

## **Defining entertainment: an approach**

### *Abstract*

Entertainment is a key cultural category. Yet the definition of entertainment can differ depending upon whom one asks. This article maps out understandings of entertainment in three key areas. Within industrial discourses entertainment is defined by a commercial business model. Within evaluative discourses used by consumers and critics it is understood through an aesthetic system that privileges emotional engagement, story, speed and vulgarity. Within academia entertainment has not been a key organizing concept within the humanities, despite the fact it is one of the central categories used by producers and consumers of culture. It has been important within psychology, where entertainment is understood in a solipsistic sense as being anything that an individual finds entertaining. Synthesizing these approaches the authors propose a cross-sectoral definition of entertainment as ‘audience-centred commercial culture’.

### *Keywords*

Entertainment, commercial culture, aesthetics, gratification

### *Introduction*

The cultural and creative industries comprise a substantial and powerful segment of global economic and cultural spheres. They were worth 654 billion euros in 2003, growing 12.3 per cent faster than the overall economy of the European Union and employing over 5.6 million Europeans (United Nations, Creative Economy Report 2008, p. 5). They are also deeply influential at a cultural level: they articulate cultural identities and values, and are sites for those identities’ contestation and discussion. The cultural and creative industries, in short, are economically and culturally significant; understanding

their workings in order to further develop them has become a major project across academia, government, and industry.

Within the growing cultural and creative industries, the Entertainment Industries are a major subsector. The fact that entertainment exists as a distinct category of culture is uncontroversial, at least industrially. Multinational research firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, for example, regularly publishes the *Global Entertainment and Media Outlook*, focusing on a clearly-defined 'Entertainment and media' industry sector. The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance of Australia is the union and professional body that 'covers everyone in the media, entertainment, sports and arts industries,' signaling a clear understanding of entertainment as a defined sector. Major firms such as J.P Morgan's Entertainment Industries Group, Sony Music Entertainment, and Nine Entertainment Australia, to name a few, demonstrate that 'entertainment' is an accepted, uncontroversial industrial category. Industry bodies reflect an idea that while the cultural and industrial categories of 'Arts' and 'Entertainment' are cognate—parts of a broad continuum of cultural products—they are distinct from one another: as nomenclature such as the Arts and Entertainment Network TV station; the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance; the US and Canadian Census' 'Arts, Entertainment and Recreation' North American Industry Classification System category attests.

Entertainment products circulate widely: people of many cultures spend a great deal of their time engaging voluntarily with entertainment, defining their identities and values through entertainment, and enjoying entertainment products. So many people elect to consume entertainment products that Wolf writes of the 'entertainmentization of the world' (Wolf 1999). Entertainment, in other words, is not a small and isolated cultural phenomenon with little cultural purchase: it is at the centre of many cultures' self-articulation and understanding, and many people's leisure time: understanding just what 'entertainment' is, therefore, means understanding one of the more significant cultural forces.

The Entertainment Industries are not only one of the more visible and culturally ubiquitous areas of the cultural and creative industries; they are also one of the

more economically significant. PricewaterhouseCoopers's 2012 Global Media & Entertainment Outlook 2013-2017 predicts that "the global E&M market will grow at a CAGR [combined annual growth rate] of 5.6% over the next five years, generating revenues in 2017 of US\$2.2tn, up from US\$1.6tn in 2012"

(<http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/global-entertainment-media-outlook/data-insights.jhtml>).

Understanding how the Entertainment Industries work, then, is a critical part of the broader project of understanding the dynamics of the cultural and creative industries. The term 'entertainment' is used and accepted globally at both industrial and cultural levels. And yet, as we will show in this article, there is no clear consensus about the definition of the term. We propose an approach to understanding entertainment by mapping key areas where the term is used – industry, consumption and academia - and providing an overview of its meanings in those contexts. In doing so, the article answers what at first seems like a simple question: what is 'entertainment'?

. We propose that this data will be useful across all sectors. It will be useful to academic researchers and governmental policy makers who want to understand the subsectors of the creative industries. It will also, we propose, help businesses in the creative industries understand exactly where the focus of their entertainment business should be – with customers. In his seminal article from 1960, Theodore Levitt describes 'Marketing Myopia' as a dysfunctional product-based perspective that results in a poor understanding of an organisation's core business. He describes how it almost led to the downfall of the major US movie studios.

Hollywood barely escaped being totally ravished by television. Actually, all the established film companies went through drastic reorganizations. Some simply disappeared. All of them got into trouble not because of TV's inroads but because of their own myopia. As with the railroads, Hollywood defined its business incorrectly. It thought it was in the movie business when it was actually in the entertainment business. "Movies" implied a specific, limited product. This produced a fatuous contentment that from the beginning led producers to view TV as a threat. Hollywood

scorned and rejected TV when it should have welcomed it as an opportunity—an opportunity to expand the entertainment business. (Levitt 1984 [1960], 59-60)

### *Business*

Economists define Entertainment simply, based on its business model. Andersson and Andersson (2006), for example, believe (with prominent Entertainment economist Harold Vogel) that the internal characteristics of a product cannot define its status as entertainment. Rather, they argue, the defining characteristic of Entertainment is that it is founded on a standard market economic and business model: in entertainment, the idea is for consumer payments to meet or exceed production costs (2). In Entertainment, entry into the market is relatively unimpeded, there is standard market competition, and success of a product is decided by consumer activity. This definition is reflected in industry usage. Live Performance Australia, for example, ‘the peak body for Australia’s live entertainment and performing arts industry,’ divides the sector into two groups, based on their business models: there is the subsidized sector (called the Australian Major Performing Arts Group and including all national and state operas, ballets, theatres, and orchestras) —in which government subsidies account for 36.6% of total revenue, and box office sales for 41.7% - and the non-subsidized sector—in which government subsidies account for 4.8% of total revenue, and box office income for 59.9% (Live Performance Australia 2010). PricewaterhouseCoopers and Ernst & Young include only commercial operations in their economic analyses of the ‘Media and Entertainment’ sector. Industry usage of business models to define Entertainment makes sense: trying to define product types, organisations, or media types as Entertainment is subjective; defining Entertainment by its business model is more objective and significantly more clear. Using business models as a defining feature of Entertainment helps to explain how some organisations generate both Entertainment (for example, a ballet company’s annual Christmas production of *The Nutcracker*, which is programmed to sell the maximum number of tickets to a large audience) and art (the same organisation’s production of a contemporary

dance piece), and how Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet* is Entertainment, while the Bell Shakespeare's production of *Henry 4* is not. Industry usage signals that Entertainment is *commercial* culture, whatever its content might be.

Similarly, business academics define entertainment as culture offered for 'the exchange of money' (Sayre and King 2010, 4):

Fruits of applied technology have ... spawned new art forms and vistas of human expression.... Little or none of this, however, has happened because of *ars gratia artis* (art for art's sake)... Rather, it is the presence of economic forces – profit motives, if you will – that are always behind the scenes, regulating the flows and rates of implementation (Vogel 2011, xx)

Scheff and Kotler (1996) argue that adherence to one or other side of the low versus high culture paradigm determines both the fundamental orientation and business performance of creative organisations:

The sharp distinction between the 'nobility' of art and the 'vulgarity' of mere entertainment is due in part to the systems under which they operate. The performing arts are predominantly distributed by nonprofit organizations, managed by artistic professionals, governed by prosperous and influential trustees and supported in a large part by funders. Popular entertainment, on the other hand, is sponsored by profit-seeking entrepreneurs and distributed via the market (Scheff and Kotler 1996, 34)

Entertainment tends to be based on building a slate of income-producing projects that continue to generate revenue throughout their lifecycle and provide business continuity (Casali and Mazzarol 2011, 2). Entertainment seeks to give large audiences what they want and will buy – or, more precisely, what they *will* want and buy at that point in time when the entertainment product is made available to them. As a result, the economics of Entertainment revolves around processes of risk minimalisation, production in established genres, the recycling of successful franchises and audience testing.

The rise of the Entertainment Industries over the course of the nineteenth century in Western countries – moving from individual craft-based models of culture to a process whereby cultural products could be produced in a

standardized model, by teams of people, using equipment such as printing presses to produce large numbers of identical texts – had many implications for the systems of managing culture. One of these is

that the law recognizes the participants in the production of entertainment have rights that may be enforced in a court of law. The contributors in such arrangements, for example the musicians and actors who contract to provide their creative talents, are commercial commodities over whom control may be exercised to sustain profits. This is evidenced by a number of cases that have come before the courts in the last 150 years or so. For example, Warner Bros obtained the assistance of a court in the United Kingdom to stop Bette Davis performing or acting for anyone else during the two years she had agreed to act exclusively for Warner Bros. This example is telling as one of the earliest and most visible examples of the management of creative talent by a commercial company. The consent of the movie studio was required before she could ‘render any services for or in any phonographic, stage or motion picture production’ for anyone other than Warner Bros (*Warner Bros v Nelson* 1937, 213). More recently, to take a more everyday example, Tracey Curro a television presenter contracted to program *Beyond 2000* was restrained by the producers from breaching her promise of exclusive service. This effectively prevented her from joining a rival Australian television network (*Curro v Beyond Productions Pty Ltd* 1993).

For the people who make it, entertainment is defined primarily by the business model of its production. A clear definition is made in terms of business models – entertainment is that form of culture that is commercial in its orientation, that does not rely primarily on subsidies from government or patrons and which exists to the extent that there is an audience willing to pay for it. At the same time, it is also recognized that entertainment is audience-centred cultural production, where economics and audience satisfaction are relational.

If entertainment is defined as commercial culture, one might wonder if this removes it from the sphere of interest for governmental policy makers. This is not, in fact, the case. Policy settings can significantly impact on commercial

culture – such as zoning laws for night-time economies. And even the most purely commercial forms of culture – such as example of the television program *Big Brother* in Australia – may still receive state support, although this will typically be in the form of investment from a body promoting tourism or economic development, rather than from an arts body aiming to promote particular forms of culture.

### *Consumption*

Consumers distinguish ‘entertainment’ as a form of culture, which has distinctive textual features (discussed below). In a sense this contradicts the business position that anything can be entertainment if it is produced within a commercial business model. Many newspapers feature separate ‘Arts’ and ‘Entertainment’ sections, or a single section titled ‘Arts and Entertainment,’ rather than a single section titled ‘culture.’ There exist entertainment magazines, entertainment reporters, and entertainment law firms. The definitions of ‘arts’ and ‘entertainment’ have never been simple, and in the course of the twentieth century they have been modified in a number of ways – particularly with questions about cultural omnivorousness as a marker of cultural capital (Warde, Wright and Gayo-Cal 2007), postmodern art practices (Indiana 2010) and theories of culture (Jameson 1991). Nevertheless the distinction retains an important position in the consumption of culture. Newspaper reviews of culture routinely make the distinction. A review of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s latest musical makes it explicit: ‘the deficiencies of *Love Never Dies* as art are more than covered for by its value as sumptuous old-fashioned entertainment’ (Blake 2012, 10). While not making explicit what the criteria are for evaluating ‘art’, the reviewer points us towards the importance of ‘sumptuousness’ (spectacle?) as a value for entertainment. A book reviewer comments of one popular writer that: ‘These stories ... might not qualify as art, but they sell. Very, very well ... Her books might not change lives or linger too long in the mind but they give several hours of pleasurable escape’ (Morris 2012, 30). Here art is opposed to selling well, and it is implied that art lingers in the mind, while bestsellers offer pleasurable escape. A review of another author asserts that ‘High literature it is

not but ... the characters are clear-cut, the pace is demanding and the ideas are bold' (Goldsworthy 2012, 34) – here the aesthetic criteria of non-literature are bold characters and ideas, and a fast-moving plot.

The aesthetic system used by consumers to value entertainment is particularly important because entertainment and its audiences are co-constitutive. By “aesthetic system” we mean in this article a set of criteria by which audiences make judgments about the value of a piece of culture. Entertainment as we currently understand it can only function when there exist sufficiently large audiences with suitable leisure time to consume regularly-produced products. And so, ‘the commercialisation of cultural production began in the nineteenth century in those societies that made the transition from feudalism to capitalism. This commercialisation intensified in advanced industrial societies from the early twentieth century onwards’ (Hesmondhalgh and Pratt 2005, 2). The rise of Entertainment industries, as a part of the broader growth in cultural industries, emerged from, and remains bound to the rise of modern working class culture and audiences.

Walter Kendrick, who traces the emergence of a category he names ‘scary entertainment’ (gothic novels, which he argues then evolved into horror films) in the course of the nineteenth century, argues that for such entertainment to exist there must first be a reliable audience who want to consume a certain kind of culture (Kendrick 1991, 33): for example, a ‘market for fiction’ (Kendrick 1991, 33). Richard Ohmann, in his history of the emergence of popular magazines and newspapers, similarly suggests that entertainment was mutually constituted alongside its audience:

In 1833, a compositor named Benjamin Day hit upon the idea of bringing out his *New York Sun* at a penny .... These papers revolutionized the business and brought together a new readership (Ohmann 1996, 20)

Ohmann argues that entertainment ‘entrepreneurs’ in the nineteenth century, like magazine publisher Frank Munsey, ‘hit upon a formula of elegant simplicity: identify a large audience that is not hereditarily affluent or elite, but that is getting on well enough and that has cultural aspirations, [and] give it what it wants’ (Ohmann 1996, 25). Ohmann also argues that this shared culture then



helps to create a group, by giving them something in common. The shared consumption of entertainment becomes a common element of a group – an audience – who might not otherwise share a background or everyday practices. These audiences also had to have the capacity to consume new forms of culture. Ohmann argues that entertainment was a ‘phenomenon of the city’ (Ohmann 1996, 20) – and in particular, a phenomenon of the urban working class (see also Peiss 1986). Mass industrial entertainment was a regular – daily, weekly, monthly event.

As well as audiences, new ways of thinking about and organizing culture had to emerge. Kendrick argues that:

what we know as a genre comes fully into being when publishers (or movie studios) can count on predictable demand for a more or less uniform product (Kendrick 1991, 77)

Writing of sensational theatre in the nineteenth century he notes that

the entertainment industry had entered a phase that we, late in the twentieth century, can recognize. ... it had become an industry, in the modern sense, for the first time ... the endlessly resourceful, grossly overworked minions of early nineteenth century theatre ... grabbed anything that would sell, copied it till it stopped selling, then moved on. Many playwrights were incredibly prolific. George Dibdin Pitt, for instance, is credited with producing some 140 dramas, melodramas, farces, burlesques and pantomimes between 1831 and 1857 (Kendrick 1991, 119)

All of these elements of entertainment as a cultural system emerge from the fact that this is culture made for profit, and therefore culture designed to give large audiences what they would want – at least, ‘till it stopped selling’. With the development of audiences and genres in place, the industries that would produce and distribute entertainment could grow.

At the very core of why audiences consume entertainment is the satisfaction or ‘pleasure’ they derive from doing so. Like all cultural production, entertainment products are experience products that have symbolic value – rather than utilitarian products that perform a basic function – and audiences watch a movie,

read a comic book, or listen to an album for the experience. For Richard Maltby (Maltby 2003, 34) 'what we [everyday people] recognize as entertainment is something that provides a pleasurable distraction from our more important concerns' (a point returned to below). As Maltby argues in relation to Hollywood cinema:

Hollywood's most profound significance lies in its ability to turn pleasure into a product we can buy. The dream factory's dreams are sold to us as a form of public fantasy that allows for public expression of ideas and actions we must all individually repress in our everyday behavior (Maltby 2003, 52).

As this suggests, entertainment depends upon – and trades upon generating – an emotional engagement with audiences, one that is pleasurable in some way, whether it be laughter, tears, or thrills. This engagement is called 'involvement', which refers to a psychological bond that consumers have with the product (Martin 1998). Involved consumers add individual and shared meaning to entertainment products, which facilitates increased enjoyment (or perhaps disappointment), and increases customer loyalty (Neale 2010).

In some respects the law draws distinctions that are similar to the aesthetic systems employed by consumers to distinguish between entertainment and other forms of culture. While there are lawyers who specialize in Entertainment Law and journals and books devoted to Entertainment Law, there is no 'body' of laws specifically about entertainment, in the same way that Criminal Law may be thought of as being those laws concerning criminal offences and Contract Law those laws concerning the formation and discharge of contractual relations. Instead 'Entertainment Law' denotes an informal amalgamation of those laws that have relevance to those who might be commonly understood as being involved in entertainment, such as copyright law, censorship law, contract law, defamation law and taxation law. Most, if not all, of those involved in entertainment will at some point be involved in activities that will be regulated or have their parameters defined by these various laws. Musicians may be concerned about the copyright in their works and the terms of exploitation of that copyright, film producers will be concerned about the classification of their

films and the audiences that their productions will be able to reach, and so on. But copyright laws, censorship laws and the other laws constituting the amalgamation known as Entertainment Law apply equally to other activities. For example, copyright and censorship apply equally to academic works.

And yet, even though in some ways the law treats all forms of culture the same – be they art, entertainment, education, or any other form of culture – there remains at certain points in legal processes a distinction between different forms of culture. In Australia, for instance, in defamation law a person's reputation is balanced against free speech by recognising defences which may permit publications that would otherwise be regarded as defamatory. One such defence relates to publication 'about a government or political matter' (*Lange v Australian Broadcasting Corporation* 1996) which has been variously defined but in essence means matters concerning 'social and economic features of Australian society'. Other defences are similarly delineated. For example, honest opinion or fair comment is available for publications *in the public interest*, as opposed to those *of interest to the public*, including publications for entertainment purposes (Butler and Rodrick 2012).

By contrast, in a more positive sense a publication that might otherwise be regarded as vilifying on the grounds of, for example, race or religion may be excused where it is done reasonably and in good faith for 'artistic purposes', and for censorship laws, when determining the appropriate classification for a film, computer game, book or magazine one of the relevant factors to be taken into account is the 'literary or artistic merit' of the publication (Butler and Rodrick 2012). However, even in this sense, even less when used as a means of contrast, concepts of 'entertainment' or 'art' are not given specific meanings and instead rely on common understandings. For the most part this may be unproblematic: a film, computer game or comedy skit may be commonly understood to fall within that common understanding. More difficult will be novel activities that push the boundaries of those common understandings. In such cases reasonable people may reach different conclusions regarding whether an activity should be regarded as entertainment or art for the purposes of the law.

Understanding entertainment from the lens of consumption draws our attention to entertainment's distinct aesthetic system. While accepting the industrial perspective that any kind of culture can function as entertainment if it is produced as in a commercial business model, understanding the audience's perspective shows us that certain kinds of culture have historically tended to function most effectively under commercial business models. From this perspective, the aesthetic system of entertainment values story, fun, speed, emotion, spectacle, loudness and vulgarity (McKee 2012).

### *Academic and policy approaches*

There are two key cultural forces that have influenced why entertainment has not yet been taken up in a coherent way within academia. As (Maltby 2003, 35) has argued, 'if we sometimes feel uneasy, even guilty, about taking entertainment seriously, we are merely responding to the forces in our culture that tell us that if we are going to devote our energies to thinking, we should be thinking about something more serious'. According to Maltby, the first force is the 'attitude of the entertainment industry itself, which has consistently sought to describe the cultural effects of its products as trivial, and has thus contributed to the treatment of its products as trivial' (35). Hollywood, for example, has and continues to unashamedly describe itself as a producer of fantasies or dreams that provide pleasure or enjoyment rather than serious art-forms that positively impact upon the quality of life and shape better citizens. The second force 'governing attitudes to entertainment' has been the treatment of entertainment within the practice of cultural criticism. As we noted above, newspaper reviewers have applied distinct criteria to the evaluation of art products and entertainment products. Academic cultural critique has tended simply to exclude entertainment products from serious aesthetic consideration. For Maltby:

The principal cultural function of criticism is to make judgments of value, and ... the most authoritative forms of criticism in our culture have not valued entertainment highly. For most the of the twentieth century, critical authority saw movies [and most entertainment products] as part

of a mass culture it condemned as vulgar, philistine, or lacking in moral seriousness (35)

The idea of 'mass culture' emerged as construct in academic cultural criticism in the nineteenth century. As Storey argues, 'the invention of popular culture as mass culture was in part a response to middle-class fears engendered by industrialization, urbanization and the development of an urban-industrial working class' (2003, 16). Adorno and Horkheimer, arguably two of the most influential theorists of entertainment in the history of cultural theory, write on 'mass culture' and bring 'entertainment' explicitly under this remit. They decry 'the fusion of culture and entertainment that is taking place today [in 1944]', that 'leads ... to a depravation of culture' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972 [1944], 143). They assert of 'all the ... products of the entertainment industry' that 'sustained thought is out of the question', and that 'no scope is left for the imagination' (127), this explaining the 'stunting of the mass-media consumer's powers of imagination' (126).

We believe that globally there has been only a little academic attention to "entertainment" as a cultural category. University teaching and learning of entertainment largely takes a subsectorial, content-based approach: there are departments and academic journals of, for example, Music, Games, and Film and TV. While each of these subsectors comprises a significant segment of the entertainment industries, entertainment is not typically employed as an organising concept—or a term that sees much use—in these academic areas. Academic Music studies, for example, deal with classical and experimental music, as well as music commonly understood as entertainment. Similarly, some aspects—largely content and fans—are studied in the academic areas of Popular Culture, Media Studies, and Cultural Studies, but none of these fields attends specifically to entertainment as a discrete cultural or industrial system; none of these fields features widespread use of the term 'entertainment.' *The International Journal of Cultural Studies*, for example, has published only five articles with 'entertainment' in their titles since its first issue in 1998; the *Journal of Popular Culture* states that its domain of interest is the 'perspectives and

experiences of common folk,' a domain which may include entertainment, but which is not focused on it.

Although it is not typically used as an organizing principle in the study of culture, there does exist some work on entertainment within the humanities. A key writer here is Richard Dyer, who has been publishing on the category of entertainment since 1973, and whose book *Only Entertainment* remains a key text some twenty years after its first publication. Although he has written on many aspects of culture, particularly through his work in film studies, Dyer holds a particular role in studies of entertainment as, for several decades, the only humanities writer who engaged with the category in a sustained way. Dyer defines entertainment in terms of its functions for the audience. For the audience, he suggests, entertainment is 'distinctive in its emphasis on ... pleasure, ahead or even instead of practical, sacred, instructional or political aims or functions' (Dyer 1973, 1). Its 'central thrust', he argues, is 'utopianism':

Entertainment offers the image of 'something better' to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide.

Alternatives, hopes, wishes – these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better (Dyer 2002, 20)

The American historian Lawrence Levine is another of the small number of humanities academics who has focused on entertainment. Throughout his career he wrote history from the perspective of outsiders. His work on entertainment takes a similar approach, refusing the ahistorical account of cultural value offered by cultural elites. He demonstrates in his detailed history of cultural hierarchies that it was largely over the course of the nineteenth century that a culture that had been shared across different classes began to fragment. Prior to the nineteenth century, 'Shakespeare was presented as part of the same milieu inhabited by magicians, dancers, singers, acrobats, minstrels and comics. He appeared on the same playbills and was advertised in the same spirit' (Levine 1988, 23). But during the course of the nineteenth century, cultural leaders undertook a process of 'sacralization' (Levine 1988, 132) – turning Shakespeare from a form of culture for the masses to 'a new literary religion' (Richard Grant White, quoted in Levine 1988, 70), only suitable for the 'exclusive' audience, and

not for the 'great popular masses' (New York Herald, quoted in Levine 1988, 66). Similar work was done to render symphonic music and opera suitable only for the most educated class fraction. And so two broad strands of culture were developed. Art was to be difficult, challenging, requiring education and reverence to consume. It should only be accessible to 'the better class, the most refined and intelligent of our citizens ... the high minded, the pure and virtuous' (Thomas Whitney Surette, quoted in Levine 1988, 101). Entertainment continued to be open to the common masses. The process of 'sacralization' was a struggle to 'establish aesthetic standards, to separate true art from the purely vulgar' (Levine 1988, 128), and the upper from the emerging middle classes. This returns us to the distinct business model of entertainment. A vital part of the process of sacralization was finding new ways to fund culture that did not rely on audiences paying directly for the works of art. He demonstrates in detail how the champions of art argued that audiences should not be given what they *want* – which, they argue, is trivial, easy and vulgar – but what they *need* – the culture that will improve them and make them better people or citizens. In this new model of culture - where art must be produced, but it is not what most people want - other ways have to be found to pay for it. Levine argues that this was the way in which cultural elites in the nineteenth century invented the idea of subsidized culture – culture that was paid for by wealthy philanthropists, or by the state, on the basis that the culture that was being created was inherently more valuable than the forms of culture that audiences wanted to see. This was different from the patronized culture of earlier eras where a rich patron might pay for something, but then would have control over the form taken by that culture – for example, in medieval and Renaissance Europe as well as in feudal kingdoms in Japan and south East Asia . This new form of subsidized culture saw artists as independent – being paid by philanthropists or by the state to make what the artist thought was valuable, not what the patron wanted to be made.

Dyer also suggests that 'entertainment' might better be understood 'not so much a category of things as an attitude towards things' (Dyer 2002, 6). This brings us to perhaps the most developed area of academic studies of entertainment - studies of entertainment psychology. As psychologists of entertainment Dolf Zillmann and Peter Vorderer suggest, entertainment promotes emotional

responses – but these responses may not be pleasant in any simple sense. Entertainment makes people ‘laugh and cry, feel the sadness and happiness of others, share their terror and triumph, or simply .... generat[es] calming or thrilling sensations and experiences of serenity and elation’ (Zillmann and Vorderer 2000, vi). Psychological work moves away from the cultural object of entertainment and instead studies the individual. Taking this approach, ‘entertainment’ is understood to be the experience had by the individual, rather than a cultural object. Here, ‘entertainment’ encompasses experiential as well as tangible products: skydiving, travelling, and shopping gratify their users in the same way as do movies, video games, and music festivals. Vorderer, Steen and Chan note that ‘someone seeking entertainment usually does so for its own sake, that is, in order to experience something positive such as enjoyment, suspense, amusement, serenity and so on’ (Vorderer, Steen and Chan 2006, 6).

Entertainment is defined as anything which offers consumers ‘attainment of gratification’ (Zillmann and Vorderer 2000, vii); and that gratification can take the form not only of ‘enjoyment’ (Vorderer, Klimmt and Ritterfeld 2004, 388) but also of other responses such as ‘appreciation’ (Oliver and Bartsch 2010, 53). These responses can be found from any external stimulus – not just those that we traditionally think of as ‘entertainment’. For entertainment psychologists, everything that people choose to consume to obtain any positive experience from falls under the category of entertainment – including ‘comedy, videogames, sporting contests, mystery novels, and the like’ (Oliver and Bartsch 2010, 54) but also literary novels (Vorderer, Steen and Chan 2006, 7), documentaries and ‘history’ (Oliver and Bartsch 2010, 53). Even films about emotionally tragic events such as the Holocaust as portrayed by Steven Spielberg in *Schindler’s List* have become part of mainstream entertainment. However, there is a difference in general usage of the term between entertainment as a category, and ‘entertaining’ as an adjective. Skydiving, golf, and shopping, for example, may be entertaining and enjoyable to many of their participants, but are not generally, industrially, or academically understood or identified as entertainment.

Industrial approaches do not include these entertaining recreational activities in their usage of the term ‘entertainment.’ In academia, Roberts was influential in setting the parameters of the academic discipline of Leisure Studies in the 1970s



when he suggested that leisure be characterized by 'the Big Five: gambling, sex, alcohol, television, and annual holidays' (Roberts 2004). Activities, generally participation-based rather than audience-focussed, that people practice for pleasure are understood and classified as 'recreation,' and sometimes 'leisure.'

### *Definition*

Drawing upon and synthesizing the understandings of 'entertainment' in these three domains – industry, consumption and academia - we suggest the following provisional definition of entertainment: entertainment is audience-centred commercial culture. It works as a system driven by audiences, to give them what they want to consume, and it is driven by commercial business models and imperatives. Entertainment is a system that consists of institutions, groups of people, and discourse. Relevant institutions include the companies that produce and distribute entertainment, as well as governments that make policy that affect these processes and NGOs that lobby around particular aspects of entertainment – calling for censorship, or for equity of access. The groups of people involved include the class of creative practitioners as well as audiences. Discourses in place around entertainment include discourses of aesthetic value as well as systems of meaning around health, children and so on. . Entertainment has a cultural history from the nineteenth century onwards as a distinct cultural system from the forms of cultural gratification that came before.

To illustrate what we mean by this, we take the case study of focus groups in Hollywood, and the ways in which entertainment producers seek to understand and respond to the demands of audiences.

[*Fatal Attraction*] originally had a rather arty conclusion, in which the woman, played by Glenn Close, commits ritual suicide as she listens to a recording of *Madame Butterfly*. Preview audiences rejected the ending as unsatisfying, however, and ... Paramount Pictures had the director, Adrian Lyne, reshoot it. In the revision, Ms. Close's character and her paramour, played by Michael Douglas, have a violent struggle in which she is nearly drowned in a bathtub and is finally dispatched by a gunshot fired by his

wife (Anne Archer). With the new ending, *Fatal Attraction* ... earned more than \$300 million in box-office receipts worldwide (Weber 2011, 16)

This is a case study of entertainment par excellence. We see in place the business model where the entertainment product is beholden to the audience – if the producers do not think the audience will like what is being offered, they will recall the creative and order them to change it in line with the aesthetic preferences of the audience. We see the aesthetic system of entertainment in place – the new ending is more exciting, violent and satisfying. And it is changed in order to offer consumers ‘gratification’. And as entertainment, it worked: audiences bought it; it made money.

### *Conclusion*

This article is deliberately named ‘an approach’ to defining entertainment as it represents only a starting point – and perhaps a research agenda – for a more exhaustive project of understanding entertainment. We have identified three key domains where the term entertainment is used, and we have mapped out some of the important themes regarding the term from each of those domains. We have shown that the use of the term ‘entertainment’ across these three domains does not align in any straightforward way, and we have made a tentative suggestion about how they might be reconciled.

However more detailed work needs to be done in each of these areas. Extensive interviews are required with the business people who produce and distribute entertainment before we can make a final judgment on their understanding of the term. We have little empirical data about audiences’ understandings of entertainment and how they value it. A sustained analysis of reviews and interviews with critics would allow us to map out in more detail the aesthetic systems of entertainment. And although we have pointed to a small number of academic writers who have discussed entertainment, the majority of writers in the humanities certainly have tended to ignore entertainment or to collapse it into wider categories like ‘mass culture’, ‘popular culture’, ‘everyday culture’ – or even just ‘culture’. A detailed review would produce useful insight into how

academic understandings of entertainment map onto those of the industry and of consumers. A detailed review would also provide critical evidence as to how one of the more powerful and substantial subsectors of the broader cultural and creative industries works. As we argue above, such data would be useful to academic researchers and governmental policy makers who want to understand the subsectors of the creative industries. It would also help businesses in the creative industries understand exactly where the focus of their entertainment business should be – with customers. Such a project is only just beginning.

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