Call for Papers

Spectacular Now – The Politics of the Contemporary Spectacle


“In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.” (Guy Debord: *The Society of the Spectacle*, §1)

It appears that our present society is dependent on spectacles: the recent refugee crisis dominates the news and especially the tabloids are quick to take sides – not preventing them from turning their coats whenever it means to spark more controversies and consequently making more money. Candidates’ debates, protest movements and social unrest are medialized and marketed to the same extent as entertainment shows and reality TV. David Cameron stumbles over the ‘Panama Papers’. And it appears that one cannot speak of an identity if Facebook/twitter/snapchat/tinder/... does not constantly generate validation via clicks/likes/re-tweets/swipes/...

With the conference “Spectacular Now – the Politics of the Contemporary Spectacle”, we would like to explore the meaning-making processes that lie underneath the phenomenon of the ‘event character’ and spectacle that is medialized to a mass audience. Although this is not a generally new development – one might think of the ancient Roman chariot races or public executions during the Middle Ages – making a media ‘event’ of each and every occasion and thereby depoliticising public discourse has reached an hitherto unmatched extent. At the same time that public discourse is being emptied of politics, however, it becomes evident that this depoliticisation can be the spectacle’s very own politics, and that in fact “[t]he spectacle is the existing order’s uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue. It is the self-portrait of power” (Debord §24).

Therefore, we welcome papers that consider recent events (i.e. from the last ten years) and their spectacular qualities. We explicitly invite young scholars (post-gradual/post-doctoral) to connect their studies to contemporary representations/depictions/stagings of spectacles and their inherent politics and to investigate our current age and time. Moreover, as this conference is dealing with spectacles, we encourage scholars to explore new ways of presenting their findings, too. Be it as a performance or via technological means – during your presentation, there shall be no boundaries apart from the time frame of twenty minutes.

Potential themes may include but are not limited to:
- Spectacle as meaning-making process (mass hysteria, attention seekers)
- Cultural spectacles: *Star Wars VII* as a world-wide phenomenon, *Fifty Shades of Grey* effect, nostalgia for yesterday
- Technological spectacles: Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Tinder, gaming as spectacle
- Political spectacles: refugee crisis, G7 summits, climate change, Occupy movement, riots and civil unrest
- Gender spectacles: burqa debate, transphobia, transgender/intersex
- Past to present spectacles: Bright Young Things vs ‘the Bling Ring’, WWI & II vs the spectacles of contemporary warfare

Please send an abstract of no more than 300 words to marie.hologa@tu-dortmund.de by 15.06.2016. The participants will be confirmed by the end of June.