

CAT 2 Society of the Spectacle

Instructor: Professor Charles Thorpe

cthorne@ucsd.edu

Office: Social Science Building room 497

Office hours:

Tuesday: 11.30 – 12.20pm

Thursday: 11.30-12.20am

Lecture Schedule: M, W, F: 11-11.50am

Lecture Location: PCYNH 106

Note: the professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus throughout the quarter. Any such changes will be announced in lecture and as an Announcement on the TritonEd site for the course.

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 consumerism shapes the urban environment. 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.

Sections

<u>956503</u>	B01	MW	8:00a-8:50a	CENTR	201	LISA WAINAINA	lwainain@ucsd.edu
<u>956504</u>	B02	MW	9:00a-9:50a	CENTR	201	LISA WAINAINA	
<u>956505</u>	B03	MW	10:00a-10:50a	CENTR	204	PAOLO ZUNIGA	pczuniga@ucsd.edu
<u>956506</u>	B04	MW	5:00p-5:50p	HSS	1106B	PAOLO ZUNIGA	
<u>956507</u>	B05	MW	6:00p-6:50p	HSS	1106B	GRACE HUDDLESON	ghuddles@ucsd.edu
<u>956508</u>	B06	MW	7:00p-7:50p	HSS	1106B	GRACE HUDDLESON	
<u>956509</u>	B07	MW	4:00p-4:50p	MANDE	B-146	ROBERT EDWARDS	rsedward@ucsd.edu
<u>956510</u>	B08	MW	5:00p-5:50p	MANDE	B-146	ROBERT EDWARDS	
<u>956511</u>	B09	WF	6:00p-6:50p	MANDE	B-146	ZACHARY BUSHNELL	zbushnel@ucsd.edu
<u>956514</u>	B12	WF	3:00p-3:50p	CENTR	206	ZACHARY BUSHNELL	

Required texts

You should purchase the following books from UCSD Bookstore:

Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*

Roy Scranton, *War Porn*

Philip K. Dick, *The Penultimate Truth*

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*

J. G. Ballard, *Kingdom Come*

The syllabus also contains videos that you will need to view outside class time. Some of these will be made available via UCSD library's electronic course reserves. Some of these are available for free on Youtube. Others will require a subscription to Netflix or payment to Amazon Prime video in order to view (you could also watch with a friend who has a subscription, or share a subscription).

All other readings will be available in the Content Folder of the TritonEd site for the course.

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

Attendance

Attendance at all lectures and sections are mandatory.

In lectures, you should sit in the area designated for your section, with your TA. The TA will take attendance at the lecture. An attendance sheet will be taken at the beginning of each session. Note: *this will not be necessary on the first day of class*. We will start this process in the second lecture of the quarter.

If, according to the attendance sheet, you miss more than 6 sessions (e.g. 6 lectures or 3 lectures and 3 sections) without prior permission or a satisfactory and documented excuse (i.e. medical, or family emergency) you will receive a failing grade for the participation component of the grade.

Lectures

The purpose of lecture, in this course, is not to impart information. The professor will not be delivering a monologue lecture. The purpose is to collectively engage with and intellectually, aesthetically, and emotionally process, through calm, reasoned, analytical discussion, the written and audiovisual documents that have been set for the course. This means discussing what the articles, novels and films made you think and feel and how they challenged your perception of the world or opened up a new way of seeing the world. For example, we will discuss whether the materials are provoking, awakening, uplifting, surprising, challenging, confusing, depressing, discomfoting, disturbing, upsetting, sickening, or even boring. They may seem right or wrong, true or false. Aesthetically, they may be beautiful, ugly, sublime, crude, or jarring. Any and all of these responses are worth talking about. We will talk about our thoughts, feelings, and judgments.

The quality of the entire course depends on your participation. In that sense, the class is what you make of it. You are expected to be active in lecture, raising your hand to speak in the lecture theatre in front of the entire room, or actively speaking and participating in small-group discussions, if organized during lecture. In discussions involving the entire lecture theatre, to speak, raise your hand and a microphone will be brought to you. Remember that you may not always get to speak when you want to because there are time constraints and the professor is also trying to make sure that everyone gets to speak. If you feel you are being overlooked, just tell the professor after class and he will make sure you are included in future.

This means that it is *essential* that you come to lecture having done the reading, or having

viewed the film or video, that is assigned for that lecture. See the lecture schedule below.

If you have not spoken, the professor may call on you.

Be polite, respectful to others, and avoid the use of profanity. But also feel free to express disagreement with other students and with the professor. It is important to have a genuine dialogue which includes differences of opinion, viewpoint, and judgment in order that the discussion be lively and not staid, artificial, and boring. Politeness and a respectful tone facilitate freedom to express disagreement. It has been said that a mark of being an educated person is being able to hear any viewpoint and discuss any topic without getting angry. Let's remember that. Also, remember that not everyone is comfortable speaking in front of the class. Let's create and maintain an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable speaking up, knowing that they will not be put down, mocked or verbally attacked and that, instead, what they say will be considered respectfully, rationally, calmly, and considerately. Be charitable in the way you judge your fellow students' intent and meaning. Let's have an environment where people are not afraid of 'saying the wrong thing' but instead feel free to test out their thoughts and ideas.

Bullying, put-downs, etc. will not be tolerated. If you cannot discuss in a calm and respectful way, the professor may ask you to leave the lecture theatre and take a pause until such a time as you are able to rejoin in a calm and collected frame of mind.

If you do not feel like speaking in front of the class, for any reason at all (you may have a cold and have lost your voice, you may be uncomfortable speaking in front of large groups, you may just not feel like doing it that day), you are welcome to write your comment on a piece of paper and raise your hand and, instead of giving you the mic, the TA or professor will read out your comment.

Active participation in lecture, as well as section, is required for the participation component of the course grade.

Section

Sections will be led by TAs. These will focus on writing. They will involve guidance in the mechanics and components of writing an essay (e.g. thesis statements, topic sentences, paragraphs, introductions, conclusions, logical argumentation etc.). They will involve in-section assignments and writing exercises, and especially drafting and re-drafting your coursework essays and peer reviewing each others' work.

Assessment

There are *five* pieces of coursework, *including a take-home final*.

Coursework 1-5: (15% each = 75% total)

Class participation: (5%)

CAT events (5%)

Reflective Portfolio (15%)

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 writing by the day and time specified in the Syllabus, below. 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 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.

You must submit all assigned work to pass the course.

Examination

In the examination period, you will hand in your reflective portfolio. See below for details.

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 exactly, but on this sheet we will simply show a general description for each letter grade.

A – EXCELLENT.

- You are always 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 and politely, making and supporting specific claims. You respond to what other students are saying in order to have a dialogue with them.
- 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, taking personal responsibility for achieving the assigned goal.

B – GOOD.

- You attend lecture and section with few absences. You have done most of the preparation. 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.

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.

D – UNSATISFACTORY.

- You have multiple absences.
- 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" (or lower) in participation.

F—FAILING.

- You have many absences, are habitually unprepared, or are uncooperative.

(Note: attendance at lecture and section is mandatory. See above section on attendance for the absolute limit on absences from lecture and section).

Quoting, paraphrasing, and citation

Wherever possible, put the argument or claim in your own words. Quotes should not be more than 2 sentences in length. 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 Harvard or APA citation format.

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

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

Hedges, C. (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.com. Prior to the due date of your first paper, you will be given a class/section ID and an enrollment password by your TA in section.

It is your responsibility to make sure you have this information. To turn in your paper, go to turnitin.com. If you have not previously used turnitin.com, register at this time. Remember your password, as you will be submitting all your other work for the course in this manner. Under your student homepage, select 'enroll in a class' from the top left hand corner of the page. Once you have enrolled in a class, select the class title and number. Next to the appropriate category, select 'submit'. After you have uploaded your paper, a confirmation page will appear. Print out the confirmation page for your records in case the electronic submission is disputed.

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

The use of electronic devices is not permitted during lecture. This includes not only phones but also laptops and tablets. Since the lecture is a discussion format and is not aimed at imparting information but rather promoting engagement, you will not need to take detailed notes and use of electronic devices will only distract your attention away from the discussion. Cell phones may not be used in class, either section or lecture. Please turn off your phones and put them away in your bag when class begins. Your TA will give you instructions regarding the use of laptops and tablets in section and different TA's may have different rules regarding this.

Schedule

Note: In addition to the readings below, you will be assigned pages of *They Say, I Say* for sections. Information on this will follow separately.

Week 1: Media Spectacle

M: Introduction and overview of course.

W: Discussion of “Black Mirror,” Season 1, Episode 2: “Fifteen Million Merits” (available on Netflix).

F: Discussion of Hedges, *Empire of Illusion*, Chapter 1: The Illusion of Literacy.”

Week 2: Society of the Spectacle

M: Discussion of Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Chapter 1: “Separation Perfected”

W: Discussion of Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Chapter 2: “The Commodity as Spectacle” and Chapter 3: “Unity and Division within Appearance” theses 64 and 65.

F: Discussion of Debord “Society of the Spectacle” film (1973)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IoUIHBSiVAY>

Watch up to 45:03. Make sure to turn off closed captioning.

Week 3: Consumerism and the Self

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

W: Discussion of ITV South Bank Show documentary on J. G. Ballard

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LosxrbL3sU>

F: Discussion of *Kingdom Come*, Chapters 1-9: How does Ballard set the scene?

Week 4: Landscape of Consumerism

M: Discussion of *Kingdom Come*, Chapters 10 – 32. What relationship does Ballard establish between consumerism and power?

W: Discussion of *Kingdom Come*, Chapters 33- end. In what way is Ballard’s understanding of human nature pessimistic? How does he portray civilization as a fragile condition?

F: Discussion: What kinds of places are shopping malls?

Week 5:

M: Discussion of Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Chapter 5 “Time and History.”

W: Discussion of Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Chapter 6: “Spectacular Time.”

F: Discussion of Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Chapter 7: “The Organization of Territory.”

Week 6: Spectacle of Nature, Spectacle of the Body

M: Discussion of film “Koyaanisqatsi” (available on electronic course reserves, via UCSD libraries Roger).

W: Discussion of Jean Kilbourne documentary *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising’s Image of Women* (available on electronic course reserves, via UCSD libraries Roger).

F: *Oryx and Crake*, chapters 1-4: What kind of world does Atwood construct? What is the relation of this fictional world to our real world?

Week 7: The Commodified World

M: *President’s Day – No Class*.

W: *Oryx and Crake*, chapters 5 and 6: Who is Oryx? What does her character represent and tell us?

F: *Oryx and Crake*, chapters 7- end. Is science all that matters? Are the humanities irrelevant?

Week 8: In Plato’s Cave

M: Discussion of BBC Arena documentary “Philip K. Dick: A Day in the Afterlife.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cK2MPgAHRk>

W: Discussion of war propaganda, historical falsification, and political leadership in Philip K. Dick, *The Penultimate Truth*

F: Discussion of documentary “Loose Change 9/11” (available on Amazon Prime video)

Week 9: The Spectacle of War

M: Discussion of violence, nihilism, and meaninglessness in *War Porn*

W: Discussion of documentary “The War You Don’t See” (available via UCSD library course reserves)

The Spectacle of the Self

F: Discussion of documentary PBS Frontline documentary “Generation Like”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txQD-l6O_8o

Week 10: The Spectacle of the Self cntd.

M: Discussion of Theresa M. Senft “Microcelebrity and the Branded Self”

W: Discussion of documentary “The Creepy Line” (available on Amazon Prime video)

F: Discussion of the course.

Annotations

This term, you will complete a reading and screening outline most weeks--due at key points throughout the term. These annotations are graded on an A, C, and F scale (see below) and are meant to provide early fodder for your papers and assignments in the course. In order to pass this assignment, you will need to turn in all individual reading/screening outlines that meet the following criteria. You are welcome to use bullet points (vs. complete paragraphs).

- Two questions that came up for you in the reading and screenings.
 - Consider things you didn’t understand or that struck you. You might also think about this portion as a way to start thinking about questions to frame your papers.
- Summarize the academic readings for the week (1 paragraph/set of bullet points). Please note: only summarize the readings listed below for each week and do not summarize the readings from *They Say, I Say*.
- Summarize the television shows or movies for the week (1 paragraph/set of bullet points).
- Put the lecture in conversation with readings and screenings (1 paragraph/set of bullet points).

When you turn in your annotations for the week, be sure to include your name, section time, TA name, and the Annotation #. While you are welcome to work with a friend, your work must be original and your own to pass the assignment.

Outlines:

Annotation #1: ‘Fifteen million merits’ and Hedges ‘Triumph of Illusion’

Annotation #2: Society of the Spectacle film and *Society of the Spectacle* book

Annotation #3: South Bank documentary on J.G. Ballard and *Kingdom Come*

Annotation #4: ‘Koyaanisqatsi’ and *Oryx and Crake*

Annotation #5: ‘Killing Us Softly 4’ and *Oryx and Crake*

Annotation #6: ‘Loose Change 9/11’ and *The Penultimate Truth*

Annotation #7: ‘The War You Don’t See’ and *War Porn*

Annotation #8: ‘The Creepy Line’, ‘Generation Like’ and ‘Microcelebrity and the Branded Self’

Please note that these are not commented on by your TA or Professor Thorpe, unless you specifically ask for feedback by going to office hours.

Grading criteria for annotations

Meeting the requirements = A

Meeting most of the requirements, but only superficial engagement with the texts = C

Not meeting the requirements = F

Reflective Portfolio

Your reflective portfolio will include all the above annotations, as well as all rough drafts of your coursework. It will also include a reflection (at least 2 pages in length) on the drafting and redrafting process. It will also include Coursework #5.

Coursework Questions

Coursework should be written in 12 font, double-spaced, with normal margins.

Coursework 1.

Rough draft due Wednesday, Week 3 (Jan 23) in section. Final draft due Friday Week 5 (Feb 8) in lecture and via turnitin.

Write 4-6 pages in answer to the following:

Interpret, through the lens of Hedges and Debord, what ‘Fifteen Million Merits’ says about the celebrity as a human pseudo-event.

Your answer should explain what a pseudo-event is and how a human being could be described as a “pseudo-event.” Your answer should draw on Chris Hedges discussion of wrestling and other examples of celebrity in American culture and explain Hedges’ argument that the worship of celebrity is degrading American culture. It should relate the notion of a “human pseudo-event” to Debord’s discussion of the celebrity in Thesis 60 of *Society of the Spectacle*. It should provide an interpretation of what the episode of Black Mirror titled ‘Fifteen Million Merits’ suggests about how celebrity is created and used in consumer-capitalist society.

Coursework 2. In-class writing assignment for the 1st section of Week 4.

Write an answer to the following:

How does Debord’s 1973 film ‘Society of the Spectacle’ use visual imagery to construct and communicate his critique of the spectacle? What is the effect on the viewer (yourself) of viewing the film?

Coursework 3. In-class writing assignment for the 1st section of Week 5.

Prior to the section, walk from UCSD to UTC shopping mall and walk around UTC. In section, write descriptively about the experience, in the style of J. G. Ballard's descriptions of landscape and architecture.

Note: this is an exercise in creative non-fiction, descriptive writing. It will not follow an academic essay format with introduction, thesis statement etc.

[Students with disabilities may choose other modes of transportation to UTC and focus their writing on the experience of being in the UTC mall itself].

Coursework 4. Rough draft due Wednesday Week 9 (March 6). Final draft due Friday Week 10 (March 15) in lecture and via turnitin.

The novels *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood, *The Penultimate Truth* by Philip K. Dick, and *War Porn* by Roy Scranton, all involve the theme of the loss of meaning from language.

Choose two of these novels to discuss and write 4-6 pages in answer to the following:

What do the novels suggest are the causes and consequences of the loss of meaning and *how* do the novels make this implication? (Think in terms of concepts such as commodification, oppression, alienation, dehumanization, violence, ecological destruction).

Coursework 5 (Final) Due in the exam period, as part of your reflective portfolio (Monday, March 18th), 11.30-2.30pm, hard copy and via turnitin.

Write 2-3 pages in answer to the following:

Consider how you construct and present yourself via social media. Your reflections on your own practice should engage with issues raised by Senft "Microcelebrity and the Branded Self," and the documentaries "Generation Like" and "The Creepy Line."

Academic Integrity

You are expected to uphold the standards of academic integrity in all your work.

All work that you submit for credit in CAT is expected to be your own original work, created specifically for this class. Where you are making appropriate use of the work of another person, which may include brief quotations, photographs or drawings, charts, special information, specific arguments, etc., you must credit the author of that work by using appropriate and complete citations. If you choose to include in your CAT assignments any data, information, argument or artwork that you have produced for another course, you should identify it as such with an appropriate self-citation, and it should in no way constitute the bulk of the assignment that you are submitting for credit in CAT.

UCSD has a university-wide Policy on Integrity of Scholarship, which can be found online at <http://www-senate.ucsd.edu/manual/appendices/app2.htm>. 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, and academic sanctions may include failure of the assignment or failure of the course.

Specific examples of prohibited violations of academic integrity include the following: (although this should in no way be considered an exhaustive list of examples):

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 helping 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. Helping other students to cheat or steal is also cheating.

Do not ask or allow friends or family members to write or substantially edit your work. That is both a violation of academic integrity and a short-circuiting of the learning process. (The peer review process in CAT 2 sections is different from this).

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.