

**University of California
Santa Barbara
SPRING 2007**

Sociology of the (MEDIA) Spectacle
SOC 146
Wednesday 5 - 8PM
PHELPS 3505

Richard Widick, Ph.D., Lecturer
Ellison 2843
Office Hours:
Mondays - 3-5pm

“Fear is the new beauty,” says Los Angeles artist Max Grundy. How can we understand this assertion and fathom its implications? We will take up these questions and more in a series of thought provoking films and essays exploring the theory, history, and function of mass media and the public sphere and the so-called *society of the spectacle*.

The rise of *the spectacle society* marks a change in the mode of domination—from domination through the sphere of production to domination through the sphere of consumption. In the words of George Ritzer, “By way of the culture industry, consumer society and the media, capitalism conspires to control individuals and alienate them from social life by creating distracting and phantasmagoric spectacles and by commodifying all the spheres of social life. What becomes important in spectacular society is the desirable surface of images and signs... the attention grabbing spectacle.” *The society of the spectacle* is devoted to “the ceaseless manufacture of pseudo-needs,” in the words of Guy Debord. The market comes to be dominated by the need to produce consumption. It must learn to situate the subject as a consumer, address it as a consumer, and to elevate the value of consumption above every other value. But, as the Situationists, led by Debord, pointed out, the rise of spectacular society simultaneously creates the conditions for revolt against the spectacle, namely boredom, apathy, alienation, and emptiness. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord stated simply that “The spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life.... The spectacle is a permanent opium war waged to make it impossible to distinguish goods from commodities, or true satisfaction from a survival that increases according to its own logic.”

From the standpoint of contemporary cultural and media theory, we begin with Grundy’s question and conduct an analysis of our contemporary historical moment, in which the so-called global war on terror converges with consolidation of corporate control over global media *and* the proliferation of micro-media production enabled by emergent digital technologies and the World Wide Web—ours is the age of the spectacle and the so-called permanent war on terror. We then look back on the historical transitions from industrial society to consumer society to contemporary *digital, information and network society*, tracking the political creation and subsequent structural transformation of the public sphere and the emergent new media technologies that have always constituted the range and power of publics. We will end with an analysis of the media reform movement in the US. Broadly conceived, our objective is to bring media theory into contemporary social, cultural and environmental theory.

This class meets once a week, with lecture, discussion, and films presented at each meeting. Attendance and participation are mandatory.

Requirements:

Attendance: 10 points per week.	100 pts.
Take-home midterm exam:	100 pts.
Film Journal: two installments, 50 points each:	100 pts.
Final blue book essay exam:	<u>100 pts</u>
Total points:	400 pts.

Materials:

Book — *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism*, by Henry Giroux. At the UCSB bookstore.
 Reader — At GrafikArt in I.V.

Outline of the Course

Week #1. April 4 INTRODUCTION

No reading.

FILM: Man with a Camera.

Week #2. April 11

Henry Giroux. 2006. "Acts of Translation." *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism*. Boulder: Paradigm Press. Pps. 1-18. [18 pages]

Niklas Luhman. 2000. "Differentiation as a Doubling of Reality." *The Reality of the Mass Media*. Stanford: Stanford University press. [6 pages]

Film: Hijacking 9/11

Week #3. April 18

Henry Giroux. 2006. "Rethinking the politics of the Image in the Age of the Image." *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism*. Boulder: Paradigm Press. Pps. 19 - 48. [29 pages]

Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. 2005. "In Marx's Footsteps." *Multitude: War and Democracy in the age of Empire*. New York: Penguin Press. [15 pages]

Film: Outfoxed

Week #4. April 25

Henry Giroux. 2006. "Image-Based Media and the Spectacle of Terrorism." *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism*. Boulder: Paradigm Press. Pps. 48 - 83. [35 pages]

RETORT. 2005. "Introduction" + "The State, the Spectacle, and 9/11." *Afflicted Powers. Capital and Spectacle in the New Age of War*. New York: Verso. [37 pages]

FILMS: Iraq for Sale; Reporting in Iraq.

Week #5. **May 2** Society of the Spectacle

FILM JOURNAL INSTALLMENT #1 DUE

George Ritzer. 2001. "The New Means of Consumption and the Situationist Perspective."
London: Sage. [21 pages]

Michael Gardiner. "The Situationist International: Revolution at the Service of Poetry."
Critiques of Everyday Life. New York: Routledge. [23 pages]

Guy Debord. Script = "The Society of the Spectacle (1973)." *Debord: The Complete Cinematic Works*. Translated and edited by Ken Knabb. Oakland: AK Press. [45 pages]

Giorgio Agamben. "Shekinah." *The Coming Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. [5 pages]

TAKE HOME MID-TERM EXAMINATION DISTRIBUTED

Film: **The Society of the Spectacle**

Week #6. **May 9** Public Sphere.1 Theory.

MID-TERM EXAMINATION DUE

Taylor, Charles. 2002. "Modern Social Imaginaries." *Public Culture*, 14(1): 91–124. [34 pages]

de Tocqueville, Alexis. 2003. "The Idea of Rights in the United States." *Democracy in America*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. New York: Penguin.
[first published in 1835+1840] [2 pages]

Habermas, Jurgen. 1964[1974]. "The Public Sphere." *New German Critique*, 3:49-55. [7 pages]

Adorno, Theodore. 2005. "Opinion Research and Publicness." *Sociological Theory* 23, 1:116 - 123. [3 pages]

O'Connor, James. 1991. "On the Two Contradictions of Capitalism," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 2, 3:16-17. [3 pages]

John Bellamy Foster. 1992. "The Absolute General Law of Environmental Degradation Under Capitalism." *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 3:17-20. [6 pages]

Samir Amin. A Note on the Depreciation of the Future. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 3:21 - 22. [2 pages]

Victor Toledo. 1992. "The Ecological Crisis: A Second Contradiction of Capitalism." *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 3: 22 - 24. [5 pages]

Michael A. Lebowitz. "Capitalism: How Many Contradictions?" *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 3:26 - 27. [2 pages]

FILM: To be Announced.

Week #7. **May 16** Public Sphere.2 History.

Starr, Paul. 2004. CH 1 "Introduction The Political Origins of Modern Communications," CH 2 "Early Modern Origins," CH 3 "America's First Information Revolution." *The Creation of the Media*. New York: Basic Books. [72 pages]

James W. Carey. 1989. "Technology and Ideology." *Communication as Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman. [29 pages]

FILM: **Fear and Favor in the Newsroom**. (54 minutes)

Week #8 **May 23** Public Sphere.3 Advertising.

Niklas Luhman. "Advertising." *The Reality of the Mass Media*. Stanford: Stanford University press. [6 pages]

Stewart Ewen. "Advertising as Social Production." *Captains of Consciousness*. New York: McGraw-Hill. [25 pages]

Lyn Gorman and David McLean. 2003. "The Rise of Advertising." *Media and Society in the Twentieth Century*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. [10 pages]

Jean Baudrillard. "Advertising." *System of Objects*. Translated by James Benedict. New York: Verso. [32 pages]

Marshall McCuhan. 1951. Excerpts from *The Mechanical Bride*. Boston: Beacon Press. **P**

FILM: **Consuming Images**.

Week #9. **May 30** Publics and Counter Publics

FILM JOURNAL INSTALLMENT # 2 DUE

Warner, Michael. 2002. "Publics and Counter Publics." *Public Culture* 14(1): 49-90. [41 pages]

DeLuca, Kevin Michael. 1999. "Making Waves." *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*. New York: Guilford Press. [22 pages] [**SOC 185S Sum 2004**]

Film **Ad and the Ego**.

Week 10. **June 6** The Media Reform Movement

Bill Moyers. Transcript. Address to the National Conference on Media Reform.

<http://www.freepress.net/conference/>

FILM: **Bell Hooks: Cultural Criticism and Transformation**.

Week #11

FILM JOURNAL FINAL ENTRY DUE

FINAL EXAM — Tuesday, June 12, 7:30 PM