Welcome to the course!

Course Description

This course examines the role played by media events and spectacle in the shaping of belief, attitudes, and actions, with particular attention paid to the concept of the masses and its changed meaning over time. The course examines concepts of mass culture, the decentralization of cultural forms, and the rise of convergence culture. It explores the history of the media event and the theories that have shaped it, and the role of spectacle in society from the Renaissance to modern society to the age of digital media.

Learning Objectives:
After completing this course, students will be able to:
- Identify the pre-history of media events, exploring notions of the psychology of panic and the pseudo-event.
- Explore notions of spectacle including commodities, fetishism, sports, embodiment, celebrity and politics.
- Assess theoretical perspectives on media outlets, communication strategies and the modes of production that make spectacle possible.
- Estimate the power spectacle has on society, its media institutions and the general public and predict where media events and spectacle are headed in the future.

Required readings

In addition to the titles below, almost all of our readings are on blackboard in the course documents section with some necessary and ancillary readings and viewings in the external documents section. While I have noted the full texts of several works below, I have placed the appropriate chapters on blackboard. Those not on blackboard will be in the bookstore, or you can get them online. I will continue to post relevant material in both places during the term.

Texts.

Required films: About the required film for class discussion

A film review can be the basis for one of your reaction papers, and we will have at least one class session devoted to a discussion of how contemporary films (or the movies, depending how you see them) – have become major vehicles for “the spectacle.” And as a class, we should
choose a particular film or perhaps a series of films that we can discuss and relate to the major ideas of the course. This medium is in a transitional state in terms of its status in American culture. Where and how we experience these cultural artifacts – their conditions of attendance – seems to have changed the standing of film in our culture. Of course, the Academy Awards is one media event (technically, a pseudo event) we intend to discuss, because this media event is an important aspect of the contemporary spectacle culture – the star system, part of the celebrity culture business, the narratives they choose to tell, and how they tell them, should all be part of our discussion.

**Course Requirements**

| Students need to paginate their papers and use a consistent documentation format. Papers will be evaluated with a concern for form and content. Late papers will be accepted and read; however, I cannot promise a written evaluation or comments. Late papers will, of course, be penalized. The specific guidelines for the class presentations are TBA, but see below for general guidelines. Rubrics will be provided and posted on blackboard. |

| 1. **A brief two-three page intellectual biography**: what books or other media products (music or films) and interests have helped form your aesthetic taste? This is a “reflective” essay on your part, in which you introduce/contemplate the intellectual and aesthetic you. For example, what films, books, paintings, music et al do you like or have liked, or have seemed to play an important role in your life and why do you think that’s the case? Not graded or evaluated, although read with commentary as a kind of informal introduction. If you have already been in one of my classes, and have done this assignment, you may opt out of this one. 0% of final grade. |

| 2. **Midterm, 25% of final grade.** This paper constitutes a “midterm,” and is due session #8. |

| 3. **Two reaction papers**: one reaction paper should be written in the first half of the course and the second one in the latter half. One reaction paper can be a film review if you like. The other can be a reaction to a class or a series of classes. As to the content of your reaction: this is not a commentary on how the class was taught, but on the content of the class discussion. Choose a class session or a series of class sessions, that provokes some thought on your part – and advance the discussion, or question the discussion. You might want to suggest what question or questions you think the discussion answered and what question or questions you think the discussion did not come to grips with. Due anytime during the semester, but as noted, it would be more beneficial if the reaction paper was written and submitted close to the class or classes under discussion. Four – five pages for each reaction paper would be average. 20% of final grade. |

| 4. **Class presentations, discussions and attendance.** Regular attendance and thoughtful and intelligent participation in class discussions are part of your overall evaluation. Because of our class size students will have the opportunity to complete |
at least one presentation – those who do more than one are exempt from one of the
two class reaction papers. We will discuss during our first session. As for the class,
please respect your fellow students and keep lateness to a minimum. Also, leaving
the class periodically should be curtailed; such actions tend to disrupt student and
instructor concentration, and become problematic when a student is doing a
presentation. We also want to maintain punctual beginnings and endings. Two
absences are allowed before your grade is affected. Students will be asked to make
several short, concise presentations on chapters of the required texts or assigned
essays or films. Please note that these presentations are to help create an
atmosphere for class discussion not for the simple regurgitation of the article
or chapter. Please take the concept of “presentation and discussion” literally. For
example, if a student were to make a presentation, say, on the Boorstin chapters, he
would briefly explain or review aspects of the pseudo-event from the text and then
provide examples from the media. The presenter is urged to include the class in a
discussion of the material. And while I will be evaluating the student’s presentation,
the class – your listening and contributions – are also part of the evaluation process.
More details to be discussed later. 25% of the final grade.

5. Your final exam essay: This is a "take-home" essay exam. For this project consider
our units of study from the second half of the semester and develop a paper from 10-
12 pages on a contemporary spectacle of your own choosing. During the semester I
will provide numerous examples for you to use as models for this assignment. Topics
could include contemporary politics to various forms of popular entertainment. As
you develop your project, think of ways this essay could become part of conference
panel or a journal article. The chapter from Chris Hedges’ book, Empire of Illusion
that we discuss during the term can serve as a model, although in his chapter he
takes on way too many contemporary media artifacts. Write a unified essay, double-
spaced and paginated, leaving some margin room for my comments. A proposal or
an outline somewhere towards the 3/4 semester mark would be helpful to you and
me – and the basis for a discussion/meeting between you and me. Approximately ten
to twelve would be average. 30% of the final grade.

6. Please note: students who make a second presentation either with a colleague
or by themselves can have a second reaction paper waived.

Evaluation Rubric
A= Excellent
This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from
discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized.
Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn
this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B=Good
This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding.
Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom
participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C=Average
This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory
This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F=Failed
This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

A  = 94-100
A- = 90-93
B+ = 87-89
B  = 84-86
B-  = 80-83
C+ = 77-79
C  = 74-76
C-  = 70-73
D+ = 65-69
D  = 60-64
F    = 0-59

Course Policies
Absences and Lateness
More than two unexcused absences will automatically result in a lower grade. Chronic lateness will also be reflected in your evaluation of participation. Regardless of the reason for your absence you will be responsible for any missed work. Travel arrangements do not constitute a valid excuse for rescheduling exams. There are no extra credit assignments for this class.

Format
Please type and double-space your written work. Typing improves the clarity and readability of your work and double-spacing allows room for me to comment. Please also number and staple multiple pages. You are free to use your preferred citation style. Please use it consistently throughout your writing. If sending a document electronically, please name the file in the following format Yourlastname Coursenumber Assignment1.doc

Grade Appeals
Please allow two days to pass before you submit a grade appeal. This gives you time to reflect on my assessment. If you still want to appeal your grade, please submit a short but considered paragraph detailing your concerns. Based on this paragraph I will review the question and either augment your grade or refine my explanation for the lost points.
General Decorum
Slipping in late or leaving early, sleeping, text messaging, surfing the Internet, doing homework in class, eating, etc. are distracting and disrespectful to all participants in the course.

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism
http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity
The relationship between students and faculty is the keystone of the educational experience at New York University in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. This relationship takes an honor code for granted and mutual trust, respect, and responsibility as foundational requirements. Thus, how you learn is as important as what you learn. A university education aims not only to produce high-quality scholars, but to also cultivate honorable citizens.

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity when you
• cheat on an exam,
• submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors,
• receive help on a takehome examination that calls for independent work, or
• plagiarize.

Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning, and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated.

Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score, and/or other materials that are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following:
• copy verbatim from a book, an article, or other media;
• download documents from the Internet;
• purchase documents;
• report from other’s oral work;
• paraphrase or restate someone else’s facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; or
• copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.

Your professors are responsible for helping you to understand other people’s ideas, to use resources and conscientiously acknowledge them, and to develop and clarify your own thinking. You should know what constitutes good and honest scholarship, style guide preferences, and formats for assignments for each of your courses. Consult your professors for help with problems related to fulfilling course assignments, including questions related to attribution of sources.
Through reading, writing, and discussion, you will undoubtedly acquire ideas from others, and exchange ideas and opinions with others, including your classmates and professors. You will be expected, and often required, to build your own work on that of other people. In so doing, you are expected to credit those sources that have contributed to the development of your ideas.
Avoiding Academic Dishonesty

- Organize your time appropriately to avoid undue pressure, and acquire good study habits, including note taking.
- Learn proper forms of citation. Always check with your professors of record for their preferred style guides. Directly copied material must always be in quotes; paraphrased material must be acknowledged; even ideas and organization derived from your own previous work or another’s work need to be acknowledged.
- Always proofread your finished work to be sure that quotation marks, footnotes and other references were not inadvertently omitted. Know the source of each citation.
- Do not submit the same work for more than one class without first obtaining the permission of both professors even if you believe that work you have already completed satisfies the requirements of another assignment.
- Save your notes and drafts of your papers as evidence of your original work.

Disciplinary Sanctions
When a professor suspects cheating, plagiarism, and/or other forms of academic dishonesty, appropriate disciplinary action may be taken following the department procedure or through referral to the Committee on Student Discipline.

Student Resources

- Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation.

- Writing Center: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233. Schedule an appointment online at www.rich15.com/nyu/ or just walk-in.
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<td>The spectacle of celebrity.</td>
<td>Boorstin, from “The Image,” on blackboard &amp; Turner, Part 1</td>
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<td>The spectacle of democracy: presidential debates.</td>
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<td>The spectacle of democracy: presidential conventions.</td>
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<td>29.</td>
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<td>Final class session. All questions answered; all answers questioned.</td>
<td>Final paper due.</td>
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Some Recommended Reading

Many books and publications and articles have been useful in helping to develop this course known as “Media Events and Spectacle.” Here is a partial listing, sometimes with a brief commentary. These books would make welcome additions to your reading as well as your library. By the way, if you come across any interesting books in your intellectual travels that you think can help us understand our spectacle driven culture, feel free to bring it to my attention. Thanks, sjf.


Carey, James. 1988. Communication As Culture: Essays on Media and Society. While this whole book is recommended, chapter two “Mass Communication and Cultural Studies” is the essay that best serves our study of the “mass mind.”


Czitrom, Daniel. 1990. Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. This is a very valuable book: it contains three case studies of media that helped bring about “the mass mind.” These include: the development of the telegraph, the rise of radio, and the evolution of the motion picture industry; along with these case studies is a remarkably lucid account of the growth of the philosophy of communications, from the “founding fathers” Charles Horton Cooley, John Dewey and Robert E. Park to Marshall McLuhan and Harold A. Innis.


Brantlinger, Patrick. 1983. Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay. This is perhaps one of the finest compilations of the history of mass culture debate. Brantlinger traces the debate from the ancient Greeks to twentieth century discussions of Post-Modernism.


Ewen, Stuart. 1988. All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture. You will never talk or think about “style” in the same way again.

__________. 1996. PR!: A Social History of Spin. As you might expect, this is a historical look at the development of spin. It contains a remarkable case study on Edward Bernays, the “father” of public relations and master of the pseudo-event.


interviews an alpha male, Sylvester Stallone, on the meaning and changing of contemporary masculinity. One of the more interesting pseudo-events of the 1990s.


Rothenberg, Randall. "The Age of Spin." Esquire. 126:6, December, 1996. This is a reworking of Ewen's ideas in PR, along with a "story interview" with Stuart Ewen.


Journals on cultural theory and popular culture: the following journals provide current thinking on "mass mind" issues.

Critical Studies in Mass Communication  Critical Quarterly
Cultural Studies
Feminist Review
European Journal of Communication
International Journal of Cultural and Media
Journal of Popular Culture
Literature and History
Media, Culture and Society
New Formation
Screen
Southern Review
Textual Practice
Theory, Culture and Society
Women: a cultural review
Women's Studies