

Handout for Alumni Board Talk (January 21, 2017)
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1) "In the evenings I usually watch television or go to the movies. Week-ends I often spend on the Gulf Coast. Our neighborhood theater in Gentilly has permanent lettering on the front of the marquee reading: Where Happiness Costs So Little. The fact is I am quite happy in a movie, even a bad movie. Other people, so I have read, treasure memorable moments in their lives: the time one climbed the Parthenon at sunrise, the summer night one met a lonely girl in Central Park and achieved with her a sweet and natural relationship, as they say in book. I too once met a girl in Central Park, but it is not much to remember. What I remember is the time John Wayne killed three men with a carbine as he was falling to the dusty street in Stagecoach, and the time the kitten found Orson Welles in the doorway in *The Third Man*" (Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer*).

2) Scratch the surface of any attack on the popular arts — the early Christians against the Roman circus, the Puritans against Shakespeare, Coleridge against the novel, the various assaults on photography, film, jazz, television, pop music, the Internet, or video games — and you will find Plato's criticisms of poetry. For the fact is that the works of both Homer and Aeschylus, whatever else they were in classical Athens, were, first and foremost, popular entertainment. (Alexander Nehemas)

3) ...I have had enough serious interest in the products of the "higher" arts to be very sharply aware that the impulse which leads me to a Humphrey Bogart movie has little in common with the impulse which leads me to the novels of Henry James or the poetry of T. S. Eliot. That there is a connection between the two impulses I do not doubt.... To define that connection seems to me one of the tasks of film criticism, and the definition must be first of all a personal one. A man watches a movie, and the critic must acknowledge that he is a man. (Robert Warshow)

4) Passage from George W. S. Trow (1980):

"TELEVISION"

Television has a scale. It has other properties, but what television has to a dominant degree is a certain scale and the power to enforce it. No one has been able to describe the scale as it is experienced. We know some of its properties, though.

Television does not vary. The trivial is raised up to power. The powerful is lowered toward the trivial.

The power behind it resembles the power of no-action, the powerful passive.

It is bewitching.

It interferes with growth, conflict, and destruction, and these forces are different in its presence.

“Entertainment” is an unsatisfactory word for what it encloses or projects or makes possible.

No good has come of it.

5) Paul Thomas Anderson movie “Magnolia (1999):” —

“And there is the account of the hanging of three men, and a scuba diver, and a suicide. There are stories of coincidence and chance, of intersections and strange things told, and which is which and who only knows? And we generally say, “Well, if that was in a movie, I wouldn't believe it.” Someone's so-and-so met someone else's so-and-so and so on. And it is in the humble opinion of this narrator that strange things happen all the time. And so it goes, and so it goes. And the book says, “We may be through with the past, but the past ain't through with us.”

6) We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing ensures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation -- all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls “forms of life.” Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest on nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying. (Stanley Cavell)