Philosophy circle discusses need for live performances

By Zachary Jernigan
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"The value of doing something live is that it gives us permission to not be perfect," Kate Hawkes said.

Paul Friedman and Angel Guevara — the other two participants of the Friday, April 10, installment of Philosophy in the Public Interest Hot Topics Café, a Northern Arizona University program designed to foster public debate — nodded in agreement with Hawkes. Each a professed lover of live performance, the three Sedona locals had come to take part in a discussion moderated by Russ Pryba, Ph.D., a professor in NAU’s Department...
“What’s the value of live performance?” inspired a variety of questions and responses to the topic, ranging from definitions couched in philosophical terminology to personal accounts of transformative performances.

“We yearn for it.” Hawkes said, adding that after times of catastrophe public performance is one of the first forms of art to bring a community back together. In this light, according to Hawkes — herself an experienced playwright, theater performer and producer — there is no greater value in a major Broadway play than a child’s ecstatic performance.

“I feel I understand more,” Friedman said. The experience of working together to create something powerful helps him expand his range of appreciation, an essential feature of art for Friedman. At the same time, he admitted that there are performances that please others that do not please him.

Pryba wondered aloud if such performances, those that arouse strong positive reactions in most viewers, are inherently valuable — or if the whole experience is subjective, simply up to taste.

“I’ll ask myself, ‘Did this work or not?’” Hawkes responded, adding that if her or her actors’ performance aroused some reaction, positive or negative, that caused the audience to go home and think deeply about what they saw, she had achieved something worthwhile.

“Then, I’ve done my job,” she said with a smile.

Pryba offered another possible interpretation — art as a cure for loneliness. “I think it’s a lovely expression,” he said, asking the participants if they agreed and going one step further by drawing a link between live performance as a way to foster democratic ideals in a healthy community.

Guevara’s interpretation was perhaps more simple, more focused upon personal experience: “I’m looking for a way to enrich myself. . . doing live performance is an expression of love.”

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