as the concept is used in contemporary popular culture. Bobby Darin's "Mack the Knife", but not Sonny Rollins' "St. Thomas"; Pat Boone's but not Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti"; Mario Lanza's "O Sole Mio"; just about anything by Kenny G but just about nothing by John Coltrane; *The Mummy* series; pick-up lines; 1980s Hair Metal (to which 1990s Grunge is a backlash); at least some of 1940s and '50s West Coast Jazz (to which 1950s and '60s Hard Bop is a backlash); Barbara Walters television specials; "You had me at hello"; "I can't live without you"; "You complete me"; Dean Martin; pandering political speeches and commercials. What do these have in common? Here is an attempt at capturing the concept:

Cheese is lacking in originality, subtlety, and authenticity, often showy to the point of showing-off, with the aim to induce an original, subtle and authentic response in an audience, but where the intention typically fails in that the response induced is typically unoriginal, unsubtle, and inauthentic, such as cheap sentimentality or pathos.

One might object: 'cheese' is not necessarily derogatory. Some of the dialog in the recent book and movie *Twilight*, for example, can only be called cheesy, and yet it is endearing of the characters nonetheless. "Sure it's cheesy, but in a good way." This is wrong. Either the dialog is merely sentimental but not cheesy at all, and our speaker simply means to say that it is sentimental but in a good way, or else it *is* cheesy

and bad for this reason, but its badness is overwhelmed by something else, such as how adorable the person uttering the cheesy lines is. Cheesy dialog might be forgivable if delivered by a dreamboat, especially for a teenage audience. His dreaminess more than compensates for his cheesiness.

So why is Dean Martin cheesy and Frank Sinatra not, even though the two belong to one and the same musical and performance genre and share not some small number of similarities, including a fan base? By now the answer should be quite apparent. Dean Martin aims for but fails to achieve the level of originality subtlety and authenticity achieved in Sinatra's best works, even though Dean Martin employs similar performance techniques, works in similar musical styles and affects a similar persona.

Another objection will be raised by anti-intentionalists, who are loathe to incorporate intentions into interpretive aesthetic assessments. For example, one might object: How can cheese arise from a failed intention? Surely Celine Dion succeeds in producing what she intends, for her audience responds appropriately by being moved in just the way intended. The flamboyant stroke of the air guitar sends the audience into rapturous delight. The intention succeeds yet the act is still cheesy.

I have more to say about this below, but for now it is enough simply to point out that our judgments about cheese require that the thing judged to be cheesy is judged also to involve a failed intention in its production, just as we can't judge that someone is being pretentious or presumptuous without assigning to that person a certain kind of intention. Similar points can be made concerning how our judgments about cheese involve historical or cultural contexts, as well as background knowledge and experience of relevant categorial facts having to do with, e.g., genre and style. I have more to say about these later.

For now, it is important to at least make note of the culturally specific nature of the concepts of cheese and cheesiness. In this paper, I am concerned with an analysis of the concepts as they are used in Western popular culture in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It may be that use of the concepts does not occur outside certain linguistic communities or sub-communities whose range is restricted by various geographical, economic, ethnic, or other factors. Something like this is surely the case, and so for what follows one must keep in mind that the discussion is culturally contextual in these ways.[35] One rather clear example of the culturally sensitive nature of "cheesiness" can be seen in the case of the exaggerated overacting prevalent in Latin American telenovelas. To North American viewers, the overacting contributes to a cheesy effect, but presumably members of Latin American audiences register no such response. This is all as it should be.

Perhaps for something to be cheesy it not only has to be considered bad by somebody, but it also has to be liked by somebody, and in particular liked by somebody whom the original somebody thinks has bad taste. "Burt Reynold's porno mustache? It's so cheesy—I can't believe he thinks it's sexy!' "Kenny G is so cheesy—my mom listens to that stuff."

Perhaps these mean that when I label something cheesy, I'm not only disparaging the work but also the people who like the work. This is all rather elitist, but none of it precludes my occasionally letting out my inner teenage girl and enjoying the special edition of *Dirty Dancing*, or singing along to "My Heart Will Go On." It just means that I can't do so and consider it cheesy at the same time. More on this below.

The relational character of cheese and related concepts is shared by other kinds of aesthetic concepts, as is made clear from the discussions of kitsch and camp, above. Thus I do not want to give the impression that the important roles of historical-cultural context, artist's intentions and audience receptivity are unique to cheese. To the contrary: they are shared by many fundamental aesthetic concepts.[36] What I hope to do here is to show, rather, how the concept of cheese provides a good illustration and a test case for various debates in contemporary aesthetics.

4. Some Theoretical Points About Who Cares

Intentionalism and anti-intentionalism

Cheesy art provides examples that help to illustrate the debate between intentionalists and anti-intentionalists, or what Stephen Davies calls "value maximizers."[37] With his highly influential work, "Categories of Art," Kendall Walton convinced many aestheticians that proper art interpretation requires that artworks be perceived or experienced under the right categories.[38] He claimed further, and quite plausibly, that it is sometimes the case that artist's intentions supply some of these categories. Call such intentions "categorial intentions." One fairly uncontroversial example of such an interpretation-determining categorial intention is simply the "for-public-consumption" intention, which is the artist's intention to produce an artifact for public appreciation. Other interpretation-determining categorial intentions might include the intention to produce a work of one or another established artistic category, such as the intention to produce a painting rather than a sculpture, or prose rather than poetry. Intentionalists and anti-intentionalists disagree about all of this in various ways and to various levels of vexation.[39] Of course, evaluative intentions aren't allowed by either side, since, for example, the mere intention to produce a great work is presumably irrelevant to matters of interpretation. Without attempting to resolve the debate here, I want to hold simply that the intentionalist position is a viable candidate position, and so any complaint that my account of cheesiness appeals objectionably to artists' intentions is off base.

Keeping this in mind, we can note that cheesy art is especially ripe for parody. Whether Celine Dion's "My Heart Will Go On" counts as a powerful and emotional *tour de force* or a hilarious send-up of sappy, sentimental movie soundtrack ballads depends on the intentions, or at least the hypothetical intentions,[40] of its performer. No one seriously maintains that Celine Dion was intending to produce a self-parody with her version of the song, and that interpretation should be rejected. She intended, rather, to produce a heart-wrenching power ballad. Such categorical intentions are relevant—indispensible—to the interpretation of artworks because categorial intentions help to fix the identity, and thus the

content, of the work.[41] As Davies puts it, the interpretation needs to be true to the work, not merely consistent with it.[42] Of course an artist's categorial intentions might fail, if other requirements are not in place.

To illustrate what I have in mind, contrast Celine Dion's version of "My Heart Will Go On" with an instrumental version of the same song performed by Los Straightjackets, a Nashville band with a guitar-heavy style in the tradition of The Ventures. The Los Straightjackets version begins, following brief introductory sounds of lapping waves and a foghorn, with a relatively reverential rendering of the melody on electric guitar with tremolo effects, but then proceeds through a series of ridiculous clichés, including over-dubbed string and choral accompaniments, and one-string guitar solos employing overuse of the guitar's "whammy-bar" and needlessly exaggerated reverb effects. The key then modulates upward for dramatic effect as new parts are added to the mix, including overdubbed and wholly gratuitous harp plucking and absurdly dramatic organ grinding. There is a pause for a guitar bridge done in a kind of 1960s style "rave up," which is followed immediately by a chorus of "aahs" that repeats the main theme. All of this continues to build to a climactic tympani-filled grand finale, followed by the bubbling, gurgling sound of, evidently, the ship's going down.

The Los Straightjackets version is obviously a send-up of a cheesy movie theme song. But it is not itself a work of cheese, despite the fact that it is composed entirely of a series of cheesy clichés. It would be impossible to appreciate the Los Straightjackets version of the tune without understanding that it is a parody, and this categorial property is something fixed by the intentions of the artists. Similarly, although the Celine Dion version is much more enjoyable understood as a kind of self-parody, this way of appreciating it is not really a way of appreciating the work itself.

So we might reason as follows: for the debate between intentionalists and anti-intentionalists, the tough cases involve situations where differences in interpretation arise depending on whether we are guided by our concern for the artist's intentions (actual or hypothetical) or by concern for maximal artistic value. Cheesy art provides a host of easily understandable examples from popular culture that make this contrast particularly clear. Here are two of them:

The movie *Australia*, understood as a sweeping epic love story in the tradition of *Gone with the Wind*, is facile, tedious and rather embarrassing to watch, but understood as a self-referential parody of such grandiose pretentions, is a hilarious and biting satire that is rather enjoyable to watch. "My Heart Will Go On," performed by Los Straightjackets, is a painful series of ridiculous clichés if heard as a reverential cover of the *Titanic* theme song, but understood as parody, it is a masterful employment of technical expertise and a brilliant send-up of a popular culture icon.

Nevertheless, an anti-intentionalist might complain these are simply cases in which the artists' categorial intentions decide the case by fixing the category to which the works belong, and anti-intentionalists as well as intentionalists can agree on this point.[43] This objection is somewhat off the mark, for the

intentions involved in works of cheese are importantly different from those involved in the ordinary case. With cheesy art, whether a categorial intention succeeds or not may still be something that is audience-dependent. To see what I have in mind, consider that there are further kinds of intentions relevant to cheesy art production, beyond the categorial ones. Especially important is the kind of intention that is involved in *trying too hard*. This intention is at least part of what is objectionable about pick-up lines and gold chains, and it is part of what makes them cheesy. Similarly, what makes an essential contribution to the cheesiness of *Australia* is that it is so clearly trying too hard, aspiring to a greatness it can never achieve. The same is true of another cheesy movie epic, *Pearl Harbor*. In such cases, our assessments of artistic value cannot escape reference to this kind of intention. Even the attribution of a seemingly intrinsic aesthetic property such as gracefulness can be influenced in the same way. Michael Brecker and John Coltrane often differ with respect to gracefulness, despite the fact that cheesy works of the former often incorporate non-cheesy elements of the latter.

Of course all of this is, as it should be, largely subjective and audience-relative. Production of cheesy art involves a failed intention to produce something original, authentic and moving, but the intention may fail only for the critically-inclined. Consider what might be one of the great examples from the history of cheese: the French cheesy art of Francisque Poulbot, whose early twentieth century works include paintings of weeping clowns and of little Parisian boys in rags, often depicted peeing in the street as sign of cute misbehaving.[44] Poulbot and other popular Montmartre artists of that time (the practice disappeared with the 1960s) who painted weeping clowns were driven by the idea that the paradox was interesting, and these pictures did find their proper audience. Thus, it is important to take into account the target audience that *does* enjoy the object and finds it not cheesy but tasteful, like American consumers of cheese whiz versus the foreign cheese lover. But the fact that judgments about cheesiness are always going to be audience-relative does not change the fact that some of the intentions involved in the production of cheesy art and essential to it are not merely categorial intentions. At the very least, given the level of contention between intentionalists and anti-intentionalists, it is not a decisive objection to my account of cheesiness that it appeals to artists' intentions. Furthermore, cases of cheesiness in art provide nice illustrations of some important points in the debate between intentionalists and their opponents.

The naïve aesthetic theory of art

Cheesy art provides straightforward challenges to the naïve aesthetic theory according to which artistically relevant properties are determined by, or supervene on, aesthetic properties. This is particularly interesting, as the naïve aesthetic theory is the one held, implicitly, by the average person on the street, and yet that same person easily grasps the challenges that cheesy art presents for that theory. Aesthetically identical works can differ with respect to a variety of artistically relevant properties, including semantic properties (reference and meaning) as well as certain metaphysical properties (artistic category, art-historical

context, originality, forgery).[45]

Bill Murray's cheesy lounge singer parody is a hilarious mocking portrait of an imagined but aesthetically identical performance that deserves our derision. We laugh at the one but not at the other, or at least not in the same way or for the same reasons. Murray pokes fun at an imagined performer who is trying too hard and failing, but Murray is neither trying too hard nor failing. One act but not the other is cheesy because they differ in semantic content, despite the fact that they are, we may suppose, aesthetically identical. So two artworks may differ with respect to cheesiness and yet be aesthetically identical. Making the same point in reverse, Ed Wood's *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, is a classic of sci-fi cheese, not a brilliant send-up that cuts against the grain of Hollywood norms.[46]

The paradox of negative art

Cheese provides some beautiful cases relevant to the paradox of negative art,[47] generating what we might call "the paradox of cheese." Why, given its cringe-inducing properties, does cheese attract such huge audiences? One obvious solution would be to claim simply that a positive response compensates for the negative response produced by cheese.[48] After all, we might say, Pat Boone's "Tutti Frutti" has sufficient enjoyable qualities, aesthetic and non-aesthetic, to overcome whatever cheesiness it exhibits. Similarly, the target audience of *Twilight* might find something compensatory in its response to the cheesy dialog in that book and movie series. But this seems wrong: the palpable cheesiness of Pat Boone's rendition of "Tutti Frutti" surely overwhelms the rest. Further, it would be implausible in the case of Celine Dion's several years of sold out shows in Vegas that the members of her audience perceived any cheesiness at all.

However, a more sophisticated, or Eudemonian, account might do: the negative response is genuine, we might say, but it is part of a broader art appreciation picture involving deeper, cognitively driven satisfactions beyond mere pleasure. But this seems highly implausible in the case of cheesy art. It seems, rather, that the attitudes of cheese-inclined audiences of *Twilight* and Celine are better captured by the conversionary account according to which the negative response is turned into a positive one. It is not so much that the cheesiness is overcome by other, more important qualities, but rather that it disappears altogether. It is sort of like joining a benign cult: given that no real harm is done, one converts. Upon conversion, one learns to love Celine Dion. If this is right, then the radical relativity of cheesiness becomes inescapable. The artwork can remain the same in all of its cheese-relevant properties and yet audiences will differ in their responses. Enjoyment of horror films, which also have cringe-inducing properties, albeit of a very different kind, might be explained in a similar way.

Postmodernism

Finally, its ubiquity makes the concept of cheesiness an interesting test-case for all kinds of aesthetic theories of popular culture. In particular, what I've discussed about the importance to cheesiness of the concepts 'copy' and

‘reproduction’ suggests implications for some themes of postmodernist aesthetics. For example, Walter Benjamin, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Umberto Eco, among others, discuss a family of notions, including mechanical reproduction,[49] the iterative and the repetitive, serial production of tokens of one type,[50] sameness, and simulacra.[51]

Importantly, the paradoxical combination of the ubiquity of and aversion to cheese in popular culture appears to count both for and against claims that originality, authenticity and reality no longer guide aesthetic assessments in the postmodern age. Ordinary use of the concept of cheesiness exploits these very notions and their dialectical counterparts. It is a concept impossible to apply without at least an implicit understanding of the importance of these various distinctions. Nor should it be claimed that the concept of cheese is simply a holdover from hierarchical, elitist, and modernist pretentions. Cheesiness doesn’t really have application inside elitist culture.

Vegas is the land of cheese, and the way to consume what it has to offer is to inauthentically immerse oneself in the not-so-expensive-but-not-so-cheap-either copies of real things, both artifactual and natural, original and copy. Every day is a veritable cheese-fest. And yet everyone knows this about Vegas. It is an escapist paradise that no one would confuse with the real thing. Someone might enjoy what Vegas has to offer more than the real things themselves, but no one confuses Vegas with the genuine article either; they just don’t care. They’ve gone over to the cheese side.[52]

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Endnotes

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* I borrow the title from the 1991 Primus album of the same name, Interscope Records.

[1] Of course this is controversial already. For more on the high art/low art distinction, see John Andrew Fisher, “High Art versus Low Art,” in *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 409-22.

[2] See David Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste,” *Four Dissertations* (London: 1757).

[3] This strategy applied to aesthetic value is not wholly unlike the one recommended in the case of ethical value by theorists who favor attention to “thick” ethical concepts like “cowardly” over “thin” ethical concepts like “bad.” See, for example, Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978). Thanks to John Bigelow for this observation.

[4] "Obama's Win Ushers in New Group," Susan Page, *USA Today*, 11 November, 2008.

[5] See David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 60-63; see too Lloyd Humberstone, "Intrinsic/Extrinsic," *Synthese*, 108 (1996), 205-267.

[6] Paul Geach, *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) pp. 71-2.

[7] Thanks to John Andrew Fisher for this point.

[8] See Michael Quinion, *World Wide Words*, http://www.worldwidewords.org/copyright.htm. Retrieved February 4, 2010.

[9] See, for example, *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, ed. Gillo Dorfles (New York: Universe Books, 1968); Tomas Kulka, *Kitsch and Art* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), pp. 3-21; and Robert Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 49, 1 (1991), 1-14.

[10] Robert Solomon "Kitsch and Sentimentality," p. 4.

[11] Deborah Knight, "Why We Enjoy Condemning Sentimentality: A Meta-Aesthetic Perspective," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57, 4 (1999), 411-20. Knight cites Anythony Savile, "Sentimentality," in *Arguing About Art*, eds. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1995), and Joseph Kupfer, "The Sentimental Self," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 20, 4 (1996), 543-60, as advocates of the standard view.

[12] See for example, Robert C. Solomon, "In Defense of Sentimentality," *Philosophy and Literature*, 14 (1990), 304-23, and Kathleen Higgins, "Sweet Kitsch," in *Philosophy and the Visual Arts*, ed. Philip Alperson, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 568-581.

[13] Not all sentiment is bad. Part of Tolstoy's greatness lies in his capacity to induce in his readers a genuine emotional response, as when Anna Karenina throws herself in front of the train. See Colin Radford, "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. Vol. 69 (1975), 67-80.

[14] Although here is a seeming counterexample: a pink flamingo made by Don Ho might enhance the kitsch value.

[15] I shall ignore for the moment cases of ironic locutions analogous to, "I love bad art," and "I love it, *because* it's so bad." These can be ironed out by some fairly straightforward reinterpretation. More on this below.

[16] Milan Kundera, *Life Is Elsewhere*, quoted in Robert Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 49 (1991), 4-12.

[17] This is close to what Mark Booth says about camp: "To be camp is to present oneself as being committed to the marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal

merits." *Camp* (London: Quartet Books, 1983), p. 18. More on the concept of camp, below.

[18] See for example, Mark Booth, *op. cit*.; Fabio Cleto, *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); and Steven Cohan, *Incongruous Entertainment: Camp, Cultural Value, and the MGM Musical* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

[19] Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'," *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), pp. 275-92.

[20] *Ibid*, p. 277.

[21] *Ibid*, p. 275.

[22] *Ibid*, p. 285.

[23] *Ibid*, p. 278.

[24] *Ibid*, p. 292.

[25] *Ibid*, p. 280.

[26] *Ibid,* p. 279.

[27] *Ibid*, p. 282.

[28] *Ibid*, p. 283.

[29] *Ibid*, p. 283.

[30] Cohan, *op. cit.*

[31] One reviewer, Jennifer Judkins, concurs:

By registering an emotional intensity that overwhelms the song's lyrics or narrative placement (a Judy specialty), we have a super-theatricalized authenticity; that is, camp.

See her review, *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism*, 64, 4 (2006), 491-493; ref. on p. 492.

[32] Another source has it that the origin is Urdu. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, http://www.etymonline.com/, retrieved February 8, 2010.

[33] Quinion, *op. cit.*

[34] *Oxford English Dictionary*, http://dictionary.oed.com, retrieved February 8, 2010.

[35] I am indebted to an anonymous referee for drawing this to my attention.

[36] Kendall Walton makes an especially convincing case for this in his classic, "Categories of Art," *Philosophical Review*, 79, 3 (1970), 334-67.

[37] Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), chapter 8. See too, his *The Philosophy of Art* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), chapter 5.

[38] Kendall Walton, *op. cit.* For his criteria of correctness, see pp. 357-8.

[39] Among the great deal of recent work on the subject is an excellent exchange between Robert Stecker and Daniel Nathan. Robert Stecker, "Interpretation and the Problem of the Relevant Intention," and Daniel Nathan, "Art, Meaning, and Artist's Meaning," in Kieran, Matthew, ed., *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Malden, MA, Blackwell, 2006.

[40] For a well-known discussion of the position, see Jerrold Levinson, "Intention and Interpretation," in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 175-213.

[41] Kendal Walton defends this claim about the importance of categorical intentions for the proper interpretation and understanding of artworks in "Categories of Art." See, in particular, p. 364.

[42] Stephen Davies, *Philosophy of Art*, p. 123.

[43] But perhaps not. Daniel Nathan denies the indispensability of even categorical intentions. See his "Art, Meaning, and Artist's Meaning," in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).

[44] See Jan Carew, *Poulbot of Montmartre: Artist and Philanthropist* (New York: Sterling Press, 2006).

[45] See Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy*, 61, 19 (1964), 571-84, and *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); George Dickie, "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1, 1 (1964), 56-65, and *Aesthetics: An Introduction*, (Indianapolis: Pegasus, 1971).

[46] I take this well-known example from Noël Carroll, "Art, Intention and Conversation," in *Intention and Interpretation*, ed. Gary Iseminger (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp. 97-131.

[47] Kendall Walton, "Fearing Fictions," *Journal of Philosophy*, 75, 1 (1978), 5-27, and Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[48] For a concise discussion of this and other responses, see Stephen Davies, *The Philosophy of Art*, pp. 153-163.

[49] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed., Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonovich, Inc., 1968), pp. 217-252.

[50] Umberto Eco, "Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Post-Modern Aesthetics," *Daedalus*, 114, 4 (1985), 161-184.

[51] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983); and *Simulacra and Simulations*, trans. S. Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

[52] I wish to thank two anonymous referees at *Contemporary*

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