



Syllabus

Week	Date	
1	3 Oct	Introduction
2	10 Oct	Communication as structure
3	17 Oct	
4	24 Oct	Communication as ritual
5	31 Oct	
6	7 Nov	Communication as performance
7	14 Nov	
8	21 Nov	Communication as discourse
9	28 Nov	
10	5 Dec	Student presentations
11	12 Dec	Individual tutorials





For next week

1. Assignment one

Read carefully the above excerpts from a blog discussing Lady Gaga's "authenticity" and "fakery". In pairs, relate the excerpts to the concepts of authenticity, image management, being yourself, performance.

Post your reflections on the blog.

2. Assignment two

Referring to the materials covered in the module so far, list three points or concepts you understood, and explain them in your own words.

Then, list three things you didn't understand.

Be as specific as possible.

Post your reflections on the blog.

2. Readings

Woolf, J. (2007) "Not the girl but the legend: mythology, photography and the posthumous cult of Diana" ([Online](#))

Communication as performance 1

Production Spectacle



Communication as performance 1

Production
Spectacle



What is celebrity?

Highbrow press:

- Decadence, triviality, "fake"

Mainstream popular opinion:

- Adored, "authentic"

Cultural studies:

- Cultural formation/text
- Discursive field of representation
- Part of social, cultural and economic processes



Conditions of production

"The celebrity is also a commodity: produced, traded and marketed by the media and publicity industries. In this context, the celebrity's ... function is commercial and promotional."
(Turner 2004: 12)



Early celebrity industry: Hollywood PR

1910: Florence Lawrence's producer plants a false story reporting the star had been killed in a trolley-car accident

Story denied, public appearance staged: triumph



Discussion: what's the story here?



Producing Celebrities Today

The celebrity industry is "an industry that spends a great deal of its time masking the fact that it exists at all. The point of publicity and promotion is to 'turn advertising into news' (Turner, Bonner and Marshall 2000: 31)

What are the industrial structures required, upon what relationships – discursive, economic, political, and cultural – do they depend?" (Turner 2004: 28)





**Media industry today:
convergence of content &
platforms**

**Celebrities can facilitate and
enhance convergence**

- As labour (producing content) -
- As assets (value as themselves) -

Agency and Power

Interdependent but conflicting interests

- celebrity as autonomous agent
- commodified industry products

Various drivers:
entertainment, communication,
publicity, representation,
appearance, coaching,
endorsement, business&legal...

Various players: celebrity,
agents, managers, publicists...



Enabling, not determining

One of the reasons for the publicity industries' excessive anxiety about media management and control is the lack of knowledge about what will actually succeed in the marketplace, about what audiences actually want. (Turner 2004: 48)



These days it's harder to create a **spectacle** because of the fragmented nature of media: diffuse, dynamic, productive...

Communication as performance 1

Production
Spectacle



Debord and Cultural Production



The Society of the Spectacle (1967)



Frankfurt School in the 40s and 50s?

- Focus on audiences

Debord and the Situationists make a similar argument in the 70s

- Focus on production

...Same objections apply



Activity

In your group, take a few minutes to discuss and note down what you remember of the Frankfurt School theories. Can you remember both their arguments and possible counter-arguments to them?

Be prepared to discuss your findings



Spectacle

Distinctive
Notable, unusual,
different, indisputable



Extra-ordinary
Big, impressive, overpowering – a media event

Visual impact
memorability, monopoly of appearance

Affective impact
Impresses and transports

Illusion of participation
(willing suspension of disbelief--narrative of "authenticity")

Society of Spectacle

Capitalist conditions of production promote accumulation of spectacles

Commodification and alienation are pervasive = representation invades social life totally

Spectacle

- is a powerful ideological tool
- Allows for the merging of identity into a collective "mob"
- Takes us *out of ourselves*
- Frees us from the burden of *existential anxiety*



Political roots

Classical Marxism

- Class struggle, alienation, Commodity fetishism

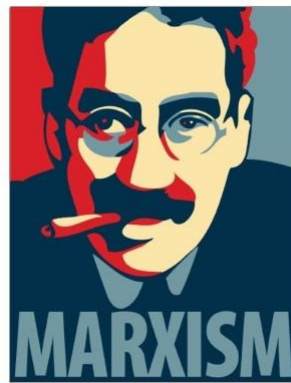
Anarchism

- anti-establishment, anti-regime, anti-politics

Avant-garde (dadaism, surrealism)

- Radicalism, anti-bourgeoisie

Psychoanalysis



Debord's spectacle can be made by the powerful for the consumption and distraction of the disempowered

BUT

Spectacle can be used by the disempowered to make points or claims about the powerful

Detournement and Recuperation

Spectacle's political function



**the
gulf war
did not
take place**

Jean Baudrillard


The narrative of a narrative

Spectacle can be used by all parties to provide a polished mythologising surface

Baudrillard: the Gulf War did not take place. It was a carefully scripted media event - a "virtual" war.

...BUT

What is going on under the "shiny surface of the real"?
Affect? People? Power?



The Unseen Gulf War

What is going on under the "shiny surface of the real"?
Affect? People? Power?

Madonna - "American Life" (2007)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIRxiKMNgts>

Proliferating production:
convergence of commodifying market strategies by the media industry, or widening of opportunity for a variety of diffuse and heterogeneous messages?

Proliferating delivery sites and channels:
from industry to DIY, who owns and controls distribution?

Proliferating representations:
widening participation of lowering standards? Who controls and determines symbolic capitals?



So: can we use "spectacle" today?

How do we read today's landscape?

It seems widely accepted in media and cultural studies that the more dispersed possibilities of production and distribution in the contemporary media - and not only through new technologies such as the internet - do imply the potential to achieve a 'different, less unequal vision of the mediated public sphere' (Couldry, 2003: 140) than seemed possible even a decade ago. (Turner 2004: 76)

LADY GAGA
OUT OF CONTROL



the contemporary media, 'in its dispersed, and often ironic, form', sustain 'a public space in which the terms of public and private discourse are open to negotiation beyond formal political control' (Couldry, 2003: 18)

The growth in the range of media outlets, and the vastly increased speed of circulation of information have combined to create a phenomenon of a 'vortex' effect, which I term here 'vortextuality'. The various media constantly feed off each other and, in an era of electronic and digital information exchange, the speed at which this happens can be very rapid.

Certain major super-events come to dominate the headlines to such an extent that it becomes temporarily difficult for columnists or commentators to discuss anything else. (Whannel 2002: 206)



Final Coursework

Coursework 1 – (5 Dec)

Group presentation (50%)

As a group, choose two celebrities.
Compare and contrast their
communication strategies.

Coursework 2 – (9 Jan)

2.000 words essay (50%)

Pick one celebrity of your choice. Choose
one of the four theoretical approaches
covered in class. Using these theories,
perform an analysis of your celebrity's
communication strategy.



For next week

1. Work on your final assignment one

By now, each group should have picked the celebrities you want to compare, and which specific aspects of their strategies you want to examine

Now you need to decide which approaches and tools you want to invoke to help with your comparison.

As a group, go over the materials and approaches we discussed so far, and weigh their pros and cons. Write your conclusions on the blog. E.g. "We think that adopting perspective X will help us highlight characteristic A of our celebrities. However, perspective X is not taking into account this or that factor..."

2. Readings

Turner, G. (2004) *Understanding Celebrity*. Ch.2 "Production"
([Online](#))