



We are all entertainers

Description

Entertainment is everywhere, especially in Edinburgh during [Festival](#) season, when the streets are peppered with performers, handbill distributors, costumed actors scuttling from A to B, and late-running Royal Scots Dragoon guards.

In an interesting essay of 2002 on entertainment and the Internet, film theorist Richard Dyer noted how entertainment was even then fusing with everyday communications channels, particularly via the Internet. The earliest forms of this fusion were sonic, in particular the use of background music and radio broadcasts that we might expect to hear anywhere and at any time. Then came personal stereos. Entertainment are ubiquitous as well:



• television, video and the internet are visual as well as audio media that are also in the home, permanently available, that you can take about with you and access at any time. •

So entertainment is no longer apart from the rest of life, at least not spatially and temporally. Neither is it constrained to professional production, but can be co-produced, crowd-sourced and user-generated.

• with the internet, performance is not even necessarily professionally provided (except by technicians facilitating commercial web sites) • music, drama, all kinds of performances and visual expressions are now as likely to be amateur as professional, and

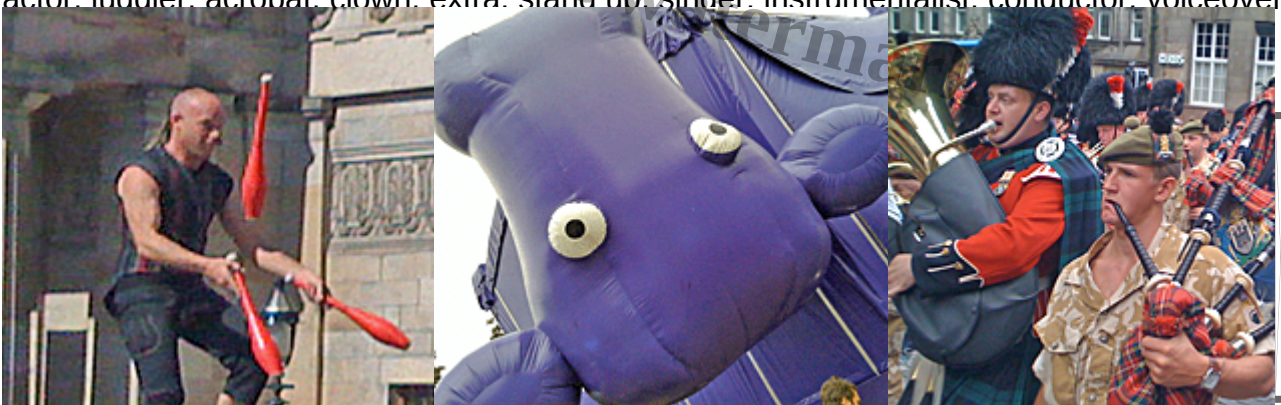
anyone may be both a provider and a consumer of entertainment.â?• (176)

Whatâ??s entertainment?

Entertainment seems to be a subspecies of art dedicated to pleasure and distraction. Commentators place entertainment in the company of popular culture. Entertainment also has its elite forms, from which the tastes of the rest of us derive. For the Victorian elite it was ok to entertain your friends with a song, but it was the *professional* performer who was most under suspicion.

Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Critical Theory School weave the story of entertainment into political critique. Entertainment is often cast negatively, as an indulgence, separate from rational, workaday life, or as a means of diverting the exploited from their plight, sustaining mass consumption and therefore global capitalism.

As anyone online can generate media content, it looks as though any of us can assume the role of entertainer. Not all producers of entertainment are themselves entertainers. By *entertainer* I mean someone who presents themselves to an audience face on, or voice on â?? not the producer, scriptwriter, set designer or costumer, but the talent on stage, in front of the camera or microphone: the actor, juggler, acrobat, clown, extra, stand up, singer, instrumentalist, conductor, voiceover, player,



Keeping out of the limelight

Anyone can be an entertainer, tell a joke, hold the floor at a party (sometimes), run a karaoke number, offer an entertaining speech or lecture, or appear on YouTube. But as ersatz online entertainers, what are we getting ourselves in to?

1. The entertainer is a juggler of emotions. Aristotle says as much of the rhetorician. You have to gauge the mood of the audience, and in turn project the right mood. For the classical tradition, any discipline so dependent on the emotions for its *raison d'être* is suspect. Emotions can sway either way. The entertainer has to be prepared for derision as well as applause.
2. Entertainment carries with it the trappings of class. Society places a great premium on entertainers who fit the bill, and some receive stratospheric remuneration. For most itâ??s badly paid. Though we may admire and even envy the entertainerâ??s abilities, stories about entertainers place them on the margins of society. Even those who are rich and famous pay the price by giving up their privacy and dignity â?? Why *isn't* Jennifer Aniston wearing her

engagement ring?â??

3. As depicted in Sylvain Chometâ??s (and Jacques Tattiâ??s) clever animated film *The Illusionist* (2010) entertainment is closely associated with pathos, dashed dreams, derision, and playing the fool. Drag acts seem to play on comic-tragedy, and audiences do enjoy sad stories about entertainers: *A Star is Born* (1954); *The Entertainer* (1960); *The Rose* (1979); *Festival* (2005).
4. â??Entertainerâ?• is sometimes a euphemism for someone in the sex business, or at least someone who is â??available.â?• Look at the words and video of Robbie Williamsâ?? *Let me Entertain You*. Entertainment has this association. According to Dyer, â??To watch an action movie is to sink back in the seat and say, â??show me a good time.â?•(68)
5. Though they are in the public eye, some people really donâ??t want to be mistaken for entertainers, and want to be â??taken seriouslyâ?•: journalists, educators, activists, politicians, critics, coaches, guides, sportspeople, bishops.

Itâ??s interesting and somewhat jarring, when entertainers turn into politicians, activists and public



â??We are all hooligansâ?•

So said the banner of protesters in New York denouncing the sentencing of the three members of the Russian protest band Pussy Riot ([Bloomberg](#)). The lyrics of the punk prayer they tried to sing in the Moscow Cathedral are [online](#). However the anti-sentimentalism of punk squares with the ethos of the entertainer, the cause has enlisted the support of many in the business. Entertainment and activism, punk and protest â?? thereâ??s something here about the power, potential and danger of entertainment.



References

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- Aristotle. 1991. *The Art of Rhetoric*. Trans. H. C. Lawson-Tancred. London: Penguin. Written in the 3rd century BC.

- Benjamin, Walter. 1992. The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. In H. Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*: 1-58. London: Fontana.
- Dyer, Richard. 2002. *Only Entertainment*. London: Routledge

Notes

- Here's the first stanza to The Entertainer by Billy Joel: I am the entertainer; And I know just where I stand; Another serenader; And another long-haired band; Today I am your champion; I may have won your hearts; But I know the game; You will forget my name; And I won't be here; In another year; If I don't stay on the charts.
- Here are some quotes about being entertaining:
<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/entertainer.html>
- In support of 4 above, Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz have the lines "The plot can be hot, simply teeming with sex, a gay divorcee who is after her ex! the world is a stage, the stage is a world of entertainment" in their 1953 song *That's Entertainment* from *The Band Wagon*.



Category

1. Play

Tags

1. audience
2. Edinburgh
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