

Against Modernism and Postmodernism on Art and Entertainment: A Kristeller Thesis of Entertainment

Andy Hamilton

This article develops a Wittgensteinian treatment of the relationship between art and entertainment, combining universal and historically conditioned features. The article is in two parts. The first is less historical, although it aims to characterize the modern concepts of art and entertainment. In this part, the article steers a middle way between the modernist view that art and entertainment are mutually exclusive, and the postmodernist view that they are indistinguishable. It also rejects the modernist assimilation of entertainment and popular art. More specifically, Section 1, Against postmodernism, argues that entertainment aims to give pleasure or delight by amusing, exciting or otherwise diverting the audience, requiring from them little or no concentrated effort; art, in contrast, has a conscious aesthetic end and richly rewards aesthetic attention. Entertainment is consistently audience-centred, while art has a more complex relation to an audience. Section 2, Against modernism, argues that art and entertainment are not polar opposites but complementary and interpenetrating concepts and practices. Pure entertainment is art only in the sense of skill, but the highest art can entertain—there are artist-entertainers. Section 3 discusses how it is common misconception that entertainment is popular art; not all ‘popular art’ is pure entertainment—the category of artist-entertainers is essential—and not all entertainment is popular.

The second part of the article is more directly historical; it holds that the categories of art and entertainment are not eternal, and one must consider their historical contexts and development. Sections 4 and 5 considers how the modern system of the arts, crafts, entertainment and sports form a loosely connected conceptual system. Like art, entertainment existed before the modern era, but not as an overarching, self-conscious concept. The article thus rests on, while developing, Kristeller’s thesis of the modern system of the arts through four further claims:

- (i) The modern system of the arts persists informally.
- (ii) The thesis must distinguish two senses of ‘art’, self-conscious and unself-conscious; likewise ‘entertainment’.
- (iii) An inter-related system of entertainment developed along with a system of art.
- (iv) Entertainment contrasts with any serious activity: artistic, scientific, political, religious. The system of art, entertainment and sport is connected with the systems of sciences, politics and religion.

Some words on methodology. Analytic philosophy rests on a post-*Tractatus* demarcation of empirical and conceptual. But it would be wrong to assume that philosophy alone considers conceptual questions. All disciplines exhibit a continuum between the empirical and the conceptual. Philosophy is the most self-consciously conceptual discipline, but philosophers need knowledge of the relevant first-order subject-matter. Thus writers in aesthetics should bring to bear as much critical awareness and practical knowledge of artistic and cultural practices as possible—hence my espousal of what I call *Real Aesthetics*, which rejects a highly abstract Analytic treatment. What follows is a synthesis of conceptual analysis, reflection on presuppositions underlying ordinary language, and argument based on social, cultural and historical evidence. The attempt to disambiguate such processes reflects a persisting debate in Wittgenstein studies on the relation between language-games as normative and descriptive (Hamilton, 2014, pp. 27–30). But it is impossible in an article of this length to address it further while at the same time advancing a philosophical treatment of art and entertainment. So I leave it to readers to decide whether the considerations offered here must be disambiguated in this way, in order to carry conviction. One thing I would stress, however: our language-game of art and entertainment is deeply unsatisfactory, and one struggles to express required distinctions by means of its vocabulary. That is because it raises contested issues concerning fundamental aspects of our social and political lives, reflected, for instance, in the debate between elitism and populism that underlies talk of high and popular art.

Most of my examples come from Western art and entertainment; jazz, with its roots in African musical expression, may be an exception. The focus is not deliberate, although the [Kristeller thesis \(1990\)](#) to which I appeal was originally formulated in terms of Western art. I do not think that this focus affects my philosophical claims, as the distinction between broad and narrow senses of art and of entertainment will manifest itself in many cultures in the course of time. But my future work will extend to non-Western systems of art such as the Japanese system of The Four Accomplishments—such work is of vital importance.

1. Undermining the Postmodern Equation of Art and Entertainment

Film academic Richard Dyer comments that ‘because entertainment is a common-sense, “obvious” idea, what is really meant and implied by it never gets discussed’ (Dyer, 2002; see also [Bates and Ferri, 2010](#)). In philosophical aesthetics, entertainment is mostly treated in negative contrast to art, as ‘non-artistic performance’. However, Kant, Nietzsche, Arendt and Shusterman analyzed it positively, while Schiller and Gadamer linked art and play. I show that the question ‘What is entertainment?’ has the philosophical depth of ‘What is art?’—indeed, the questions must be answered together.

The article has two principal targets: the modernist assumption that art and entertainment are mutually exclusive—although modernists sometimes equate entertainment with *popular* art—and the postmodernist view that they are indistinguishable. It steers a middle way between these positions, rejecting the common equation of entertainment with popular art. Modernist thinkers such as Adorno entrenched the art-entertainment distinction; some might say that his culture industry thesis says that all art is entertainment, but that would be a simplification of his view. One should reject the modernist view

that art and entertainment are mutually exclusive without endorsing the postmodernist view that they are indistinguishable.

The article is directed against positions that I have labelled ‘modernist’ and ‘postmodernist’, but these are not coherent theoretical positions advanced by particular individuals. Rather I refer to beliefs that I take to be broadly held, pervasive both during and after modernism. *Modernism* is a problematic and highly contested concept—a sharpening and intensifying of modernity, or a response to it (see [Gildea, 2003](#), p. 395). The consensus is that artistic modernism arose in the later nineteenth century, flourished in the first three decades of the twentieth, and persists in the era of postmodernism from the 1970s onwards. Thus high modernists such as Lachenmann, Harvey and Ferneyhough in music, or Noland and Caro in visual art, continued to define themselves in opposition to postmodern fragmentation and eclecticism (see [Metzer, 2009](#), ‘Introduction’). But while I do not offer worked out modernist and postmodernist theory, I take certain writers as representative: Adorno in modernism, Jencks and Eco in postmodernism, for instance.

First, against postmodernism, I will argue that art and entertainment have distinct aims concerning the audience, although these often overlap. *Entertainment* aims to give pleasure or delight by amusing, exciting or otherwise diverting the audience, in a way that calls on them to make little concentrated effort. *Art*, in contrast, has a conscious aesthetic end, that richly rewards aesthetic attention. Entertainment is consistently *audience-centred*, while art has a more complex relation to an audience, explored fully in Section 2 below. Pure entertainment lacks depth or seriousness, and takes one’s mind off serious concerns; its value lies partly in escapism ([Shusterman, 2003](#), pp. 292–293; [Heilman, 1975](#)). Art, in contrast, while perhaps involving escape from immediate reality, is not escapism. Art may console, where consolation means helping through bad times, while recognizing that times are bad. Escapism means forgetting; consolation does not—a vital contrast between art and entertainment.

The concept of escapism is surprisingly new. Only in 1972 does OED record the ‘figurative’ sense of ‘distraction’ from, ‘avoidance’ of, or ‘retreat’ from ‘the realities of life’. ‘Escape’ used to refer only to very specific and concrete situations; we now think of it as a mode of dealing with imperfect existence. As Heilman comments, by the mid-twentieth century, escapism became a cliché of denigration. Escapism must be contrasted with consolation. In 1952 Norman Demuth defended ‘finding solace’ and insisted, ‘This is not the same thing as escapism’ (quoted in [Heilman, 1975](#), p. 453). As Heilman argues:

There is some element of escape in reading all kinds of literature, that one may escape into a simpler and more orderly world or into a richer and deeper one ... the ultimate issue is whether, and in what frame of mind, one returns from the adventure of escape.

The issue must be explored by contrasting the varieties of escapism: analgesic, rest-and-recreation, tranquilizing, narcotic, reinforcement and so on.
([Heilman, 1975](#), p. 457–458)

Modernist theory correctly stresses that artworks are particularly worthy of aesthetic attention, while pure entertainment is not—that follows simply from calling the former ‘art’. ‘Art is more aesthetically valuable than entertainment’ is a tautology, not an

expression of elitism. Nonetheless, as we will see, high art can be entertaining as well as challenging. An analysis of the aesthetic would occupy an entire article, but salient features should be presented. The aesthetic:

1. Involves beauty and cognate concepts.
2. Involves making a judgement rather than expressing a mere liking, and so involves some notion of disinterestedness.
3. Involves useless work.
4. Is interdependent with the concept of art.

As design theorist David Pye argued, craft has always involved unnecessary and easily avoidable work on an artefact that contributes nothing to its usefulness. This crafting goes beyond the strictly functional, to create ornament, excellent finish, and so on (Pye, 1978). Art began as useless work on useful things, and in the modern era became useless work on useless things. (The claim that art and the aesthetic are interdependent concepts is defended in the companion to the present article.)

Some entertainment is so evacuated of an aesthetic aim that it can be called pure entertainment. But pure entertainment with no artistic aim or content is rare; a song or routine must have a form. But likewise, ‘This is pure art with no entertainment aim’ is a limiting and comparatively unusual case, as we see in Section 2.

Stephen Davies argues insightfully that *procedural definitions of art*, which say that artworks have in common only the process by which they are recognized as such, have supplanted *functional* or what I call *substantive definitions* (Davies, 2005, Ch. 2). This is a regrettable development as purely procedural definitions are misguided. The characterization of art as a *practice or performance involving skill, with a conscious aesthetic end, that richly rewards aesthetic attention* is a qualified substantive characterization, opposed by currently popular procedural definitions. Proponents of procedural definitions draw unwarranted conclusions from the postmodern truth that anything can be art, I believe. It is an argument against procedural definitions—which may evacuate the art-entertainment contrast of meaning—that postmodern art gains its meaning from traditionally crafted art; there could not be an artworld consisting entirely of ready-mades, or conceptual art.

Pure entertainment lacks the aesthetic end, and reward, of art, therefore. Entertainers aim simply to elicit an emotional response: being amused (comedy); being in suspense (thrillers, horror films); being delighted, or amazed at the performer’s virtuosity (music) (Carroll, 1998, Ch. 4). Pure entertainment encourages stereotypical responses—for instance, to horrifying images in horror films. The entertainer aims to satisfy *existing* dispositions of the audience to find certain things pleasurable; pure entertainment belongs to affirmative as opposed to critical culture. It can attack stereotypes, and thus become critical—*Brookside* in the 1980s became the first British TV soap to present gay relationships, but in a propagandizing rather than artistic way. (Propaganda can be great art—for instance, Humphrey Jennings’ (1942) ‘Listen To Britain’—but this is soap propaganda.)

Most entertainment does not involve effort by the audience. ‘I had to work hard to enjoy the entertainment’ is an unusual comment—perhaps it was in an unfamiliar language, or I was depressed. But if, like Shusterman, one includes artist-entertainers under the heading of entertainers, then entertainment can require effort from an audience—this is true of

art that entertains, but not of pure entertainment (Shusterman, 2003, p. 295). There is audience effort also in sophisticated video games or sport, where the player is at least part-performer. Following a chess match, or the plot of a complicated detective story such as *The Big Sleep* (1946), involves effort. When director Howard Hawks asked author Raymond Chandler, ‘Who killed the chauffeur?’, Chandler did not know. But *The Big Sleep* is art that entertains—‘an entertainment’ in Graham Greene’s sense, not *pure* entertainment. One can be a connoisseur of pure entertainment, and this obviously involves effort. One can be a connoisseur of pure entertainment, and this obviously involves effort. Thus comedian Roy Hudd is a connoisseur who, for instance, analyses how Tommy Cooper achieved extravagant comic effects from limited resources. But entertainment, unlike art, neither *claims* appreciation, nor aims at truth (see Hamilton, 2012). Art *merits* attention, while entertainment, if successful, merely *generates* it—although perhaps it merits laughter, or delight.

We now examine the modernist denial that art should entertain.

2. Undermining the Modernist Opposition of Art and Entertainment

For modernists including Adorno, art and entertainment are mutually exclusive categories. Adorno held that gratification excludes appreciation of art:

Whoever concretely enjoys artworks is a philistine ... convicted by expressions like ‘a feast for the ears’ ... [It is] their truth, which ... in works of Kafka’s type outweighs every other element. They were not a higher order of amusement. (Adorno, 1997, pp. 9–13)

For Adorno, as for Hegel, art becomes fine only when free of subservience to entertainment. Heidegger—not a modernist, and following Hegel rather than Adorno—commented that ‘art’s defining essence is not pleasure or entertainment but “the becoming and happening of truth”’ (Heidegger, 1975, pp. 68, 71, discussed in Shusterman, 2003, p. 299). These writers might agree that art with a small ‘a’, which diverts or entertains, is distinguished from pure entertainment in its aesthetic skill, in having essentially aesthetic ends, and by particularly rewarding aesthetic attention. But they seemingly reject the standpoint of humane art proposed here, which says that the highest art can be entertaining.

Aim and result—intent and use—both enter into the characterization of something as art or entertainment. Someone who intended to do no more than entertain can produce work that richly rewards aesthetic attention; when Duke Ellington came to Europe in the 1930s, he was surprised to be treated as a real composer by authorities such as Constant Lambert (Lambert, 1934, p. 214). Even if the creator does not profess aesthetic ends, these may be evident in the product. Likewise, someone who professes a high artistic aim can end up producing kitsch. But particularly important in undermining the modernist dichotomy is the category of artist-entertainer, one who aims to create art while entertaining in the process. Here Jencks and Eco’s concept of *double-coding* is important. Thus *Don Quixote* (1605/1615) by Miguel de Cervantes—by some measures the second most widely read book after the Bible—entertains those who do, and those who do not, appreciate its artistic depth.

'Double-coding' is better-termed *multiple coding*—artworks speak in different ways and at different levels to people of different backgrounds and experience.¹ Thus, the finest work of Nat 'King' Cole, jazz pianist and pop singer, speaks as both art and entertainment—although much of his output is pure entertainment. The most valuable art is multiply interpretable; multiple coding is implied by the test of time and place. Richness of interpretation helps to make something art rather than entertainment, but there is an intrinsic dimension too. Pure entertainment cannot be treated as art; while as we see, hermetic high art cannot be used—although it can perhaps be mis-used—as entertainment. Thus entertainment is, in part, an intrinsic category, but one that also depends on use or reception. There could not be a James Joyce of entertainers—a hermetic entertainer—and Bob Monkhouse's joke is funny partly for this reason: 'They all laughed when I said I'd become a comedian. Well, they're not laughing now' (Monkhouse, 1993, p. 76).

Dickens and Shakespeare did not create high art that happens to entertain; they set out to entertain, while or by fulfilling deeper artistic purposes. Entertainment can potentiate artistic value. The Fool's choric commentary on Lear's folly kept the groundlings happy, but enriched the larger artistic scheme. Satire presents political or social pieties in a mocking fashion, achieving its moral purpose through entertainment. Thus the opening of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1817) sees the heroine's father, Sir Walter Elliot, re-reading his entry in the *Baronetage*—a nineteenth-century equivalent of googling his own name. Sir Walter is a caricature, a vain snob. But Austen's satire advances a central theme of the novel: the heroine's family over-value social class, persuading her against marrying the relatively lowly Captain Wentworth—a disastrous decision that 'persuasion' eventually reverses.

Humane art, of which Shakespeare and Dickens are paradigms, communicates and interacts with the audience. Dickens advised fellow-writers to take seriously the need to amuse their audience. His high artistic status is compatible with being the most popular English writer since Shakespeare. Although it gives pleasure, some high art cannot entertain. Bach's *St Matthew Passion* (1727) or Ravel's (1917) *Le Tombeau de Couperin* entertain only if the performance is amusingly poor, in some way that compensates for its inadequacy.

Esoteric or hermetic art, in contrast, result from the modernist bifurcation of art and entertainment. Hermetic artists see their work as the product of inner necessity; they seem indifferent to the audience's desires and expectations, even perhaps its existence. Examples include Lennie Tristano, Proust, Prynne, Boulez, and the Joyce of *Finnegan's Wake* (1939). Modernist Harrison Birtwistle, denying that his music is inaccessible, remarked, 'I can't be responsible for the audience: I'm not running a restaurant' (cited in Blanning, 2008, p. 60). His thought is: 'This is art—the audience can like it or not'. He misunderstands the complex artist-audience relation, probably confusing 'addressing the audience' with 'simply pleasing them'. Ambitious art aims to transform its audience. In the film *The Invisible Woman* (2013), Mrs Dickens and Ellen Ternan discuss Charles Dickens' (1852–1953) *Bleak House*, which Ellen says has a spirit of unease, yet has much to make her smile. Mrs Dickens responds: 'Tis a fiction designed to entertain', to which Ellen replies: 'Surely it's more than that—it changes us'. It would have been preposterous for Bach and Mozart to deny an

1 For Jencks, postmodern architecture can be appreciated by the public, yet command critical approval.

interest in the audience. Beethoven, however, was a proto-modernist—on one occasion describing his audience as ‘Cattle! Asses!’ But if no one turned up, the composer would care—unless they were as unworldly as Havergal Brian, whose huge symphonies were written with reckless disregard for performability.

‘Writing for future generations’ is one possible development in the complex relation between artist and audience; the audience becomes ideal. As biographer Jan Swafford comments, Charles Ives ‘became an anomaly in the history of his art: a composer without a milieu’. However, ‘Ives’s eventual distance from any musical establishment was unprecedented for a composer’ (Swafford, 1998, pp. 140–141). Hence Schoenberg’s famous description:

There is a great Man living in this Country—a composer. He has solved the problem how to preserve one’s self-esteem and to learn. He responds to negligence by contempt. He is not forced to accept praise or blame. His name is Ives. (Soderberg, 2012).

However, the successful New York businessman and part-time composer had not ‘solved the problem’. He needed an audience for his works of genius. Plagued by uncertainty about their final form, his career ended prematurely.

We have seen that art, like entertainment, implies an audience, although the artist–audience relation is significantly weaker. An artist can profess indifference to its reaction, although there is a cost, as Ives’s career shows. Transaction with an audience is a positive part of artistic creation, which the hermetic artist neglects at their peril. Artistically negative effects follow from the psychological need of artist-entertainers such as Armstrong and Dickens for the audience’s love; but such effects also follow from the hermetic artist’s rejection of that audience.

We now turn to the entertainer–audience relation. Some pure entertainers treat the audience as passive consumers, having less genuine interest in them even than hermetic artists. Thus one can contrast *authentic and cynical entertainers*, or as Ken Dodd put it, doing a show ‘with the audience, or at the audience’—he preferred the former (quote from *Arena: Ken Dodd’s Happiness*, 2007). The authentic entertainer—one with integrity—does not cynically manipulate or even pander; like the true humane artist, they wish to communicate with their audience.² *Authentic entertainers* give the audience what they want—or at least seem to want—because they identify with them. So might *cynical manipulators*, but through calculation rather than identification. An example of the latter is balladeer Henry Russell, popular in America in the 1830s and 40s. In his sentimental ballad ‘Woodman, Spare That Tree’ (1837), the narrator asks that the woodcutter ‘let that old oak stand!’:

Woodman spare that tree!
Touch not a single bough
In youth it sheltered me
And I’ll protect it now...
My heart-strings round thee cling
Close as thy bark, old friend!
(Crawford, (2001), pp. 250–253).

2 Marie Lloyd is a good example (Major, 2012).

Russell hammed it up. His autobiography told how after one performance, a man in the audience rose and ‘in a very excited voice, called “Was the tree spared, sir?” “It was”, I said. “Thank God for that”, he answered, with a sigh of relief’.³

Fellow songwriter George Root reports that when Russell retired to his dressing room, he was much amused at the grief of his weeping constituents. For Root, such cynicism was unforgivable: ‘Good taste requires that the singer should treat respectfully the emotion he excites’. This is the contrast between the authentic and cynical entertainer. Both are concerned to excite emotions, but only the former treats the audience respectfully (Root, 1891, p. 18). Root himself served ‘the larger mass who enjoyed music that touched their hearts. He stood ready to embrace sentimentality ... [and] felt an obligation to respect the taste of the audience that supported him’ (Crawford, 2001, p. 251). *Sentimentality*, the characteristic weakness of the humane artist-entertainer, is integral to entertainment—both Dickens and Armstrong have been accused of it. But it is no criticism of a pure entertainer, provided they treat their audience respectfully.

3. Undermining the Modernist Assimilation of Entertainment with Popular Art

Modernists like Adorno insist on the opposition of art and entertainment. But they may also subscribe to the common error of equating entertainment with *popular art*. I now turn to this mistaken equation. As popular culture is already exhaustively analyzed in the philosophical literature, it would render an aesthetics of entertainment redundant. Film, TV, pop music and pulp fiction—and Adorno’s overarching explanation of them through the culture industry—have received close academic scrutiny within Cultural Studies and Analytic philosophy, for instance Carroll’s *Mass Art* (Carroll, 1998). But an aesthetics of entertainment is not redundant, because the equation of entertainment with popular art is mistaken. It is rightly rejected by Shusterman and James Hamilton, although the latter’s view that ‘the connection between what is entertaining and what is popular is purely contingent’ is too radical (Hamilton, manuscript). Shusterman’s treatment is more plausible, and two of his core claims are developed here: (i) entertainment is an allied and not just contrasting category to art, forming a non-exclusive polarity; (ii) the art/entertainment contrast is older and more basic than the popular/high art distinction, and cuts across it (Shusterman, 2003). I now turn to the latter issue.

The equation of popular art and entertainment is simplistic for several reasons:

- (1) Not all ‘popular art’ is pure entertainment, as artist-entertainers such as Louis Armstrong and Howard Hawks show. Something can be *entertaining*, or *an* entertainment, and also the highest art. Graham Greene described his less serious novels as ‘entertainments’—artworks that gratify and divert, showing the attention to structure and detail, and perhaps the unity, associated with high art. From its long opening tracking shot, Orson Welles’ (1958) *A Touch Of Evil* is a ‘potboiler [that] still feels fresh and exciting’, a masterpiece of cinematic art and ‘pure gritty

3 Quoted in Jackson (1976), p. 287.

entertainment'.⁴ It is *an* entertainment, but—despite the preceding comment—not pure entertainment. This intermediate category of 'entertainments' covers many quality Hollywood films—from film noir such as *The Big Sleep*, to screwball comedy such as *Bringing Up Baby* (1938). And Claes Oldenberg's Pop Art soft sculptures mimic popular culture, with results that are entertaining, but not—unless one derides them—pure *entertainment*.

- (2) Not all entertainment is 'popular'; there is elite entertainment, such as Inigo Jones's courtly masques.⁵ 'Popular' is ambiguous between 'appeals to the masses' and 'has a certain kind of appeal to the target audience, whoever they are'. By 'popular art', it is normally meant 'that with a mass audience'; entertainment aims to appeal to a specific but not always a mass audience. Record producers know their market; British comedian Ken Dodd crafted jokes for specific regional audiences, based on his experience. Art, in contrast, aims to pass the test of time and place, appealing broadly.
- (3) The most commodified popular or mass art is pure entertainment, and not art in any aesthetic sense.
- (4) High art is not always the highest art, just as not all paintings of the High Renaissance are paintings of the highest quality. Sèvres porcelain, Adams interiors and paintings by Fragonard or Munnings are high art but not the highest art.

The preceding discussion has addressed what may be termed the *modern conception of art and entertainment*. The categories of art and entertainment are not eternal and, to understand them, one must consider their historical contexts and development. In the second half of the article, I elucidate that claim more directly by addressing and developing Kristeller's (1990) thesis of the modern system of the arts. This helps us to discern a continuum between two senses or forms of art, and an analogous one between two senses or forms of entertainment.

4. The Kristeller Thesis of the Modern System of the Arts

Art and entertainment existed before the modern era, but neither was then an overarching concept whose practitioners saw themselves self-consciously as artists or entertainers. The art–entertainment opposition developed in later modernity, sharpened by modernism. Kant contrasts the 'agreeable arts' with fine art that has a higher purpose (*Critique of Judgment*, Section 44). However, before the eighteenth century, 'art' had the non-aesthetic sense of 'practical skill or knowledge'.

Any skill can be evaluated aesthetically, but the primary evaluation of 'the art of medicine' is practical. 'Medicine and engineering are arts' states that these are not mechanical processes, but practical skills involving judgement. Before the modern era, therefore, 'art' included skills or disciplines whose ends are not essentially aesthetic, such as the art

4 Welles, (1958).

5 Although Orgel writes: 'Dramas at [the early Stuart] court were not entertainments in the [usual] dismissive sense ... [but] expressions of the age's most profound assumptions about monarchy' (Orgel, 1975, p. 8).

of medicine, or astrology. The performing arts, and entertainment, involve performance before the public, which implies an aesthetic dimension.

In the West, since the advent of art for art's sake in the earlier nineteenth century, the meaning of 'art' has become more aestheticized. As late as the mid-nineteenth century, the non-aesthetic sense of art was equal in importance. Mayhew (1851, p.17) comments that The Great Exhibition aimed 'to wed mechanical skill with high art', 'by collecting the several products of scientific and aesthetic art from every quarter of the globe into one focus'. 'Scientific art' is now almost an oxymoron (Mayhew, 1851, p. 17).

The aestheticization of 'art' implied the development of the *Western system of five major arts*—painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry. According to art historian Oscar Kristeller, the system did not assume definite shape till the eighteenth century, although ingredients were found in classical, medieval and Renaissance periods: 'classical antiquity left no systems of elaborate concepts of an aesthetic nature ... merely a number of scattered notions' (Kristeller, 1990, p. 172).⁶ In Ancient Greece, he argued, what we now separate into art, craft and science were conflated. Kristeller's claim is not just that the Greeks lacked separate *terms* for art, craft and—by implication—entertainment. Rather, they did not so much as *conceive* of a distinction between art and craft, or art and entertainment; they lacked overarching, self-conscious concepts of either.

On my broadly Wittgensteinian view, terms derive their meaning from a practice or language-game; human linguistic practice is broader than 'saying the right words on the right occasion'. 'Grammar' in Wittgenstein's sense refers to the habitual routines of linguistic practice. Thus one can grasp a concept without having a word for it. There are *concepts without a word*—that which became art, entertainment, conservatism, liberalism. The appearance of such concepts generally precedes the appearance of a word for them.

As the modern system evolved, autonomous art demanded an audience's undivided attention—in museums and concert halls. The system was formally articulated by eighteenth-century Beaux-Arts theory. Batteux distinguished *mechanical arts* such as engineering—that satisfy basic human needs—from *fine arts* of music, dance, poetry, painting, and sculpture, with architecture as intermediate (see Gracyk, 2011). The notion of mechanical arts persisted at least until the mid-nineteenth century—in the non-aesthetic sense of 'art' assumed by Mayhew—but has now largely disappeared. Beaux-Arts theory upheld traditional hierarchies within particular artforms, such as history, portrait, landscape and still-life artforms within painting.

Kristeller's thesis commands wide—although not universal—support; for most writers, Greek *techne* (Latin *ars*) embraced all activities now discriminated as arts, crafts or academic disciplines. Some writers insist that the Greeks had an overarching concept of fine arts—that Plato and Aristotle regarded painting, epic and tragedy as arts of imitation.⁷ For Schaper, the *Ion's* distinction between skill (*techne*) and inspiration (*poiesis*) justifies talking of 'art' in something like a modern sense (Schaper, 1968, p. 23). But Plato clearly maintains that mimetic arts are no more worthy of serious attention than someone

6 By 'aesthetic', he presumably means 'artistic'. See Shiner (2001), pp. 10–11.

7 The thesis is defended by Kivy, 2012, and rejected by Young (2015), Porter (2009), Buchenau (2013).

waving a mirror, doing magic tricks or imitating animal voices. Even Aristotle, who did not echo Plato's hostility to the poets, held that painting and tragedy are not essentially separate in their procedures from shoemaking or medicine (Shiner, 2001, p. 21). One might contest Kristeller's thesis by arguing that individual arts could exist without constituting a system; but then 'art' would not have its present-day sense.

I develop the Kristeller thesis through four further claims:

- (1) *The system of the arts persists informally.*
- (2) *The thesis must distinguish self-conscious and unself-conscious art.*
- (3) *An inter-related system of entertainment developed along with a system of art; 'entertainment', like 'art', has two senses.*
- (4) *Entertainment contrasts with any serious activity: artistic, scientific, political, religious.*

(1) *The system of the arts persists informally*

The vogue for internal hierarchies within each art declined during the nineteenth century; for Kuhn, 'the endless rivalry of the systems finally discredited the enterprise of systematization' (Kuhn, 1941, pp. 67–68). Modernism rendered classical theory defunct. But the system of the arts persisted informally during the twentieth century, otherwise there could be no Arts Councils, or Arts pages in newspapers—although the latter are sometimes more like entertainment pages, covering TV, film, fashion and photography. Thus art photography is a high art practice, although not as universally valued as painting.

(2) *The thesis must distinguish self-conscious and unself-conscious art*

Kristeller does not hold that art began only in the modern era. To avoid this improbable consequence, one must distinguish *two senses of 'art'*—as self-conscious ('Art' with a capital 'A'), or as unself-conscious ('art' with a small 'a') practice. 'They did not conceive of them as X' does not imply 'They were not X'. The modern, overarching concept of art appeared in the West in the eighteenth century, but the less self-conscious *practice* is ancient. For instance, we recognize Anglo-Saxon clasps from Sutton Hoo as art of high quality, a conception only imperfectly grasped by their makers (Nees, 2002, p. 111). *Homer's Iliad and Odyssey*, *Plato's dialogues* and Dante's (1308) *Divine Comedy* showed a depth and complexity later appropriated to high art; in the 1790s, it is said, Mozart's (1791) *The Magic Flute* was regarded as entertainment, but is high art now. *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786) is an entertainment, in my sense; at best, so is *The Merry Widow* (1861) or *West Side Story*. Both Mozart and Lehar were craftsmen who wanted to entertain the customers, but Mozart's opera turned out to be high art—it comments seriously on the human condition, and aims at truth—while Lehar's operetta sometimes approaches seriousness, and counts as *an entertainment* in Graham Greene's sense.

It is the *conceptualization* of these works as art—as works, that is, artworks—that developed only in the modern era. I referred to 'Art' with a capital 'A', or self-conscious art, as 'high art'; alternatives are autonomous, ambitious, serious, or demanding art. 'High art' is unsatisfactory, but so are the alternatives. It is art originally patronized by church

and aristocracy, with elevated themes and subjects, that appears from the Renaissance onwards at different times in different arts. Although it originated in social distinction, it is now publicly available in art galleries and concert halls (see [Hamilton, 2009](#)). According to a persuasive modernist narrative, high art is autonomous art; it transcends the practical utility of mechanical arts such as furniture or ceramics, and the direct social functions—religious, courtly, aristocratic, and military—which art and music once served, and which persist (see [Hamilton, 2007](#); [Wolterstorff, 2015](#), criticizes this picture). Autonomous art is art for art’s sake. The original function of church music was to enhance the liturgy; the function of military music was to make the military occasion more impressive, and so on. From the eighteenth century, much contemporary art became an end in itself—not subservient to a social function, whether religious, military or social. These developments underlie the modern conception of art.

(3) *An inter-related system of entertainment developed along with a system of art; ‘entertainment’, like ‘art’, has two senses*

I call this philosophically neglected development a *Kristeller thesis for entertainment*. However, it must also be acknowledged that:

(4) *Entertainment contrasts with any serious activity: artistic, scientific, political, religious*

Shusterman rightly treats the meaning of entertainment as contextual: ‘[In] modern times, the contrast term has become serious art. But in earlier times, entertainment and amusement was contrasted with philosophy and the serious business of life, while the fine arts ... [had] the lower status of entertainment’—whether higher or lower ([Shusterman, 2003](#), p. 292). I develop Shusterman’s position by arguing that ‘fine arts’ is a modern concept, and that entertainment contrasts with *any serious activity*—science, politics, religion. The system of art, entertainment and sport is connected with the systems of sciences, politics and religion.

We now look at point (3), then (4).

5. A Kristeller Thesis for Entertainment: Art and Entertainment as an Interconnected System

Kristeller overlooked entertainment, which is generally under-theorized—though before the nineteenth century, the art-entertainment distinction was weaker. So a complementary or supplementary thesis to Kristeller’s is required: that a *Western system of entertainment*—initially involving music hall, circuses, professional sport—did not assume definite shape till the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, although ingredients were found in earlier periods. Entertainment always existed, but like art, only in the modern era did it evolve into a system involving an overarching, self-conscious concept. Artisans became elevated in social status when regarded as artists; however, jugglers,

singers and comedians generally did not become elevated when recognized as (professional) entertainers. ‘Professional’ means self-conscious, aspiring to making a living from the activity.

Entertainment, like art, therefore has two senses. *Broad sense entertainment* existed in pre-modern societies as part of the rhythm of life and culture—not an independent category. There were clowns in Ancient Greece, circuses in Imperial Rome (Potter, 2010). Medieval entertainment (broad sense) included feasts, banquets, jousts, tournaments and fairs; holidays featured entertainment by jesters, mummers, minstrels, acrobats, jugglers and conjurers. *Narrow-sense entertainment*, in contrast, is a modern development. As Dyer argues, it differs in audience, performers and intention to entertainment in traditional, feudal, or socialist societies:

[it is] performance produced for profit ... before a generalized audience (the ‘public’), by a trained, paid group [whose performances] have the sole (conscious) aim of providing pleasure ...

[Medieval] pageants and amusements [were] governed by the Church and tied to seasonal—hence, economic—festivals ... Our entertainment ... is not in any coherent way associated with serious metaphysical or ceremonial practice. (Dyer, 2002, p. 19)

As private recreation or leisure activities acquired a public audience, they became entertainment. Conversely, activities once considered entertaining—public executions, bear-baiting, cock-fighting—disappeared from the public arena, no longer functioning as entertainment. (Perhaps dog-fights are now illegal entertainment.) Skills such as sword-fighting and archery became sports. These were later professionalized and also became entertainment.

Crucially, the modern system is an interconnected one of art *and* entertainment—professionalization occurs in both. Historians debate this gradual process. For Gray, late medieval records suggest travelling troupes of players, London-based professional companies emerged in the sixteenth century (Gray, 2008, p. 568). In 1576, James Burbage—father of Shakespearean actor, Richard Burbage—built probably the first permanent theatre in Europe since Roman times. Previously:

the concept of theatre had included no sense of *place*. A theatre was ... a group of actors and an audience; the theatre was any place in which they chose to perform ...

[But now] theatre was an institution, a property, a corporation. (Orgel, 1975, p. 2)

Unlike a private or court theatre, a public playhouse such as Burbage’s was built by entrepreneurs; to be successful, ‘individual citizens, potential spectators, [must] compose themselves into that audience the producers have imagined’ (Orgel, 1975, p. 2, p. 6). Private theatres, in contrast, were creations of their courtly audiences.

Analogous developments occurred rather later in music. To reiterate, by 1800 the concert was the principal medium of musical performance—it ‘clearly distinguishes between performers and audience and ... admits an anonymous public upon payment of an entrance fee’ (Blanning, 2008, p. 85). In early nineteenth-century Paris, as audiences began to listen silently, concerts became art rather than entertainment. But well into the nineteenth century, the boundary between performances that are art—and indeed

science—and those that are entertainment was vague. Promenade Concerts at London's Strand included selections from the latest Meyerbeer opera, accompanied by:

real Scottish Quadrilles ... followed by the performances of the Infant Thalia, experiments with the Colossal Burning Lens and the New Oxyhydrogen Microscope, Popular Lectures, and the Laughing Gas every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday evenings. (Blanning, 2009, p. 102)

On special occasions, leading conductor Louis Jullien had himself shot out of a trap-door, baton in hand. During the nineteenth century, the modern system separated into one of art and entertainment, while remaining interconnected.

Narrow-sense art and entertainment—self-conscious, overarching but non-exclusive categories—arise in prosperous societies that possess leisure, and in that sense are modern Western phenomena. They rest on the *commercialization of leisure*, encouraged by shorter factory hours (Borsay, 2006, Ch. 2). The Victorian era saw a shift from gregarious, participatory activities to large-scale spectator entertainments of music halls, circuses and professional sport. Dickens observed this change over his lifetime—his late career as a public reader of his work was a manifestation of it. In his readings, however, he wanted ‘the magic conversion of a public into a domestic space’, and remained attached to older communal traditions which were:

a locus for ... spontaneity, selflessness and fellow-feeling. [The] enjoyment by family and friends of shared amusements had meaning for him far above the aesthetic accomplishment of the professional entertainer impersonally exhibiting his skills before an anonymous audience. (Andrews, 2006, p. 72; Schlicke, 1988, p. 8)

Results of the commercialization of leisure included professional football, and music hall.

A Kristeller thesis for entertainment acknowledges the growing nineteenth century bifurcation between art and entertainment, while viewing art and entertainment as a *single loose and informal unified system*. Art with a capital ‘A’ (high or fine art) is defined principally against craft—the artist against the artisan—and, in the modernist era, against entertainment and the pure entertainer. *Interlinking of genres* is significant. Every performing art has a contrasting entertainment-genre; every non-performing art has a contrasting craft, including decoration. Theatre contrasts with variety or soap opera, the novel with pulp fiction, poetry with doggerel, painting with kitsch, art music with popular music. (Architecture seemingly lacks an entertainment equivalent.) Genres such as comedy, thriller, horror film or crime novel constitute or lend themselves to entertainment; tragedy, epic, history painting and monumental architecture do not. These are definitional, almost tautological claims. Comedy is a multiple phenomenon, or involves multiply related phenomena; as dramatic genre, it has both artistic and entertainment functions. To reiterate, entertainment primarily belongs to the performing arts, but extends across non-performing arts too.

The modern system of arts and entertainment includes crafts, and sport, whose aesthetic dimension is not limited to the graceful gymnast, or stroke-playing cricketer. Winning and its rewards are regarded as sport's non-aesthetic aim, but that applies only to the participants—who

benefit financially, career-wise and in terms of fame. It matters to the spectator whether Leicester beat Tottenham only because they have chosen, for their own pleasure, to feel that it does—an aesthetic dimension. But the aesthetics of sport cannot be pursued further here.

Reservations and uncertainties remain. To reiterate, our vocabulary of art and entertainment is deeply unsatisfactory, and one struggles to express the required distinctions by means of it. One unresolved issue is whether the art-entertainment relationship is fundamental. Every serious activity has its entertainment correlate. Entertainment also contrasts with science, maybe with (true) sport, even with punishment, which until the nineteenth century was a public spectacle. It might be concluded that there is no special dependency relation between art and entertainment. A further unresolved question is whether there is a test of time for entertainment. Is there 'classic entertainment'—Laurel and Hardy's short films, or Eddie Heywood's easy listening classic 'Canadian Sunset'? But that remains material for a future occasion.

Andy Hamilton
Durham University, UK
a.j.hamilton@durham.ac.uk

References

- Adorno, T. (1997). *Aesthetic theory*. Hulot-Kentor, R. (trans.). London: Athlone.
- Andrews, M. (2006). *Charles Dickens and his performing selves: Dickens and the public readings*. Oxford: OUP.
- Arena: Kenn Dodd's Happiness, (2007). [TV Programme]. BBC2.
- Bates, S. and Ferri, A. (2010). 'What's entertainment? Notes toward a definition'. *Studies in Popular Culture*, 33, pp. 1–20.
- Blanning, T. (2008). *The triumph of music*. Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin.
- Borsay, P. (2006). *A history of leisure: The British experience since 1500*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Buchena, S. (2013). *The founding of aesthetics in the German enlightenment: the art of invention and the invention of art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carroll, N. (1998). *A philosophy of mass art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Crawford, R. (2001). *America's musical life: a history*. New York: Norton.
- Davies, S. (2005). *The philosophy of art*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Dyer, R. (2002). *Only entertainment*. London: Routledge.
- Gildea, R. (2003). *Barricades and Borders: Europe, 1800–1914*. Oxford: OUP.
- Gracyk, T. (2011). 'The sublime and the fine arts', in Costelloe, T. (ed.), *The Sublime: from Antiquity to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 217–229.
- Gray, D. (2008). *Later medieval English literature*. Oxford: OUP.
- Hamilton, A. (2007). *Aesthetics and Music*. London: Continuum.
- Hamilton, A. (2009). 'Scruton's Philosophy of Culture: Elitism, Populism, and Classic Art'. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 49: 4, pp. 389–404.
- Hamilton, A. (2012). 'Artistic Truth', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 71, pp. 229–261.

- Hamilton, A. (2014). *Routledge guidebook to Wittgenstein and 'on certainty'*. London: Routledge.
- Hamilton, A. (manuscript). 'Art & Ents'.
- Heilman, R. (1975). 'Escape and Escapism: Varieties of Literary Experience'. *Sewanee Review*, 83:3, pp. 439–58.
- Heidegger, M. (1975). 'The origin of the work of art', in his *Poetry, language, thought*. New York: Harper.
- Kivy, P. (2012). 'What really happened in the eighteenth century: the "modern system" re-examined (again)'. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 52, pp. 64–74.
- Kristeller, P. (1990). 'The modern system of the arts', in his *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 163–227.
- Kuhn, H. (1941). 'The system of the arts'. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1, pp. 66–79.
- Lambert, C. (1934). *Music ho! A study of music in decline*. New York: Scribner.
- Major, J. (2012). *My old man: a personal history of music hall*. London: Harper.
- Mayhew, H., and Cruikshank, G. (1851). *1851: or, The Adventures of Mr and Mrs [Cursty] Sandboys and family who came up to London to "enjoy themselves", and to see the Great Exhibition*, London: George Newbold & D. Bogue.
- Metzger, D. (2009). *Musical modernism at the turn of the twenty-first century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Monkhouse, B. (1993). *Crying with laughter: my life story*. London: Century.
- Nees, L. (2002). *Early medieval art*. Oxford: OUP.
- Orgel, S. (1975). *The illusion of power: political theater in the English renaissance*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Porter, J. (2009). 'Is art modern? Kristeller's "modern system of the arts" reconsidered'. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 49, pp. 1–24.
- Potter, D. (2010). 'Entertainers in the Roman empire', in Potter, D. and Mattingly, D. (eds), *Life, death and entertainment in the Roman Empire*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Pye, D. (1978). *The nature and aesthetics of design*, revised edn. London: The Herbert Press.
- Root, G. (1891). *The story of a musical life: an autobiography*. Cincinnati, OH: John Church.
- Schaper, E. (1968). *Prelude to aesthetics*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Schlicke, P. (1988). *Dickens and popular entertainment*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Shiner, L. (2001). *The invention of art: a cultural history*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Shusterman, R. (2003). 'Entertainment: a question for aesthetics'. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 43, pp. 289–307.
- Soderberg, S. (2012). 'Schoenberg on Ives'. *Schoenberg: resources and commentary* [blog]. Available at <http://eschbeg.blogspot.com/2012/08/schoenberg-on-ives.html> (Accessed 21 August 2022).
- Swafford, J. (1998). *Charles Ives: a life with music*. New York: Universal Pictures.
- Welles, O. (1958). *Touch of Evil* [Feature Film], Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures.
- Wolterstorff, N. (2015). *Art rethought: the social practices of art*. New York: OUP.
- Young, J. O. (2015). 'The ancient and modern system of the arts'. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 55, pp. 1–17.