

CAT 2 (C) Society of the Spectacle

Instructor: Professor Charles Thorpe

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Office: Social Science Building room 497

Office hours: Mondays 1-3pm.

Schedule

Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 12-12.50pm

Lecture Location: PETER 110.

Final exam scheduled for Wednesday March 22, 11.30-12.30 (collecting final paper). All coursework must be handed in by this time at the very latest.

Course description

In consumer capitalism, we are surrounded and bombarded by images from the media and advertising. Commodities increasingly take the form of images, since branding is all important. With today's interactive technologies, we carry on our social relationships mediated by technologies and we construct virtual representations of ourselves on sites like Facebook. Contemporary society can therefore be understood as a 'society of the spectacle.' In his path-breaking book of this title, Guy Debord argued that in advanced capitalist societies "all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation."

In the course, we will read Debord's text, and other analyses of capitalism, consumerism, and media, as well as reading science fiction literature, and viewing film. We will also pay attention to the way in which class power and inequality, politics, sex, gender, nature and the urban and suburban environment, and the self are constructed and mediated within 'the spectacle.' The course aims to provide a space in which we can gain analytical distance from the spectacle and develop a critical understanding of how it shapes our everyday lives.

Required texts

You should purchase the following books from UCSD Bookstore:

Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Black and Red, 2000)

Philip K. Dick, *The Simulacra* (Mariner Books, 2011)

Roy Scranton, *War Porn* (Soho Press, 2016)

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (Anchor, 2004)

In addition, students are required to buy the following books which will be used throughout the 3-quarter CAT sequence:

Andrea Lunsford, *Easy Writer: A Pocket Reference*, 4th edition (Bedford/St. Martin's 2010).

Losh, E.; Alexander, J.; Cannon, K.; Cannon, Z. *Understanding Rhetoric: A Graphic Guide to Writing* (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013).

Reading

You should do all the readings listed for each discussion session. The quality of class discussion and your experience will depend on your having made a serious attempt to read and understand these core readings.

Apart from the required texts, all other required readings will be available on the TED site for the course, under Content – Required Reading.

In order to deepen your understanding, you should also make use of the readings posted under Content—Further Reading, and the extensive archive of Weblinks that is available in TED. You may refer to these materials, and cite them, in your coursework.

Attendance

Attendance at all lectures and sections is mandatory.

An attendance sheet will be taken at the beginning of each section. Students arriving after the attendance sheet has been circulated will not be able to sign up later in the class or at the end. Therefore punctuality is important.

If, according to the attendance sheet, you miss more than 4 section sessions without prior permission or a satisfactory and documented excuse (i.e. medical, or family emergency) you will receive a participation grade of F (or 0%).

Presentations

In section, each student will be expected to give a presentation on a reading once during the quarter. Each student presentation will be about one of the readings on the syllabus. The presentation should outline the argument in the reading and raise questions about it – e.g. what did you find most interesting and significant in the reading, which concepts or ideas did you find hard to understand, what did you agree or disagree with in the author's argument or perspective *and why*, what examples can you think of that illuminate the author's ideas or seem to conflict with their ideas, how does the reading relate to topics or ideas discussed previously in the course.

Students presenting during a session should distribute in class and also hand to the instructor at that time a 1-2 page handout. This should be an outline of the presentation with a list of questions for class discussion. This handout together with the oral presentation, will be given a mark of Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. (An outline without an oral presentation or vice versa will receive a mark of unsatisfactory). This will count for 5% of your overall mark: S = 5%, U = 0%.

Assessment

There are *two* pieces of coursework, *plus a take-home final*.

Coursework 1-2: 50% (25% each),

Take-home final: 35%,

Presentation: 5%,

Class participation: 10%

Coursework

Coursework is due *in class* on dates given below.

I DO NOT ACCEPT PAPERS SUBMITTED VIA EMAIL

Assignment Submissions Policy

All assignments must be submitted in hard typescript copy by the day and time specified in the Syllabus, below. If a hard copy of the assignment is not turned on the date specified, it will be reduced by one grade point (i.e.: An **A** would be lowered to a **A-**). Papers not submitted in hard copy by the time of the final exam will be lowered two grade points (i.e.: An **A** would be lowered to a **B+**).

Additionally, all assignments must also be submitted digitally via turnitin.com by midnight of the day in which they are due.

All graded writing must be submitted to Turnitin.com to receive credit. Late submissions will be penalized. If an assignment is not time stamped in Turnitin.com by midnight on the date it is due, it will be reduced by **one full grade** (i.e.: An **A** would be lowered to a **B**). Papers not submitted to turnitin.com by the time of the final exam will be lowered two full grades (i.e.: An **A** would be lowered to a **C**).

[If a paper is not turned in either in hard copy or in turnitin by the specified date, it will receive both penalties: one full grade and one grade point. i.e. An **A** would be lowered to a **B-**. Papers not submitted in any form by the time of the final exam will receive an **F**].

Just make sure to turn in both a hard copy and Turnitin on time and you will be fine. If you have an emergency and you discuss it with your TA **before the deadline**, it may be possible to make arrangements but this is not guaranteed.

By university policy, the final exam will not be accepted late and no coursework can be accepted after the date and time of the final exam.

You must submit all assigned work to pass the course.

Examination

The examination is an essay-format take-home final.

Participation Grades

Here is a description of the kind of participation in the course that would earn you an A, B, C, etc. Your TA may use pluses and minuses to reflect your participation more fairly, but on this sheet we will simply show a general description for each letter grade.

A – EXCELLENT.

You are well-prepared for discussion in lecture and for section, with almost no absences. You can explain each reading in your own words. In addition, you have already asked yourself questions about what it means, focusing on specific passages that are interesting to you and making connections between various readings and ideas.

You express your thoughts clearly, making and supporting specific claims. You listen and respond thoughtfully to your peers, helping to create a safe, inviting space for discussion..

You find ways to connect the course material with issues that matter to you personally.

You do all section activities with high energy and attention to detail, and actively lead or enthusiastically contribute to small or large group activities, taking personal responsibility for achieving the assigned goal.

You submit rough drafts on time, and these drafts demonstrate a thorough engagement with the assignment.

You respond creatively to the feedback you receive (from both your peers and TA) on drafts, making significant changes to your writing between the first and final drafts that demonstrate ownership of your own writing process.

You are an active contributor to the peer-review process, offering insightful, substantive, and constructive feedback to your classmates.

B – GOOD.

You attend lecture and section with few absences. You have done most of the readings. If you don't understand the reading the first time you read it, you wait to have it explained by the TA.

You talk on a regular basis. Sometimes you offer well-thought-out ideas and connections, supported with evidence; sometimes your contributions are merely a statement of opinions or initial reactions.

You do assigned activities willingly; but if you run into obstacles, you let the TA or

someone else figure out how to overcome those obstacles.

You submit rough drafts on time, and these drafts demonstrate thorough engagement with the assignment.

You respond effectively to the feedback you receive (from both your peers and TA) on drafts, making significant changes to your writing between the first and final drafts.

You are a regular contributor to the peer-review process, offering constructive feedback to your classmates.

C – SATISFACTORY.

You are present in lecture and section, with few absences, and have done some of the reading some of the time.

You occasionally contribute to the discussion; your contributions are opinions more often than they are thoughtful efforts to make connections. You're not a real self-starter, and you have to be nudged to participate.

You do activities when asked, because it's required.

You submit rough drafts on time.

You make some efforts toward revision between the first and final drafts of an assignment

You are involved in peer-review activities, but you offer minimal feedback.

D – UNSATISFACTORY.

You have multiple absences from section.

When you come, you're often not very prepared, and you don't say much.

You may have a habit of using your cell phone or computer in class to chat or do things not directly related to the course. Playing online poker or shopping for surfboards in either lecture or section, for instance, would be ways to earn a "D" in participation.

You submit late or incomplete drafts.

You revise minimally or only at a surface level between drafts.

You are absent for peer-review activities, or offer unproductive feedback.

F—FAILING.

You have many absences, are habitually unprepared, fail to engage with the drafting and revision process, or are uncooperative.

Quoting, paraphrasing, and citation

Wherever possible, put the argument or claim in your own words. Quotes should not be more than two short sentences in length, or one long sentence. Do not use more than two quotations in a paragraph. Where you do quote, always go on to explain the meaning of the quotation in your own words. Whenever you draw from or refer to a text, cite the text with page number.

You should use the following citation style:

In-text reference should be in this format (Hedges, 2009: 15).

Your paper should include a bibliography, with citations in the following form:

Hedges, Chris, 2009. *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle*. New York: Nation Books.

Turnitin.com

In addition to turning a hard copy in class, you should also submit your paper online to turnitin.com

All papers **must** be submitted to Turnitin via Ted. Papers must be uploaded no later than midnight on the day an assignment is due. To turn in your paper go to the course Ted (<http://ted.ucsd.edu>) and find the link under 'Content' titled 'TurnItIn Submission'. After you have uploaded your paper a confirmation page will appear. Print out the confirmation page for your records in case your electronic submission is disputed.

Academic Integrity

UCSD has a university-wide Policy on Integrity of Scholarship, published annually in the General Catalog, and online at <http://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/policy.html>. All students must read and be familiar with this Policy.

All suspected violations of academic integrity will be reported to UCSD's Academic Integrity Coordinator. Students found to have violated UCSD's standards for academic integrity may receive both administrative and academic sanctions.

Administrative sanctions may extend up to and include suspension or dismissal.

Academic sanctions for plagiarism – even if this is 'sloppiness' in citation or use of quotation marks and not deliberate – will be a failing grade for the piece of coursework or exam which is deemed to have been plagiarized. In some serious cases of plagiarism or cheating etc., the sanction may be failure of the course. Specific examples of prohibited violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, the following:

Academic stealing refers to the theft of exams or exam answers, of papers or take-home exams composed by others, and of research notes, computer files, or data collected by others.

Academic cheating, collusion, and fraud refer to having others do your schoolwork or allowing them to present your work as their own; using unauthorized materials during exams; inventing data or bibliography to support a paper, project, or exam; purchasing tests, answers, or papers from any source whatsoever; submitting (nearly) identical papers to two classes.

Misrepresenting personal or family emergencies or health problems in order to extend deadlines and alter due dates or requirements is another form of academic fraud.

Claiming you have been ill when you were not, claiming that a family member has been ill or has died when that is untrue are some examples of unacceptable ways of trying to

gain more time than your fellow students have been allowed in which to complete assigned work.

Plagiarism refers to the use of another's work without full acknowledgment, whether by suppressing the reference, neglecting to identify direct quotations, paraphrasing closely or at length without citing sources, spuriously identifying quotations or data, or cutting and pasting the work of several (usually unidentified) authors into a single undifferentiated whole.

Receipt of this syllabus constitutes an acknowledgment that you are responsible for understanding and acting in accordance with UCSD guidelines on academic integrity.

Students With Special Needs

Students with physical or learning disabilities must work with UCSD's Office for Students with Disabilities to obtain current documentation, then contact instructor and TA's to arrange appropriate academic accommodations. For pre-existing needs this should be accomplished in the first two weeks of the quarter; for emerging needs do it as soon in the quarter as possible. To be fair to all students, no individual accommodations will be made unless the student first presents the proper documentation.

Electronic Devices

Electronic devices, including laptops and cell phones, may only be used in class to the extent and for the purposes permitted by the course instructor. Please be aware that even when their use in lecture or discussion section is permitted, using these devices in ways which are distracting to other people in the room, irrelevant to the class, or counterproductive to learning is not acceptable.

Reading schedule (for section)

Week 1 and 2

Read:

Chris Hedges, Chapter 1: "The End of Literacy" from Chris Hedges, *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (NY: Nation Books, 2009).

George Monbiot, "Celebrity Isn't Just Harmless Fun – It's the Smiling Face of the Corporate Machine," *The Guardian* (UK) December 20, 2016.

Please watch *Black Mirror*, Series 1, Episode 2: *Fifteen Million Merits*.

It is available on Netflix: <https://www.netflix.com/title/70264888>

I am also making the DVD available in UCSD library for in-library viewing.

(Please try to view it by the end of Week 2, but if you can't access it by then, at least by the end of the quarter).

The episode depicts (in science fiction or speculative fiction style) a future in which TV/internet screens are inescapable and the central institution of society, and the only promise of a way out of everyday drudgery, is a Reality TV talent show.

Week 3

Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Chapter 1-3: “Separation Perfected,” “The Commodity as Spectacle,” and “Unity and Division within Appearance” (read only these 59-72 of chapter 3).

Weeks 4 and 5:

Philip K. Dick, *The Simulacra* – all.

Week 6:

Brad Evans and Henry Giroux, “The Destruction of Humanity,” in Evans and Giroux, *Disposable Futures: The Seduction of Violence in the Age of Spectacle* (City Lights Books, 2015), pp. 75-105.

Week 7:

Charles Thorpe, “The Pornography of Information,” in idem, *Necroculture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 153-204.

Week 8

Roy Scranton, *War Porn* – all

Weeks 9 and 10

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* – all.

Also read:

Matthew Adams, “#Hypernormalisation – and why Heathrow plan is proof we exist in a catastrophic fantasyland.”

Lecture Schedule

Week 1: Media Spectacle

M: Introduction and overview of course: The spectacle of media, consumerism, information

W: Pseudo-events

F: Celebrity

Week 2: Society of the Spectacle

M: *Martin Luther King Jr. Day* – No lecture

W: Understanding Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*

F: *Society of the Spectacle* film (segment)

Week 3: Forms of Spectacle

M: In-lecture discussion of *Society of the Spectacle* film and *Black Mirror*

W: Diffuse vs. Concentrated Spectacle

F: Integrated Spectacle

Week 4: American Political Spectacle

M: Film: 'Red Nightmare' and Discussion

W: 'The American Dream' and the Reality of Inequality

F: 'The American Dream' and the Reality of Inequality cntd.

Week 5: American Political Spectacle cntd.

M: Donald Trump: Money, Celebrity, Politics

W: Philip K. Dick's America

F: In-lecture discussion of *The Simulacra*

Week 6: The Spectacle of War

M: War, Lies, and Propaganda

W: *The War You Don't See* video

F: *The War You Don't See* video

Week 7: The Spectacle of Sex and Violence

M: Militarization, Violence, and Spectacle

W: Advertising, Media and the Female Body

F: Video: *Killing Us Softly 4*

Week 8: The Spectacle of Sex and Violence cntd.

M: Pornography, Objectification and Violence

W: Discussion of Scranton, *War Porn*

Living in the Spectacle

F: The Artificial Environment

Week 9: Living in the Spectacle cntd.

M: *Presidents' Day – No Lecture*

W: Understanding *Oryx and Crake* (lecture and discussion)

F: The Self as Spectacle

Week 10:

M: Can art disrupt the spectacle? (Lecture by Ash Smith).

W: Cracks in the Spectacle

F: Discussion

Coursework due dates

Coursework 1

Prompt will be given out at beginning of week 2.

Write 6 pages

Rough draft due Week 3: Wednesday, 1/26 in section. Final draft due Week 5: Friday, 2/10 in lecture and Turnitin.com

Coursework 2

Prompt will be given out at beginning of week 4

Write 6 pages

Rough draft due Week 6: Wednesday, 2/8 in section. Final draft due Week 8: Wednesday, 3/1 in lecture and Turnitin.com

Coursework 3 (Take-home final exam).

Prompt will be given out at beginning of week 6

Write 8 pages

Due Wednesday of exam week (March 22) during first hour of exam period 11.30am-12.30pm. Hard copy in exam period. And Turnitin by end of day (midnight).