Contestation, a Deeper Seduction

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Abstract

Individual media events, from the extraordinary to the mundane, as well as the logic they present, have transcended society. Media events no longer happen in isolation, they are intertextually and extratextually linked and mixed together. The ability to view, create, join in, and affect the shape of media events has caused a profound shift in the conception of what they are. What Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz refer to as individual media events, Guy Debord, Michel Foucault and Douglas Kellner consider collectively as spectacle. Their work on media events and spectacle features a debate on the role of contestation within it. Live audience members have an opportunity to impact media events and the spectacle either through individual or collective action. This action can go along with the intents ascribed to the media event and spectacle, or it can oppose them. Contestation often takes the form of an oppositional interruption of the linear messaging promoted within media events and spectacle. Contestation is typically a strategy used by voices that feel marginalized by the images of the spectacle. But contestation of media events and spectacle through their own logic becomes a means of deeper seduction.

Introduction

Tomorrow Never Dies (Spottiswoode, 1997) is a second-rate James Bond film that involves 007 foiling a nefarious scheme to use media events for world domination. The supervillain of the film, Elliot Carver, is a media baron intent on instigating war by conspiring with a corrupt Chinese General to strategically initiate missile attacks to Great Britain from China, and back in retaliation. His intention is to create a global media empire. In the film, after Carver receives word from his key henchman that they have sunk a British warship that was drawn into the South China Sea, he returns to a screen of media subordinates and exclaims:

Gentlemen, and Ladies, hold the presses! This just in! By curious quirk of fate, we have the perfect story with which to launch our satellite news network tonight. It seems a small crisis is brewing in the South China Sea! I want full newspaper coverage, I want magazine stories, I want books, I want films, I want TV, I want radio, I want us on the air 24 hours a day. This is our moment! And a billion people around this planet will watch it, hear it, and read about it from the Carver Media Group!

Carver's diabolical ploy can be seen as a prophetic vision of the maturation of Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz's notion of a media event. Carver's actions are a fictional representation of the contemporary shift that has occurred in media events. Instead of large-scale events organized separate of the media -- where media are merely invited along -- their increased frequency and normalized stature in contemporary media discourses reflects a self-perpetuating, ubiquitous, and ecumenical force that shapes the perspectives and actions of large numbers of people. Carver's conspirations are the dubious and inevitable extension of the media event, their now realized destiny as self-created for their own sake.

The notion of media events is rooted in earlier days of television, when the technological limitations played a significant role in the organization of audiences. What is known as

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"appointment viewing" was the rule, not the exception. People watched television on an established schedule, with limited stations, and far fewer television screens. This resulted in far more communal consumption of television programming. Media events typically took up airtime on one, or sometimes all major television stations, resulting in colossal audiences spread out over disparate spaces sharing experiences simultaneously. The power of media events is in their ability to gather audiences, disseminate prioritized messaging, and normalize the perspective they present. There are still major media events today that command larger audiences from more corners of the globe than ever before due to the increased access that has resulted from digitization. This expansion shows no signs of slowing.

Media events in contemporary society have extended further than Dayan and Katz, further than even Elliot Carver could have imagined. The technologies of contemporary society have shifted what the very notion of a television is, which has consequently changed what the notion of a media event is, which has changed the way the audience live their lives in conjunction with these new media forms. Despite this the traditional discourses surrounding television still hold a great deal of sway as the power of television grows alongside the audience.

Today, everything from the extraordinary to the mundane is potentially reified as a media event. Reification is the process where discourses, objects and primarily in this instance images, are ascribed cultural currency through social convention. This cultural currency does not come from any intrinsic worth, but from abstract, often mythical appraisements of value. The notion of reification is intimately connected to commodification -- as explored by Georg Lukács (1967), who writes:

> The commodity can only he understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole. Only in this context does the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance both for the objective evolution of society and for the stance adopted by men towards it. Only then does the commodity become crucial for the subjugation of men's consciousness to the forms in which this reification finds expression. (pp 136-137)

The perceived and thus established value of a reified object is exponentially disproportionate to what it actually offers. In a sense this disproportionate, reified value *is* what the object offers. The extreme valuations and aspirations that surround reified objects play a prioritized role in the organization of individuals that extends out to society collectively. Reified objects play a determinant role in the development and maintenance of a logic rooted in itself. The logic of reification creates false representations of equivalence that have established themselves as standard throughout society. The logic of reification of media images and content is a crucial consideration surrounding the perceived precedence and superiority in contemporary society.

Media events no longer happen in isolation, they are intertextually and extratextually linked and mixed together. The ability to view, create, join in and affect the shape of media events has caused a profound shift in the conception of what they are. Notions of location for contemporary media events are much like notions of content: continuously fluid, as opportunities to create or consume media events have become endless, bound by space and time less and less. The value of individual media events is still strong, and together they develop and maintain a logic that diffuses throughout society.

The collective power of contemporary media is rooted in the boundless, transcendent role it plays in today's society. Theories of spectacle provide an extended articulation of the new dynamics resulting from this omnipresence of media. The theory of spectacle introduced by Guy Debord explores reified images of mass media as the key current organizing principle. Spectacle is about a worldview developed by perpetual exposure to mass media images, and the self-perpetuating logic it motivates. The spectacle creates and reinforces a perspective that continuously shapes and is

shaped by itself, by the overwhelming mass of media content that grows relentlessly and ingrains it deeper and deeper into our lives. Debord's work was extended by both Michel Foucault and more recently by Douglas Kellner, who provides unique interpretations that open up potential for spaces for liberation from the pervading tyranny Debord feels the spectacle imposes.

Modern personal technology in combination with the logic inspired by the spectacle today offers the possibility for almost any location to be turned into a media event. Media events are no longer limited to sacred occasions where groups of varying sizes celebrate together in common ritual. Today even the grandest of media events are dimmed by the light pollution let off by all the other media events surrounding them.

Contemporary mass media features an overwhelming amount of underwhelming content that is shaped around the understanding that anything at any time can be (and is) turned into a media event. An ever-growing Internet universe has overtaken an ocean of specialty channels, generating a galaxy of content that can be accessed, created, and shared by anyone with a smartphone, tablet, or laptop. Increasingly, historically novel media forms are playing a significant role in shaping traditional media. Example after example of 'viral' media, from cute animals, to pop culture fragments, to reappropriated memes and mashups, to the semi-private content that spreads almost instantly among audiences online and off, continually prove that anything can go 'viral' among hundreds of millions at any moment.

Regardless of type, almost all media events require a live audience. No matter the size, the potential for audience motivates the logic of the media event. The live audience is an indentifying marker for most media events. They provide an interpretive lens that eases and encourages engagement by the larger audience watching on the variety of visual media we will coarsely gather together as 'television'. This goes both ways, as any phenomena considered a media event would likely draw a live audience, regardless of location. The location of the media event becomes a site of potential participatory action for those in attendance. Nick Couldry (2003) describes the phenomenon as "liveliness", writing: "'Liveness' naturalizes the idea that, through the media, we achieve shared attention to realities that matter for us as a society" (p. 99). Aware that they are collectively and individually part of the media event through their attendance, each live audience member shapes their action accordingly, performing participation as metonymical of a larger group of viewers watching on television.

Back to James Bond for a moment. While Carver is well on his way to starting World War III, Bond's mission throughout the film is obviously to foil his plans. 007 repeatedly takes action to upset the media events of his adversaries' design. His intentions are to stop his temporary nemesis from using the powers of spectacle to motivate World War III. Carver possesses a battleship equipped with stealth technology that allows him to wreak havoc all around the South China Sea in the name of both Britain and China, completely undetectable, until Bond causes an explosion that exposes the location of the stealth boat to the British Navy, who promptly move to sink it. By alerting both superpowers to the plan and the stealth boat, Bond is able to stave off impending nuclear doom. This came at a cost to the supervillain, who dies a painful death, unable to achieve his ultimate goal of world domination through media events. As Carver says:

Great men have always manipulated the media to save the world. Look at William Randolph Hearst, who told his photographers, 'You provide the pictures, I'll provide the war.' I've just taken it one step further.

Bond's actions caused disruptions of the linear, uninterrupted messaging of spectacle fictionally created by Elliot Carver. In this instance, 007 is not only defeating yet another foe for Queen and country; his actions also represent an overt manifestation of spectacular contestation.

Traditionally both media events individually, and the spectacle collectively, have been used to portray a vision of a unified, yet distinctive, society. Everything is pushing in one direction all the

time. This totality is seemingly closed off, but like any totality, one crack has the potential to cause the whole edifice to crumble. Contestation represents a temporary site of resistance within media events and spectacle. Contestation puts the fissures of the linear messaging in the spectacle on display, and once they are noticed they can motivate more and more detachment between the intended messaging and what is appearing on-screen.

When anyone live at a media event disrupts the intended messaging, they are creating ambiguity around it in real time, conceivably for almost everyone watching. Ambiguity about messaging in one space can quickly affect the whole; contestation can cloud or re-direct intended messaging in part or entirely. It offers the potential to shift away from the prevailing ideals celebrated through individual media events and collectively in the spectacle.

The notion of contestation is, both ironically and unsurprisingly, highly contested within academic discourse surrounding individual media events or the spectacle. Dayan and Katz, Debord, Foucault, and Kellner all offer perspectives on how effective contestation is, if at all. The power of both media events and spectacle is unquestioned and revered by all of them, the debate surrounds the impenetrability of the linear messaging put forth.

Media Events

The focus of media events, for Dayan and Katz, surrounded the event itself. Media events consisted of large, live, public events that were made even more public through mass media. These events would occur and be significant with or without mass media coverage, but the extensive coverage provided creates an added importance and majesty. Dayan and Katz (1992) write: "The most obvious difference between media events and other formulas or genres of broadcasting is that they are, by definition, not routine. In fact, they are interruptions of routine, they intervene in the normal flow of broadcasting and our lives" (p. 5). Media events pre-empt regularly scheduled programming and gather groups from handfuls to hundreds of thousands to watch together, creating common conceptions of society to share in.

To Dayan and Katz, media events are virtual spaces that motivate community and shared experience through ritual participation. Large audiences shape themselves through ritual participation around the dynamics of media events. Dayan and Katz write:

> The secret of the effectiveness of these televised events […] is in the roles viewers bring with them from other institutions, and by means of which passive spectatorship gives way to ceremonial participation. The depth of this involvement, in turn, has relevance for the formation of public opinion and for institutions such as politics, religion, and leisure […] they enter the collective memory. (p. 17)

The self-referential, mutually reinforcing relationship that occurs between traditional events and the media through their transformation in media events is based on one absolutely crucial component: the audience.

In order for a media event to qualify as such there must be a large audience live in attendance. They are an essential component of any live media event. The audience provides visual proof of the event itself and cues that engage and orient the television audience, encouraging their participation. Video cameras at media events capture the ongoing reaction of different members of the crowd, and are mounted at various vantage points to mimic the gaze of the live audience for the benefit of the television audience. Key moments and reactions by the live audience are repackaged and rebroadcast instantaneously and repeatedly, reinforcing the intended messaging of the media event for the televised audience. The highlighting of the live spectator provides points of navigation for

the live audience; it helps them to negotiate the complex messaging at play within the media event. As Dayan and Katz (1992) write:

> [Media events] allow their spectators to follow the event from within. The spectators are invited to inhabit the event through the primary audience in attendance, to see through the eyes of those directly involved. Images depict the situations perceived by the 'spectators in the text.' These spectators may also be performers, momentarily turned audience. (p. 115)

There is a relationship of reciprocal motivation that exists between the live and televised audiences. The live audience is drawn to attendance knowing they are participating in a media event that will be broadcast on television to a much larger audience. The television audience is drawn to the media event because they anticipate an event so prominent it draws others to it directly.

Despite the complexity in the messaging that is transmitted, for both live and televised audiences, media events can typically be considered to be moving in one, linear direction, one that favours the vested interests of established power and authority. The messaging of media events is about unification around the centre, a reification of existing power structures through the ritual participation of the audience. Dayan and Katz (1992) suggest that: "[t]hey celebrate what, on the whole, are establishment initiatives that are therefore unquestionably hegemonic. [...] These broadcasts integrate societies in a collective heartbeat and evoke a renewal of loyalty to the society and its legitimate authority" (p. 9).

Such celebrations of power reinforce conformity under authority through individual participation in a seemingly collective action as audience. Differences are often celebrated and conflicts overshadowed or marginalized. As Dayan and Katz (1992) write: "Even when these programs address conflict -- as they do -- they celebrate not conflict but reconciliation. [...] Often they are ceremonial efforts to redress conflict or to restore order or, more rarely, to institute change" (p. 8).

The vision Dayan and Katz share of media events has little room for oppositional messaging. To them, media events are common spaces of shared experience for everyone involved. Though they reference contests as a type of media event, mostly involving politics or sports, there is little consideration given to possible contestations of media events. Contestation in this instance could be considered the imposition of subversive perspectives through sudden, often surprising interruptions of media events. Groups with interests that are typically incongruent with the intended messaging of a media event, or on occasion those involved with the media event, use the event as a forum to get their seditious messaging out.

Dayan and Katz (1992) consider those who interrupt the linear messaging of media events to be "hijackers" who intend to: "Explode the myth of value consensus implied by the event" (p. 74). The same appeal of large audiences that inspires media events also inspires these hijackers to attempt to convey subversive messaging to the event's audience. Those there live also have the opportunity to contest messaging, and the potential for this to occur is ever-present, a tension which makes for part of the appeal of a live event.

The exuberance of Dayan and Katz's ambitiously idealistic notion of media events is juxtaposed by the desolate theorizations of spectacle by Guy Debord. Where Dayan and Katz focused on prominent individual events, Debord imagines the logic of the media event as universal to all media, which works together non-stop as a means of domination.

Spectacle

Spectacle as a means of entertainment and latent coercion has existed since long before the advent of the media event. The enhancement of certain events through aesthetic ornamentation and

decoration has added to the prestige, the power, and the seduction of events since antiquity. These antecedent spectacles, like contemporary media events, typically helped organize societies around the interests of those who ruled through their ability to gather an audience in ritual participation. Both traditional and contemporary spectacle disseminates hegemonic messaging in a seemingly innocuous provision of entertainment.

Spectacles, the eyeglasses worn by many to improve their vision, provide an intriguing allegory for theories of spectacle in contemporary society. Once placed on the nose, the lenses of spectacles offer a technologically mediated and technologically improved relationship with the world around them. The use of technology to improve human negotiation of the natural environment, and the subsequent sensory priority attributed to that technology, works to eclipse almost all other perspectives. The brain is being convinced of the primacy of its view as the individual wearing the spectacles is presented with a seemingly superior version of reality. This technologically mediated and improved experience takes prominence, and eventually motivates reliance. This experience is unique for each individual wearer, even though they are all experiencing the same effects. The body of scholarship surrounding theories of contemporary spectacle can be attributed to the influence of Guy Debord, who developed the notion as a theory of mass media and its organizing relationship with society. To Debord, images in contemporary society are commodities equivalent if not superior in exchange value to traditional commodities like labour, goods, and services. Images are reified, becoming the principal form of consumption in a contemporary society that has come to be shaped and dominated through them. Mass media not only reflects society, but also plays a determinant role in its development; media content now shapes the social relations that were once shaped around traditional commodities. Debord (1967) writes:

> The spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life. It is now plain to see – commodities are now all that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity. (p. 29)

Spectacle is an all-encompassing, self-reflecting logic that imposes itself through the harmonization of all media to shape society around its own interests, which are the continued and increased consumption of media itself and the reified commodities it promotes. The power of spectacle is in its perceived weightlessness and inconsequence, a deceptive trait that masks its effects on the development and maintenance of both the parameters and intricacies of contemporary society. Debord (1967) writes:

> The spectacle appears once as society itself, as a part of society, and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is the sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges […] The spectacle is not a collection of images, rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images. (p. 12)

As with Dayan and Katz's notion of media events, the prominence of the spectacle allures the audience, allowing the spectacle and its logic to shape their logic. The key difference with Debord's version is that it never ends. Contemporary mass media is so pervasive that the onslaught of media events never ends, and their collective effects never cease. The insidious nature of its power allows the spectacle to both normalize and marginalize itself within itself in a tautologic impenetrability. Even though the spectacle is in and of itself not tangibly real, the impact of its logic and motivation in everyday life makes it real. Debord (1988) writes:

> The spectacle proves its arguments simply by going around in circles: by coming back to the start, by repetition, by constant reaffirmation in the only space left where anything can be publically affirmed, and believed, precisely because that is the only thing to which everyone is a

witness [...] There is no place left where people can discuss the realities which concern them, because they can never lastingly free themselves from the crushing presence of media discourse and the various forces organized to relay it. (p. 19)

The spectacle is intended to maintain dominance through the encouragement of alienation. To Debord, audiences participating in the spectacle are interpellated into its worldview and succumb to its domination. Where Dayan and Katz see media events as gathering groups to watch together in community, Debord sees television as isolating people within groups, forcing them within themselves and forcing them open to the manipulated imaging of the spectacle. By isolating individuals from one another around the television while consuming the spectacle, individuals in the audience are alienated from each other, from the exchange of commodities that runs their lives, and from the society they belong to. The solution to this alienation is seemingly offered within the spectacle, which also marginalizes or prevents other conceptions of the world from intruding upon the edifice it is continually (re)constructing through itself. As a result the alienation encouraged through the spectacle becomes cyclical and the spectacle's logic becomes impermeable. Contemporary television technology is all about creating separation and alienation, encouraging a unique viewing experience for each person, often through their own personal television-consuming device.

Debord and his Internationale Situationniste contemporaries felt the power of spectacle was so pervasive and totally entrenched that revolution, violent or not, was a viable (and necessary) recourse in opposition. With this in mind, in *The Decline and Fall of the 'Spectacular' Commodity-Economy* Debord offers his own justification for the Watts Riots of August 1965 within the logic of spectacular contestation. Debord (2004) writes: "Even those prepared to acknowledge apparent justifications for the Black anger in Los Angeles [...] deplored the irresponsibility and disorder; the looting. [...] But who has defended the rioters of Los Angeles in the terms they deserve? Well, we shall" (p. 5).

The Watts riots were not so much race riots as racially instigated class riots according to Debord. The rioting represented action against the spectacle and the authority it represented, authority that marginalized anyone who could not participate in the ritualized consumption it promoted and the vision of society it projected. Debord (2004) writes:

The issue is broader than the condition of American Blacks: it is the condition of America itself, even if Blacks were the first to have raised it. [...] The Los Angeles revolt was a revolt against the commodity, against a world of commodities and of worker-consumers hierarchically subordinated to the measuring rod of the commodity. [...] The flames of Watts consumed consumption. The theft of large refrigerators by people with no electricity, or with their power cut off, is the best possible metaphor for the lie of affluence transformed into a truth in play. (pp. 9-13)

By motivating a media event of violence and destruction, the rioters in Watts were contesting the spectacle by using its own power and logic against it. In looting and destroying the same commodities on live television that were otherwise promoted on shows and in advertisements, they were laying bare the actual value of these reified products, and as importantly, the system that promotes and protects them. As Debord wrote (2004): "Any rebellion against the spectacle occurs at the level of totality, because -- even if it is confined to a single neighborhood, such as Watts -- it is a human protest against an inhuman life; because it begins at the level of the real single individual" (p. 33).

Here Debord appears inspired by the possibilities for agency. As with those participating in the Watts Riots, the individual and their display of humanity in the face of spectacular tyranny can provide what Debord (2004) refers to as "The positive transcendence of the spectacle" (p. 34).

Individual agency within reach of the coercive powers of the spectacle is explored in more detail by Michel Foucault, who seems to have challenged Debord's work in his writing on spectacles of public tortures and executions in seventeenth-century France.

The spectacle of the scaffold

Michel Foucault's work on spectacle in *Discipline & Punish* is largely allegorical. Though public torture and execution in 17th century France seemingly offers little in relation to contemporary society, Foucault's work unpacks the power relations that existed between authority and audience as representative of the negotiations that go on in contemporary society around media events and spectacle. To Foucault, the rulers of 17th century France used public tortures and executions as a means of continually reasserting symbolic dominance over those they ruled, much like contemporary media events and spectacle are theorized as doing. Foucault (1975) writes:

> Torture forms part of the ritual […] It must mark the victim: it is intended, either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it. […] men will remember public execution, the pillory, torture and pain duly observed […] public torture and execution must be spectacular, it must be seen by all almost as   its triumph. The very excess of the violence employed is one of the elements of its glory. (p. 34)

The value in the torture and execution in 17th century France is in the symbolism of its public performance. The spectacle of public torture had the effect of organizing that particular society around the rule of the "sovereign". This was reinforced through the display of the tortured or executed body and through the ritual participation of the audience in the spectacle. Just by attending as a member of the crowd, people were opening themselves up to the brutal message: that they were indeed ruled by the sovereign and subject to their will. Foucault (1975) writes:

> A power which, in the absence of continual supervision, sought a renewal of its effect in the spectacle of its individual manifestation; of a power that was recharged in the ritual display of its reality as super-power […] In the main ceremonies of the public execution, the main character was the people, whose real and immediate presence was required for the performance. (p. 57)

The crowd's presence worked in harmony with the violence to affirm for each individual that they were all subjected to the domination of the sovereign. This aligns with Dayan and Katz's notion of a special event that requires participation and shapes perspectives, but it also encourages the notion of the universal, unceasing imposition of power that Debord considers. Foucault's notion of spectacle differs from those of Dayan and Katz and Debord not just because of its historical and allegorical context, but because Foucault began to outline spaces where the power of the spectacle could be contested and reversed. Particularly apposite to the unyielding mass of media consumed and created in contemporary society is that opportunities for contestation and reversal happen in moments right alongside the moments where domination is performed. To Foucault public tortures and executions were volatile spaces where the spectacle's intentions to maintain the sovereign's dominance were exercised. Despite this there remained spaces for contestation by the crowd when their values fell outside those imposed by the sovereign. Foucault explains that the crowd would manifest collective actions of their own if they felt the sovereign, embodied by the executioner, had overstepped the bounds of their power and authority. The crowd, brought together, emboldened, and excited into fervor by the spectacle of violence, would revolt against the sovereign's power within the spectacle of their own construction. Foucault (1975) writes:

The people, drawn to the spectacle intended to terrorize it, could express its rejection of the punitive power and sometimes revolt. Preventing an execution that was unjust… abusing the judges and causing an uproar against the sentence – all this formed part of the popular practices that invested, traversed and often overturned the ritual of the public execution. (pp. 59-60)

In fact spectacles of public execution and torture were one of the few places where the apparent divinely appointed sovereign's word or will could be questioned at all. Foucault's spectacle is a space where those in charge can be contested publicly and collectively. In a reversal of the power within the spectacle, the spectacle of the scaffold can be used to empower the same audience it is intended to exert dominance over. Foucault (1975) writes: "In these executions, which ought to show only the terrorizing power of the prince, there was a whole aspect of the carnival, in which rules were inverted, authority mocked and criminals transformed into heroes" (p. 61). These moments of contestation can be seen as being inoculative, but they are also moments that encourage the audience to challenge their perspectives on existing authority and order. The notion of simultaneously negotiating dominant and subversive messaging offers space for audience interpretation and agency. The prospect of challenging the dominance of the spectacle that is introduced by Foucault is extended and brought into a more contemporary context by Douglas Kellner.

Media spectacle

Douglas Kellner builds on Debord's notion of spectacle, placing it into a more contemporary context. Kellner also theorizes spectacle as terrain that is highlighted by certain media events that rise in prominence above the remaining mass. Kellner (2003) describes "media spectacle" as: "Those phenomena of media culture that embody contemporary society's basic values, serve to initiate individuals into its way of life, and dramatize its controversies and struggles, as well as its modes of conflict resolution" (p. 2). In conjunction with the transcendental conception of Debord's spectacle, Kellner incorporates individual media events as well as phenomena that are centered in the logic of spectacle like branding, fandom and politics. This allows him to look spectacle as a site of open, ongoing conflict between different groups and interests. Like Foucault, Kellner sees moments for spectacular contestation as occurring right alongside the moments of intended messaging, sometimes occurring directly on top of each other. Kellner (2003) writes: "It is preferable to perceive a plurality and heterogeneity of contending spectacles in a contemporary moment and to see spectacle itself as contested terrain" (p. 11). Key to the idea of contending spectacles is the notion of the moment.

A moment is not a minute; it is not a set amount of time. Instead, a moment can be considered as a subjective distillation of a specific instance from a larger temporal construct. Moments range from a split-second of action, to a few minutes of a conversation, to an ongoing debate that lasts a few days. Within the context of spectacle the concept of the moment allows separation of specific instances from within the spectacle that can then be theorized as a metonymical representation of larger discourses occurring within the spectacle.

Moment by moment media spectacle shapes itself through these conflicting forces, developing, organizing, and maintaining itself through its audience. Moments within media spectacle are crucial to understanding and analyzing its contemporary logic. These moments according to Kellner (2003): "Give rise to conflicting meanings and effects, and constitute a field of domination and resistance" (p. 11). Moments provide the opportunity to re-affirm or shift messaging. This means spectacular messaging is no longer linear, but instead negotiated moment-by-moment by the audience. The intent of Kellner's consideration is to encourage the audience to move past the interpellative powers of the spectacle, around the false consciousness it constructs, and towards a

praxis of media literacy. In this way Kellner preempts one of the main critiques of theories of spectacle: that no solutions are offered, merely gloomy assessments of modern society. Ideally contestation offers an opportunity to reshape the spectacle, to hijack its logic in order to shift discourse. Douglas Kellner (2003) saw spaces of contestation as offering the possibility for liberation from the tyranny of spectacular oppression, writing: "Envisioning [spectacle] as contested terrains articulates the openings and possibilities for social transformation, and the potentials for resistance and struggle" (p. 29).

The spectacle continues to expand exponentially in contemporary society, as do the opportunities for engagement with it. Seemingly the ability to contest and (re)shape spectacular discourse has improved considerably. Is this the case though? Will more opportunities for spectacular contestation result in a power shift within media events/spectacle?

Conclusion – A deeper seduction

Theories surrounding media events and spectacle suggest the imposition of a worldview through the proliferation of images that reflect, shape, and are shaped by, society. These images impose power on those who engage them. Spectacle encourages itself continually as solution to the problems it presents. This circular logic allows both the spectacle as whole, and individual media events within it, to continually reaffirm itself within itself again and again over time, further shaping the society it has become permanently embedded within.

Contestation is the act of reappropriating the connection between spectacle and audience in order to shift the messaging of the spectacle, typically in an oppositional way. When contestation is motivated as a means of creating a voice for subversive messaging, or if a media event is created around messaging that opposes the traditional and linear messaging of the spectacle, this represents an attempt to create ambiguity around the intended messaging of the spectacle. Contestation too can shape society, and opportunities abound for those who possess the increasingly available technology that allows for participation in the contemporary spectacle.

Technology ensures that individual media events and the spectacle as whole have never been more reified or powerful. Personal computing technology and the absorption of social media into spectacular discourse have lowered the barriers for entry and encourage a more tangible engagement with the spectacle. Audiences have never played a more determinant role in the content that serves as a proxy for spectacular messaging. The ability to create and consume an unprecedented volume of media, regardless of location, is in the constant possession of a huge and growing portion of the population. This means that the production and development of media events and spectacular discourse at the ground level are no longer the domain of only the powerful. Dayan and Katz (1992) write: "One wonders whether the media-events genre is not an expression of a neo-romantic desire for heroic action by great men followed by the spontaneity of mass action" (p. 21). Ideally in contemporary society this notion is no longer exclusive to "great men," but open to anyone and everyone. Ideally each individual's ability to engage the spectacle through the creation of media content, and the ability to meet and interact with others, can inspire the disruption, confusion, or even reversal of the linear messaging of media events and spectacle. Infinite spaces for contestation are open and waiting. Marginalized and excluded groups are able to create their own voice. The audience collectively or individually can stand up and make their voice heard, and in doing so they can attract others who feel the

same way.

This optimism takes us appropriately full-circle, back to 007. At the climax of *Tomorrow Never Dies*, as James Bond prepares to send Elliot Carver to his rightful spot in the annals of overambitious supervillains who dared to chase their delusions of global domination under the watch of 'Her Majesty's Secret Service', he cannot, as is the rule, resist one final quip at the expense of his soon to be departed foe: *"I've got some breaking news for you."* Bond exclaims, as he grabs Carver by the collar, about to throw him into the menacing teeth of a deep-sea drill, continuing: *"You forgot the first rule of mass media Elliot. Give the people what they want!"*

With his actions Bond is actualizing, fantastically albeit, every person's ability to contest the spectacle. Through his cry to: "Give the people what they want", he aligns his actions with the audience. "The people", who are subjected to media events and spectacle, have been freed from its oppression, if only temporarily.

Traditionally media events/spectacle have been used to portray a vision of a unified, distinctive, collective identity. This is a key component of their power. Contestation offers the opportunity to shift away from the prevailing notions celebrated through the spectacle. Moments of contestation are metonymical of larger discursive spaces within society. Their presence reflects a larger ambiguity that exists within the different groups who make up the audience. Bond's words could be seen as representative of groups who do not see themselves or their interests reflected in the spectacle.

When the spectacle offers itself as a solution for the problems it creates, it not only creates more problems, it further marginalizes those who already feel imposed upon by it. This is especially true for individuals and groups who feel excluded from the spectacle, but are often encouraged to participate through the rituals of spectatorship regardless. They engage the spectacle but see their world as dissimilar. The lack of reflection in the sublime illusory paradise projected through the spectacle loses resonance with them. The spectacle begins to lose its luster, its appeal. The linear messaging it offers no longer carries the currency it once did for many. For those excluded by the images of the spectacle, its logic can become inverted. Everything that draws prioritized groups into the spectacle can work in the opposite direction, pushing marginalized and excluded groups further and further away. Contestation in this instance can be seen as a means of reclaiming space.

The spectacle's inherent tendency towards domination inspires contestation. As media events and spectacle continue to grow in size and prominence, the incongruence between reflection and reality threaten to cause the spectacle to bring about its own demise. The increased potential for, and frequency of, contestation, reflects larger numbers of disaffected who no longer see any semblance of themselves on the screen. Will this cause an irreparable detachment between spectacle and tangible reality? Will this detachment cause a loss of prominence in the power that media events and spectacle hold over the organization of daily life in contemporary society? Will spectacle eventually be responsible for is own death?

No. Contestation becomes a new lifeline for media events and spectacle. Contestation allows the parameters of both media events and spectacle to expand and impose themselves onto whatever discourse surrounds the contestation. Any forms of contestation highlighted within the parameters of media events and spectacle are in fact bound by their rules. Debord (1988) writes:

The individual […] will essentially follow the language of the spectacle, for it is the only one he is familiar with; the one in which he learned to speak. No doubt he would like to be regarded as an enemy of its rhetoric; but he will use its syntax. This is one of the most important aspects of spectacular domination's success. (p. 31)

The pervasive role spectacle has taken in contemporary society allows it to construct itself as impenetrable. Since any discourse must be formulated and articulated within the spectacle to be considered relevant, it must bow to the spectacle's requirements for inclusion and participation. In this way spectacle monopolizes any possible discourse, either by forcing it within its own designed parameters, or through further practices of exclusion and marginalization. Those who intend to commandeer media events or spectacle for their own purposes must adapt their messaging to the operational logic of the spectacle. In doing so they cede control of their subversive messaging to the logic and power of spectacle.

Increasingly, the logic of contestation has been subsumed by the logic of the spectacle. Contestation, or the perception of contestation that is rooted in its logic, is used by the spectacle to (re)construct its own discursive space. Since contestation is always limited when compared to the total, linear messaging of the spectacle, it inevitably becomes enveloped in the same tautologic, self-referential, and self-enclosed discourse it opposes. The worldview media events and spectacle impose and reinforce through rituals of spectatorship are barely interrupted by most moments of contestation. Too often these moments are reappropriated within spectacular discourse in order to either satiate demand for debate and multiple perspectives. Acts of contestation are at too often interpellated into the spectacle as inoculations of opposition to make audiences feel better about the seeming inevitabilities projected by the spectacle. Contestation becomes aesthetic ornamentation within the spectacle, which seizes and reappropriates moments of contestation, negating any disruptive potential they may have possessed.

By using the spectacle's logic to present themselves, contesting interests reify it as the predominant space for discursive exchanges. Contestation *is* the new logic of the contemporary media event/spectacle, a perception created to induce a deeper seduction.

The crowds that attended Foucault's 17th century public tortures and executions did occasionally take the opportunity to contest the otherwise absolute authority of the sovereign, but in doing so they provided themselves with a temporary respite in catharsis, a sufficient reprieve that enabled them to return to their subordinate, dominated roles with renewed satisfaction.

Bond claims to "give the people what they want" through his acts of spectacular contestation, and this is entirely true. But through allowing, enabling, and even encouraging contestation, media events and spectacle, in the use of phenomena like James Bond, intend to "give the people what they want." That is, after they've told them what they want and how to want it. Perceptions of contestation in contemporary media events and spectacle are often as contrived as a big-budget action film, with the results similarly predictable. The film itself, in spite of the presence of Bond and his triumphant outcome, thoroughly reifies the importance of the spectacle. *Tomorrow Never Dies* is a perfect example of the full circuit of contestation within the spectacle. It is a spectacular articulation of spectacular contestation spoken in the language of spectacle, making it at its essence just another iteration, another media event within Debord's society of the

spectacle. In a sense, using a Bond film to explore notions of spectacular contestation also only furthers the intense reification of spectacle. At the same time, unravelling the mythic efficacy of spectacular contestation highlights the need for political action that subverts the spectacle and the authority it represents to occur outside of the spaces encroached by, and parameters defined by, the spectacle. The best way to oppose the spectacle is to not even engage it.

Regardless, the spectacle continues forth, a tautological web that only grows and never pauses, never untangles. Contestation allows the spectacle to open its tent to newcomers, to broaden its reach to include the previously skeptical, who now sees their image reflected within elements of spectacular discourse. Contestation is an innovation that provides another, deeper, broader, more enticing layer of ultimately hegemonic seduction for the audience.

Acknowledgement

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