Entertainment: An interdisciplinary approach to an object of study

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Between 2007 and 2010 the three authors of this article were part of an interfaculty team that developed the study area of 'Entertainment Industries' at Queensland University of Technology. We worked with staff from three Faculties – Creative Industries, Business and Law – to put together a program which trains students to work as Entertainment producers. Producers are the people working in the Entertainment Industries who combine business, creative and legal skills in order to initiate, develop, fund, run and distribute entertainment products (Collis et al, 2010)

Ben Hamley's home discipline was originally Technical Production, and later Business; Alan McKee came from Film and Television; Christy Collis is trained in Cultural Geography and Media Studies – although all three of us have found a reasonably comfortable home in the area of Cultural Studies. In developing Entertainment Industries, we found that we had to expand our research ambit beyond the disciplines with which we were familiar – even given the fact that we have all ended up associated with the interdisciplinary area of Cultural Studies. This expansion occurred for two key reasons: first, there exist significant bodies of research on entertainment in Business, Law, and Psychology; and second, while Cultural Studies scholarship featured a great deal of discussion of 'popular culture' products, it did not feature much material on entertainment as a larger system of culture and cultural production. In extending our research into what were for us new disciplinary areas, we found that the under-recognition of such Business, Law, and Psychology scholarship in Cultural Studies entertainment research raised interesting questions about the nature of Cultural Studies – in particular the components of its interdisciplinary mix.

When 'Cultural Studies' first emerged, it was driven by an interdisciplinary spirit. Richard Hoggart was Professor of English when he founded the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and his first act was to invite sociologist Alan Shuttleworth to speak (Hartley, 2009 np). Raymond William's 1974 manifesto for Cultural Studies (or 'Cultural Science' as he also named it) drew on Max Weber (sociologist and political economist) and Wilhelm Dilthey (historian, psychologist and sociologist). This interdisciplinarity was associated with a refusal of doctrinaire positions – as Williams described the discipline of English literature he was seeking to escape:

You can go on doing, in effect without challenge, virtually anything that has ever been done, but if you propose anything new you are lucky if your integrity escapes whipping; your intelligence and sensibility will have been long given up as dead (Williams, 1974, quoted in Hartley, 2009: np).

However, Hartley suggests that Cultural Studies in the twenty first century may itself have become the very kind of doctrinaire study area that Hoggart and Williams sought to escape. In response to this (among other reasons) Hartley suggests rethinking Cultural Studies as 'Cultural Science', as a way to explore other potentialities. This paper maps out the key literatures in entertainment; and uses this exercise to expand Cultural Studies' interdisciplinarity. In explaining how incorporating the disciplinary insights of Business, Law, and Psychology benefits the understanding and study of entertainment industries, this article takes up Hartley's cultural science reminder that adventurous interdisciplinarity is at the heart of Cultural Studies. Taking Hartley's Cultural Science paradigm as its impetus, the article demonstrates the fruitfulness of opening up the number and range of paradigms for knowledge production with which we engage as we attempt to understand how culture works and how it changes.

Cultural Studies and interdisciplinarity

There exists little Cultural Studies writing that explicitly addresses that group of practices and texts known as 'entertainment' (the best known, of course, being the work of Richard Dyer –*Only Entertainment* (Dyer, 1992). Communication researchers Sayre and King observe that 'considering the prominence of entertainment in our daily lives, it is perplexing that the academic effort to deal with this phenomenon has remained rather weak' (2003 xviii) in humanities disciplines. Most commonly Cultural Studies collapses entertainment into larger categories, such as 'mass culture' or 'popular culture'. 'Entertainment' as a cultural category with particular approaches and content tends to vanish, lumped in with the practice of everyday life, religion and even workplace practices as part of a homogenous grouping including everything that is not 'high culture'. In part this may be because of the disciplines upon which Cultural Studies has drawn. Cultural Studies is characterised as a 'resolutely interdisciplinary' field of study (Mirzoeff, 1999; Thompson, 2001). But Hartley is not the first to notice the limits placed on that interdisciplinarity. Renata Rosaldo, for example, noted almost twenty years ago that:

Despite all the talk about interdisciplinarity, a large number of senior anthropologists feel that Cultural Studies is just another name for literary studies. They feel downright bad because they have not been invited to the party (Rosaldo, 1994: 526).

Looking through the key texts in Cultural Studies, a number of disciplines occur frequently: Literary Studies, Philosophy, Film Studies, Anthropology, History and Sociology form a loose 'social-scientific' theoretical standard of cultural studies (Milner, 2002: 227; Hoggart, 1970: 271). The place of Sociology in this set of standard disciplines is notable for our current project. When entertainment has been discussed in Cultural Studies it has often been described in negative terms. In understanding this, the role of Sociology as one of Cultural Studies' central inter-disciplines is important. In the work of the Frankfurt School – particularly the classic works of Adorno (sociologist, philosopher,

musicologist) and Horkheimer (sociologist, philosopher) – entertainment as a particular kind of popular culture is explicitly named – and condemned: 'The fusion of culture and entertainment that is taking place today', they note 'leads … to a depravation of culture' (Horkheimer, and Adorno 1972: 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). 'The entertainment manufacturers' have 'molded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product' and 'take good care that the simple reproduction of this mental state is not nuanced or extended in any way' (127). Entertainment products are, they claim, devoid of any originality and 'Every detail is so firmly stamped with sameness that nothing can appear which is not marked at birth, or does not meet with approval at first sight' (128). This understanding of entertainment is familiar in Cultural Studies – and remains influential to this day (McKee, 2008).

Some works on entertainment stand out from this strand of cultural studies. Dyer's *Only Entertainment* (first and second editions) represents a serious attempt (informed by Film Studies) to understand the nature of entertainment as entertainment. Recently the work of Jonathan Gray on *Television Entertainment* (2008) takes a Media Studies approach to understanding the area. But in terms of the tradition of thinking about entertainment within Cultural Studies, Sociology has been the key inter-discipline.

Entertainment in psychology

Entertainment has not been a key term in Cultural Studies. But why does this matter? Why did the team at QUT want to develop entertainment as an area of teaching and research?

The key aim of the teaching program is to train students to work in the Entertainment Industries – outside universities, the term 'entertainment' has strong descriptive power and currency. 'Entertainment' is the name of the industry sector which produces audience-centred commercial culture. When Price Waterhouse Cooper prepares its regular report on this industry sector, it is named the *Global Entertainment and Media Outlook* – not the *Global Popular Culture Outlook* (Pricewaterhousecoopers, 2010). Workers producing television programs or pop music or bestsellers describe themselves as being in the Entertainment Industries – not in the mass culture industries.

It's not only outside of the University that the term 'entertainment' has purchase. As noted above, in several major academic disciplines 'Entertainment' is a recognised area of study - yet interestingly, these are not disciplines with which cultural studies has traditionally engaged.

Psychology provides an interesting example. Notwithstanding Williams' early citation of Dilthey, Psychology has not been a strong presence in Cultural Studies' interdisciplinary mix. If we look for a tradition of research into the functioning of the mind in Cultural Studies, Psychoanalysis has a more prominent position than Psychology. Indeed, around debates about 'media effects' Cultural Studies has almost defined itself in opposition to

Psychology (Gauntlett, 1998). But when Cultural Studies takes Psychology as an inter-discipline, it finds a strong tradition of writing on entertainment.

The range of Psychology textbooks on offer demonstrates a consolidated field of research: The Psychology of Entertainment (Bryant, 2006); The Psychology of Entertainment Media (Shrum, 2004); Media Entertainment: the psychology of its appeal (Zillmann, 2000). Entertainment is an object of fascination for psychology, organised around the key question: Why do consumers like entertainment? (Bosshart & Macconi 1998: 3). Psychologists have tested a range of hypotheses to explain the appeal of entertainment (Zillmann and Vorderer, 2000). A common starting point states – tautologically – that entertainment is pleasurable or enjoyable (Bosshart & Macconi, 1998; Klimmt & Vorderer, 2003; Vorderer, 2001; Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000). But psychologists' accounts of enjoyment complicate the concept – it does not simply equal fun. Rather, enjoyment is associated with 'effective mood management', and thus with personal disposition and context. One explanation for such mood management is the importance of conflict resolution: 'Enjoyment depends not so much on conflict as on its resolution and on what the resolution means to the parties involved' (Bryant 1994: 447). Entertainment is thus understood – as is common in much Psychology – through an individualistic lens. The type of entertainment a consumer enjoys is linked to personality characteristics: 'audience personality characteristics have a pervasive impact throughout the various stages of media selection, use and consequence' (Weaver 2000: 236).

Alongside the individualistic approach, Psychology is also interested in the interpersonal aspects of entertainment. Recognising that many entertainment products involve an aspect of shared experience, often with a well-known group of connected individuals, psychologists see social capital and 'emotional contagion' as both playing a role in the experiences and reactions of people to entertainment: 'Persons responding to humour appear to take the reactions of others as a cue that signals the extent to which the events before them are laughable' (Bryant, 1994: 454) Similarly, whilst watching a horror film a couple may contribute to each other's enjoyment of the experience by displaying amusement of disaffect towards the frightening stimuli in order to comfort or impress their date (456; see also Zillmann et al, 1986)

There exists, then, a solid tradition of studying entertainment in Psychology. But would we want to bring Psychology into the interdisciplinary mix of Cultural Studies?

Obviously, some psychology (but not all of it) has a worrying normative trend (Gauntlett, 1998). Some psychology (but not all of it) accepts quantitative data as being inherently more trustworthy – more truthful even – than qualitative information. But even if we accept that the paradigm of psychology has limitations, surely we must accept this about all disciplines? Must one accept everything about a discipline in order to bring it into the disciplinary mix of Cultural Studies? Literary Studies is a key discipline in the Cultural Studies mix – and yet we presume that most practitioners who draw on its methods or insights would have at least some critique of the way the discipline has traditionally operated (certainly we know that this was the case for Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams). The point of interdisciplinarity is that it allows us to bring different paradigms together, overcoming the limitations inherent in individual disciplines. As noted above, John Hartley uses the term 'Cultural Science' to propose an expansion of Cultural Studies'

interdisciplinarity, which brings economics into the mix. But this does not simply mean accepting every currently existing aspect of that discipline:

> Certainly, cultural studies needs to distance itself from neoclassical economics, where, in the immortal words of Thorstein Veblen, the individual sits as 'a self-contained globule of desire'. But it must not reduce itself to that same status – self-contained, desiring but unconnected to others (Hartley, 2009: np).

In putting together the Entertainment Industries teaching and research program, we found it not only productive but also necessary to return to the animating logic of early Cultural Studies, which engaged with a variety of disciplines in order to understand how culture worked without prejudging which forms of knowledge were worthwhile. We find, for example, that Psychology offers a more convincing account of human consciousness (as opposed to the workings of the unconscious) than does psychoanalysis (see Bordwell et al, 1988). In approaching Entertainment, bringing Psychology into the mix brings us closer to understanding how the industry works. Entertainment is audience-centred culture - those who produce it insist that all Entertainment products must be driven by the desires of the audience. And the dominant approach by which the industry seeks to understand those desires is Psychology.

Incorporating Psychology into a Cultural Studies interdisciplinary approach can lead in fruitful directions. For the work of entertainment Psychology has strong links with another venerable discipline of entertainment studies – one that it is sometimes difficult to imagine being embraced within the existing interdisciplinarity of Cultural Studies: the discipline of Business.

Entertainment in Business

Although Business is clearly a recognised area of study in Universities – many have Faculties or Schools of Business – it is not easy to describe business as a discipline per se. It may rather be itself an interdisciplinary venture based on an object of study, which then draws upon a range of more or less discrete disciplines – Economics, Psychology, Marketing - often hand-in-hand in the case of consumer behaviour - and Management, for example. There exists a solid tradition of studying entertainment in Business. We have found it highly productive for the interdisciplinary project that is Cultural Studies to interact with the interdisciplinary project that is business. As Hartley suggests, this interaction might represent a significant new growth area for Cultural Studies:

> Although cultural studies has gone on to have productive encounters with many other fields, including anthropology, postcolonialism, and more recently geography, it has not enjoyed sustained dialogue with economics, except in the truncated form of 'political economy' (Hartley, 2009: 26)

For a project like ours, seeking to understand entertainment, there exists a strong tradition of work published by economists, marketers, management experts – and psychologists - working in Schools and Faculties of Business (Hudson, 2006; Sickels, 2009). These writers provide a distinctive perspective on entertainment as an industry. What emerges in Business writing is a picture of entertainment as *audience-centred culture*. While the work of sociologists has been taken up in cultural studies to argue that entertainment is best understood in terms of the people who make it, business accounts of entertainment

insist that an understanding of entertainment must always begin with the audience – and with giving large numbers of people what they want. The focus of Business Entertainment writing tends to be less on entertainment content and more on its mode of production.

> Entertainment indeed means so many things different to so many people that a manageable analysis requires sharper boundaries to be drawn. Such boundaries are here established by classifying entertainment activities into industry segments, that is, enterprises or organizations of significant size that have similar technological structures of production and that produce or supply goods, services, or sources of income that are substitutable (Vogel, 2000: xviii)

In business writing, entertainment is a product of a commercially-focused organisation. Although 'creatives' are employed at various stages to execute some of its properties, what is of interest is entertainment's status as an industry; entertainment is itself concerned with economics, and relies heavily on understanding market behaviour, on audience research and on return on investment.

Vogel's *Entertainment Industry Economics* (now in its seventh edition, as befits its status as central to the field) describes entertainment as a distinct industry sector, taking a broadly neoclassical approach:

> 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 arts 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, 2000: xviii)

Entertainment is understood in terms of price elasticity, market-share and primary and secondary markets. In order to understand consumers – who are at the centre of his approach - Vogel draws on individualistic psychological accounts. For example, he makes example of the concept that consumers often seek more 'bang-for-their-buck' when choosing an entertainment experience. 'The cost of time and the consumption-time intensity of goods and services are significant factors when selecting from among entertainment alternatives' (5). While we may wish to question if traditional individualistic Psychology is the best way to find out what audiences want, it is the fact that audiences, and the desperate desire to understand them, is at the heart of entertainment as understood by business researchers that is most interesting for a project attempting to understand entertainment as an object of study.

Entertainment marketing is also recognised as a distinct project for business researchers. Sayre's *Entertainment Marketing and Communication* (2008) spends some time mapping out the distinctiveness of the area. Experiences are perishable, intangible and time sensitive. Entertainment is unique in that consumers give their attention to it willingly (Sayre, 2008: 7). And once again, a theory of the function of entertainment, drawn from Psychology, informs the work: 'many forms of entertainment seek to provide relief from the stress of everyday life' (7).

In developing Entertainment Industries as an object of study at QUT, the work of Richard Dyer and Jonathan Gray was vital. But in seeking out an intellectual tradition of writing on the subject, it was in the work emerging from Business Schools and Faculties that we found the most substantial body of work. To introduce such work into cultural studies has proven not only possible, but also productive. As with the work of Psychology, bringing this work into a Cultural Studies' attempt to understand Entertainment makes clear that Entertainment is audience-centred culture; that it only exists to the extent that it successfully manages to provide audiences with what they want. Business provides a rich and complex vocabulary to explain the mechanisms by which this process is managed.

Entertainment Law

Business writers acknowledge that entertainment is not transcendent – it is necessarily produced in material conditions, forged within a complex cultural context of competing 'forces', as Vogel puts it. Yet as Hartley has pointed out, the lack of engagement with economics and other business disciplines (beyond the 'truncated' form of political economy) has limited the ability of Cultural Studies to explain the way in which various institutions interact in the creation of culture. Entertainment as a form of culture is quite open about the role of institutions in its creation. While some theories of art may want to lay claim to transcendence, entertainment is quite explicit about its creation within a system of institutions. The desire to find an audience is only one of these; the system of the law is another. In the discipline of law, entertainment is clearly defined as a discrete area of culture: the phrase 'Entertainment law' is a meaningful one, covering a recognised object of study:

> Entertainment is a human activity and economic venture. Its internal relationships and products are, of course, shaped by contract, as well as constitutional, copyright, labor, antitrust, and trade law. Yet every one of those branches of the law applies to other industries - to auto manufacturing for example. Professors do not, however, teach and write books about 'automobile law'. What is distinctive about entertainment law is the unique way that many cruicial features of this industry have shaped and been shaped by the legal system (Weiler, 2002: 2)

By engaging with this discipline, Cultural Studies has another perspective to understand this object of study: entertainment is a system of cultural production shaped by legislative constraints (Butler, 2010). Again, although the legal system is clearly an important cultural construct, is not often the focus of interdisciplinary work in Cultural Studies, particularly when law is studied as an enabling, rather than a restrictive, cultural technology.

What is entertainment, from the Law perspective? Entertainment is culture made by producers – those people who draw on creative, legal and business skills:

> The producer's role is seen as being divided into four distinct areas or skill bases: the raising of finance and the development of the story... the bringing together of the cast and crew, and the management of the production (Mosawi, 1997:7)

Across the writing on entertainment law, the producer - her responsibilities and skills - are emphasised:

> prior to the initial network meeting, the attorney and the producer must examine where a network's weak spots are in terms of its current schedule to determine what times periods might become available (Collyer, 1989:192)

Entertainment consists of the properties created by those producers, and which they then monetise – in short, copyright and IP are at the heart of entertainment as an industry:

> The business of music publishing is, in a nutshell, the ownership or control of musical compositions (songs) and their worldwide commercial exploitation and turning to account (Perlstein, 1989: 38).

As an industrially-created culture, entertainment projects also clearly involve numbers of stakeholders whose interests must be reconciled. It follows then that entertainment is naturally a highly contracturalised form of culture. For researchers in entertainment law: 'the legal rules that govern industry action and relationship are principally those created by the parties and their lawyers in contractual documents' (Weiler, 2002: 558). Legal experts are very aware of the competing demands that an entertainment product must try to balance – and in this writing, entertainment as an object of study is clearly shown to be the result of competing interests:

> The comedy/drama producer, the sports producer, and the news and documentary producer seek to entertain and inform and hold the attention of a mass audience; the sponsor seeks a program that provides a proper setting for its advertisements and does not offend the American buying public; and the cablecaster wants a program with sure firepower, big name stars, or a big event to induce its cable homes to keep subscribing. The attorney practicing in this arena must be aware of these varying needs and the economics of the industry if he is to counsel his clients effectively (Collyer, 1989: 180)

Turning to legal studies, Cultural Studies can expand its understanding of entertainment towards seeing it as the result of a number of institutional and creative factors, which in themselves provide the framework for managing competing interests. The sheer complexity of entertainment production as a cultural system comes clearly through the work from business and law on the nature of entertainment.

Conclusion

There exists a large amount of academic work on entertainment, sitting in extensive literatures across several disciplines. But as we discovered in the process of developing a degree in Entertainment, much of this work is invisible to the practitioners of Cultural Studies. Interdisciplinarity is a feature of Cultural Studies – and we can see in the history of its emergence the excitement and energy that came from bringing together competing paradigms which had long seen themselves as incommensurable. In taking entertainment as an object of serious study – as itself, and not as a homogenous subset of a quite different object called 'popular culture' or 'mass culture' - we see the strength of Hartley's argument

for Cultural Science, an argument that insists that Cultural Studies must continue with its core originating impulse of interdisciplinary engagement and exploration. Psychology, Business and Law are not disciplines with which Cultural Studies has traditionally had many dealings. Yet each of them has a robust tradition of studying entertainment, and from each of them we find useful perspectives that allow us to build up a three-dimensional view of our object of study. All three – Business, Psychology and Law – bring us closer to the self-understanding of the business of Entertainment and the way in which it functions in modern societies. Entertainment is industrially-created culture, focussed on the desires of the audience. Business shows us the models by which its producers work, and the complexity of its systems of production. Psychology is part of that process – the favoured approach within the production of entertainment for understanding audiences. Law reminds us that in the production of a form of culture with so many stakeholders, contractual arrangements will be vital. By bringing together these disciplines which have not traditionally been part of the conversations instigated by cultural studies, it has been be possible to revitalise and expand not only our understanding of entertainment, but also the very domain of Cultural Studies – or Cultural Science – itself.

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