

FYS Deconstructing Spectacles
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Course Description:

Guy Debord, a French social theorist, characterizes contemporary society as “an immense accumulation of spectacles.” The spectacle is a social logic which blends the logics of the cinema, the circus, and capital. It permeates a wide range of social cultural and political formations such as advertising and marketing discourses, architecture (Times Square, The Mall of America, Las Vegas), events (SuperBowl, Columbine, 9/11), celebrities (Dr. Phil, Oprah), theme parks and zoos (Disney World, Sea World, The San Diego Zoo), video games, TV news, reality television, etc. Using special effects, architectural facades, and fast paced music the bland and dull appear exciting and worth watching or buying. In this sense the spectacle is the cultural compliment to capital both producing value and stimulating consumption. In this course we shall both analyze and theoretically engage with the underlying logic of events, spaces, media formations which might be called spectacles. The course is a research-oriented course. Students will map and analyze a site, event, or formation determined by the logic of the spectacle.

Readings:

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Boston: Zone Books, 1995.
Barry Glassner *The Culture of Fear*, NY: Basic 1999.
Aaron Doyle, *Arresting Images: Crime and Policing in Front of the Television Camera*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 2003.
John Hannigan, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis*: NY: Routledge, 1998.
Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2005.
Robin Williams, *The Non-Designer's Design Book*, Berkeley: Peachpit Press: 2003.
Barbara Assadi and Galen Gruman, *In Design for Dummies*, NY: Hungry Minds, 2005.

Part 1 Conceptualizing the spectacle

Looking at the seminal work on the spectacle by Guy Debord we will first focus on the relationship between the spectacle and everyday life. The spectacle exaggerates. It blends the logics of the cinema, the circus, and capital to make events, spaces, and media flows more dramatic or salient. Debord argued that next to the exaggerated representations of the spectacle, the everyday is experienced as boring, bland and routine. While Debord conceptualizes the spectacle as the antithesis of everyday life, increasingly the everyday is integrated into the spectacle. Spectacles carve out spaces for the fan, the viewer, and the audience. We don't just watch from a distance. Spectacles work because we participate in them. The more we participate, the more we consume, the more profit is made. Moreover, the spectacle invades the everyday through commodity signs that serve as a pool of signifiers out of which we can construct our identities.

Jan 23 Introduction

Jan 24 The logic of the ad

Reading: Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, *Sign Wars*, NY: Guilford Press, 1996, pp. 20-54.

Jan 25 The spectacle in history: From the Roman coliseum to modern fascism

Reading: Douglas Kellner, "Media Culture and the Triumph of the Spectacle," (<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/>)

Jan 30 The concept of spectacle/ discussion of research topics

Reading: Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Boston: Zone Books, 1995, 1-15.

Jan 31 The promo

Readings: Margaret Morse "Television graphics and the virtual body: words on the move," *Virtualities*, 71-98

Part 2 Media and the spectacle

Media spectacles are driven by the logic of capital. In order to deliver audience to advertisers, media must continually add sign value to their products. The use of celebrities, over-dramatization of narratives, enhanced special effects, and the use of images of both fictional and real violence are some of the ways media enhances its product to increase its ratings. Unfortunately, everyday life can't compete with the spectacle of the media. Since the photographed image is not subject to the weight of time and place, it always appears more exciting than real life. Even "real life" programs select and edit material constructing a hyperreal or "realer than real" text. In this part of the course we shall look at how media transforms the mundane into the extraordinary.

Feb 1 Producing an audience

Film: Martin Scorsese *King of Comedy* Showings: Jan 30, 31 4, 7, 10pm

Feb 6 The Super Bowl

Reading: Gary Crawford, "Consumption, Spectacle, and Performance," in *Consuming Sport*, NY: Routledge, 2004, pp. 77-88.

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Boston: Zone Books, 1995, pp. 17, 18, 21, 24, 25, 29.

Feb 7 Topic, research plan workshop, envisioning the final project

In class reading: Richard Wurman, *Information architect*

Thomas Levin et al., *Control Space*

Chuiha Judy Chung et al., *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*

Feb 8 Research workshop (ODY)

Feb 13 Bond

Readings: Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, "Pleasure and the Bond Films," in *Bond and Beyond*, NY: Methuen, 1987, pp. 204-230.

Feb 14 Workshop: the news as spectacle**Feb 15 Research: statistics (ODY)****Feb 20 Fear and the production of value**

Readings: Barry Glassner *The Culture of Fear*, NY: Basic 1999.

Quiz #1**Feb 21 Workshop: turning statistics into tables, charts, graphs, time lines****Feb 22 9/11**

Readings: Geoff King, "'Just Like a Movie?': and Hollywood Spectacle," in *The Spectacle of the Real*, ed. G. King, Portland, OR: Intellect Books, 2005, pp.47-57.

Kathy Smith, "Reframing Fantasy: September 11 and the Global Audience," in *The Spectacle of the Real*, ed. G. King, Portland, OR: Intellect Books, 2005, pp.59-70.

Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2005, pp. 25-44.

Feb 27 Cops

Reading: Aaron Doyle, *Arresting Images: Crime and Policing in Front of the Television Camera*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 2003.

Quiz #2**Feb 28 Reporting research****Mar 1 Talk TV –Dr. Phil**

Readings: Danille Egan and Stephen Papson, "'You Either Get It or You Don't': Conversion Experiences and *The Dr. Phil Show*," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, vol. X, Summer, 2005, <http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/>

Mar 6 Reality TV

Reading: Misha Kavka, "Love 'n the Real: or, How I Learned to Love Reality TV," in *The Spectacle of the Real*, ed. G. King, Portland, OR: Intellect Books, 2005, pp.93-103.

Justin Lewis, "The Meaning of Real Life," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. S. Murray and L. Oulette, NY: New York University Press, 2004, pp. 288-302.

Quiz #3

Mar 7 Narcissism and the media: producing the celebrity

Reading: Barry Smart, "Cultures of Sport Stardom: David Beckham and Anna Kounikova," in *The Sport Star*, Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage, 2005, pp. 144-190.

Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, "Therapeutic Culture: Narcissism and Self-Revelation," in *Reality TV*, NY: Wallflower Press, 2005.

S. Elizabeth Bird, "Media Scandal Meets Everyday Life," in *The Audience in Everyday Life*, NY: Routledge, 2003, pp.

G. Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004, pp. 52-70.

Mar 8 Nature films

Reading: Stephen Papson "'Cross The Fin Line of Terror': Shark Week on The Discovery Channel," *Journal of American Culture*, 15, 4 (Winter 1992), 67-82.

Mar 13 WWF

Reading: John Fiske, "Offensive Bodies and Carnival Pleasures," *Understanding Popular Culture*, 1988, pp. 69-102.

Film: Chris Mortensen, *The Unreal Story of Professional Wrestling*
Mar 11 and 12 4, 7, 10

Quiz #4

Mar 14 Natural born celebrities: serial killer as spectacle

Film: Oliver Stone *Natural Born Killers* Mar 12 and 13 4, 7, 10

Mar 15 The spectacle of the grotesque

Due: First draft

Spring Break

Mar 27- 30 Writing conferences

Mar 27 The Spectacle of War

Reading: Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2005, pp. 45-106.

Quiz #5

Mar 28 The spectacle and the commodity form: revisiting advertising

Reading: Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Boston: Zone Books, 1995, 35-37, 42, 44.

Mar 29 Introduction to InDesign (ODY)

Space as Spectacle

In this part of the course we shall exam how the processes of rationalization, commodification, and spectacularization intertwine in the transformation of urban public space into tourist sites. Disney World provides the model for leisure landscapes in which pleasure, education, safety, comfort, and authenticity are designed into the landscape. This model extends to spaces such as Times Square and Las Vegas. The class will explore issues of authenticity, diversity, the flattening out of experience, panopticism and over-commodification in relation to these spaces.

Apr 3 "It's fun; it's safe; it's easy; it's clean."

Reading: John Hannigan, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis*. NY: Routledge, 1998

Quiz #6

Apr 4 Times Square

Due: Final draft of written project

Apr 5 Designing pages (ODY)

Reading: Robin Williams, *The Non-Designer's Design Book*, Berkeley: Peachpit Press: 2003.

Apr 10 Designing pages (ODY)

Apr 11 Las Vegas: the urban spectacle

Apr 12 The politics of the spectacle

Apr 18-21 Conferences on design and presentation

Apr 18: Due: First draft of videobook

Apr 19 Workshop on designing (ODY)

Apr 24 Presentations

Apr 25 Presentations

Apr 26 Presentations

May 1 Presentations

May 2 Presentations

May 3 Presentations

Due: Final draft of videobook and portfolio

Evaluation

Quizzes (5 out of 6): These short quizzes will cover course readings. There are no make-up quizzes. Your lowest grade will be dropped.

Course Project: The project will consist of the critical mapping of a spectacle. Here, you are expected to integrate a wide range of data (statistics, video clips, news articles, web sites, images, charts, maps, interviews with participants, audio clips) with theory to construct a critical analysis of your topic. Special attention should be paid to exhibiting your project graphically. The final project will appear in three forms: a paper, a PowerPoint presentation, and a graphically designed videobook.

Feb 3 Topic proposal

A short description of the topic you plan to research. Note why you are interested in the topic. List the questions which you wish to answer. Also develop a research plan. (2 pages)

Feb 28 Thesis, annotated bibliography, data, and related web sites.

You should extend your topic proposal into a thesis statement supported by a discussion of the relevant literature. Identify and review both the substantive and theoretical literature relevant to your topic. Note why you plan to use a particular theoretical perspective. Your bibliography should contain 20 annotation citations. No more than 5 of the citations should be relevant web sites.

Your data might include statistics, video clips, news articles, web sites, images, charts, maps, interviews with participants, audio clips, etc. Your data should be organized into manageable files.

Mar15 First draft of written analysis

Apr 4 Final draft of written analysis

Apr 18 First draft of videobook

May 3 Final draft of videobook

Apr 24-May 3 PowerPoint presentation

A twenty minute presentation in which you map out and critically analyze a spectacle.

Participation

The class is organized around discussion, workshops, and presentations. Participation is essential for this class to work. Your participation grade is based on informed participation (that you attend class and that you regularly demonstrate your familiarity with texts.)

Quizzes (5 out of 6)	125 pts.
Topic proposal	20 pts.
Thesis and bibliography	30 pts.

First draft of written analysis	75 pts.
Final draft of written analysis	50 pts.
First draft of videobook	50 pts.
Final draft of videobook	50 pts.
PowerPoint presentation	50 pts.
Participation	50 pts.

Grade scale

4.0	450
3.75	438
3.5	425
3.25	413
3.0	400
2.75	383
2.5	375
2.25	363
2.0	350
1.75	338
1.5	325
1.25	313
1.0	300

First-Year Program Philosophy and Goals 2006-07

The First-Year Program (FYP) and First-Year Seminar (FYS) are the first steps in a four-year process of helping you meet the University's Aims and Objectives and the broader goals of a liberal education. The faculty of the FYP and FYS see themselves as partners and mentors in the process of working with you to acquire the intellectual habits of mind, the writing, speaking, and research skills, and the ethical self-reflexiveness that are at the core of a liberal education. The FYP and FYS will ask you to consider new perspectives on the world and your place in it and will challenge you to confront many of the hidden assumptions you bring to college with you. We hope to open you to new ideas, help you to see the complexity of the way in which knowledge gets produced and used in society, and encourage you to see yourself as an active contributor in making the world a better place. The course topics, the texts you will read, listen to, and watch, the in-class and out-of-class activities you will engage in, and the writing, speaking, and research assignments you will work on are all designed to introduce you to the depth of critical thinking and the quality and complexity of the communication skills that will be expected of you at SLU and as a citizen of an increasingly diverse society.

First and foremost among our goals are those related to your abilities as a communicator. The work of the FYP and FYS asks you to design and deliver written, spoken, performed and/or visual texts that demonstrate basic skills in the relevant modes of communication and with an increasing degree of rhetorical sensitivity. Our focus on "rhetorical sensitivity" means that we expect you to cultivate the awareness that all of your communication, whether formal or informal, involves having to make choices about your messages, whether written, spoken, aural or visual. To become a good communicator, you need to recognize that the creation of meaningful and powerful written, spoken, performed, or visual texts involves both a creator and an audience, and that therefore the voice you adopt in your communication, the audience you imagine yourself communicating to, and the social and ethical context of the content, matter a great deal in creating such texts. One important way to become a better communicator is to become a better critical reader, viewer, and listener, which is why we will ask you to engage challenging materials in a variety of forms and work with you to learn how to interpret them.

Learning to read, listen, write, speak, do research and/or perform well also requires feedback. As faculty, we submit our work for feedback from colleagues all the time, and giving and receiving constructive feedback from both friends and strangers is central to collaborative work in any field and is itself a form of critical thinking and learning. We further recognize that this feedback process is not linear and that good communication requires that you continually rethink, restructure, and revise your work in order for it to be your best. This is why we require that your writing, speaking, and performance assignments be "projects" that include preparatory exercises and multiple drafts or rehearsals, all of which ask you to continue to reflect critically on the choices you have made in the texts that you produce. Furthermore, we see all of these forms of communication as complementary and intertwined, which is why many of your assignments will ask you to integrate elements of the written, spoken, performed, and visual. Finally, developing good habits of critical inquiry and communication also means reflecting on the ethical dimensions of how your work represents that of others, thus one of our goals is to help you to understand both the nature of academic integrity and the social processes by which knowledge is produced and represented.

To ensure that the program is meeting its stated goals, all FYP and FYS syllabi are read by other faculty in the program to determine if they include a variety of assignments that foster the

writing, speaking, research, and critical thinking goals of the program. All FYP and FYS courses have to be approved by faculty in the program before they are offered.

First-Year Seminar research project learning goals

With respect to research skills specifically, our learning goals for the spring are that students should:

- Be introduced to ways of conducting productive and imaginative inquiry and research in order to become a part of the various conversations surrounding issues.
- Learn to differentiate among the various ways that information is produced and presented, between popular and scholarly journals and books, between mainstream and alternative publications, between primary and secondary sources.
- Learn how to evaluate and synthesize information, whether gathered from traditional sources, such as books and journals, or from websites or electronic media.
- Begin to develop the skills of critical analysis in the interpretation and use of information gathered from any source.
- Be introduced to the ethical obligations that scholars have to both responsibly represent their sources and inform their readers of the sources of their information, as well as learning, and being held responsible for the proper use of, the conventions of scholarly citation and attribution.
- Present the results of your research through writing, speaking, visual elements, or other multimedia forms in such a way that you demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively using the rhetorical conventions of the chosen form.