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**Entertainment as a genre in media, social networking and consumer culture**

## Abstract

Entertainment is undoubtedly under-studied with regard to the importance it has taken in the culture of the twentieth century and in ours.

There are various reasons for this: a scale of priorities that privileges high-brow culture; a moralistic criterion, which put in contrast entertainment with work (as in the cicada and the ant fable). Furthermore, entertainment is more or less directly connected with transgressive behaviours (of a sexual nature and others) and with activities whose legitimacy is more than dubious (i.e. gambling), but whose promiscuity with organised crime is well known.

Nevertheless there are also less evident reasons. Considering entertainment only a genre of media production means to underestimate much of its importance. Entertainment does not only generate activities tied to spectatorship, such as watching a movie or a television show, but strongly participatory, experiential and self-performed activities such as tourism and travel, gaming, physical activity, food and beverages. The real importance of entertainment in the contemporary world is the strong link between spectatorship and participatory experience of the self. Far from being two rigidly separate domains, they fuel one another by exchanging themes, contents, fashions, forms of consumption, social habits. Even the success of a movie or television entertainment text cannot be fully understood without considering continuous reciprocal links between spectatorship and direct participatory experience.

Considering entertainment as a genre in cinema or in the media, perhaps with the best intentions (to rehabilitate previously despised and considered non-artistic productions), cannot render the power and breadth of contemporary entertainment, only touched by several disciplines (popular culture, film studies and others), separate and often distant.

The conditions for the hegemonic affirmation of entertainment are all located in XX Century: between technical reproducibility of moving images and the advent of consumption culture: theme parks, shopping malls, mass tourism, gambling, sports, fitness and food. Large masses of citizens / consumers / voters are thus involved. Consumption itself, but also politics, information, high-

brow culture and even religion are presented and sold as a shared experience flooded with the pleasurable features of entertainment in all its forms.

Finally, in the digital age, further barriers are falling. Pervasive multitasking digital media erase any residual distinction between working time and free time. Furthermore, beside the media (institutional agencies for production and delivery of contents) appear internet social networks: each single or group can become a medium, producing and delivering contents in turn. A third spot, the social (in which the experience of the individual is performed), appear in the dialectics between spectatorship and experiential participation that was typical in the previous century.

Entertainment is today a frank language that integrates and seems able to replace educational, informational and high  cultures. It should therefore be studied as a macro-genre which links activities and habits so far always considered separately: media, tourism, sites of consumption and experience, play, physical activities, food and others. Without considering the link between spectatorship and experiential participation, one is in danger of losing the spirit of the present time.