

E-Entertainment:

The Inescapable Spectacle

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In 1967, Guy Debord theorized the Spectacle "which, in a limited sense, is mass media and its most glaring superficial manifestation" (Debord, 1983, p 13). The Spectacle exists in advertisements, posters, and television programs that manipulate consumers to continually purchase products in a capitalistic society - the Spectacle utilizes its control of mass media and images to influence the population to feed the Spectacle. In turn, the Spectacle's presence in consumerism grows. After nearly a century since its advent, the Spectacle still continues to plague society and media, especially in today's electronically evolving world. Over time, the Spectacle has expanded its utility and now employs not only visual, but also nostalgia, music, atmosphere, and immersion to entice consumers. Because e-entertainment operates within the bounds of the Spectacle's new tactics, e-entertainment is impacted the hardest by the Spectacle and is unlikely to escape the grasp of the Spectacle due to its overpowering presence and recuperative ability.

E-entertainment encompasses a large spectrum of digital media - television, computers, the Internet, film, music, smart phones, and most prevalent, video games. With every new medium introduced to e-entertainment, the Spectacle has commoditized it. Commercials are squeezed in between television shows, advertisements are situated into every empty space on websites, and product placements are cleverly laced in films and, sometimes, music videos. The Spectacle has even taken advantage of the rapid improvements of technology, advertising larger HD TVs, faster computers, and newer generations of video game consoles. Given e-entertainment's broad spectrum, analyzing smaller representative media of e-entertainment such as video games and music facilitates identifying the impacts the Spectacle has. Since video games have some of the largest grossing entertainment launch titles in history (Kain, 2013, p 2) and the music industry makes billions in global revenues (IFPI, 2014, p 6), the Spectacle has divided a huge portion of its attention to video games and music.

Within the video game industry, the Spectacle utilizes trailers to hype consumers. Trailers give consumers a quick glimpse of the visuals, story, mechanics, and content of video games.

Trailers can build tension, play with emotions, show footage of action scenes or gameplay, or leave a feeling of mystery - all of which must catch the consumer's eye in the short thirty seconds or two minutes. The Spectacle is able to create hype through these quick successions of visual scenes, immersive music, and sense of the atmosphere of the game, especially in today's rapid digital age where the mind "wants and needs to take in and dole out information in short, often overlapping bursts - the faster, the better" (Nicholas Carr, 2010, p 10).

The Spectacle also controls the plot, content, and visuals of video games. "The Spectacle pushes video game franchises to become increasingly flashier, grandiose, and more adrenaline rushed" (Portnow & Floyd, 2013). In the Call of Duty: Modern Warfare lineup, the first installment only went as far to have a nuclear bomb go off. In the later two installments, players are forced to play as terrorists at an airport and participate in a zero gravity fight in a crashing plane, Russia invades Washington D.C., and the United States flippantly knocks down the Eiffel Tower (Portnow & Floyd, 2013). In a game targeted towards a casual audience, such as Pokemon, what was once players just saving a region is now, in the recent installment, players saving humanity from an ancient "ultimate" weapon. In games where the stakes aren't as important, like Madden, the Spectacle improves the visuals, realism, and clarity in order to entice consumers. By either upping the absurd stakes or improving the visuals of video games, the Spectacle captures the attention of consumers, spending little to no time in changing any of the franchise's mechanics. Without the increase in severity or better visuals, consumers would pass the games off as replicas of previous games and not buy them. As a result, the Spectacle limits and controls the video game industry in order to increase, if not then maintain, the level of sales.

The Spectacle uses the same tactics in music videos as it does in video game trailers. Camera movements such as tilts, pans, tracking, and crane shots keep the videos dynamic and exciting; very bright or contrasting colors capture the viewer's eyes; and edited "rapid jump cuts" from one scene to another often simulate the mind's tendency to intake information in swift successions (Jamsjamsjams,

2010, pp. 1-2). The Spectacle creates music videos that are visually appealing and eye-catching in order to draw in attention of consumers.

Furthermore, the Spectacle determines the themes of music videos and lyrics. While generally most popular songs follow the theme of love, despair, or happiness, the presence of drugs and nudity in music is increasing, albeit is not necessarily new. Although these attract negative responses, music videos such as Miley Cyrus's "Wrecking Ball," which displays Miley completely naked, garner huge amounts of attention. On the other hand, more family friendly songs employ comical randomness - most popular, Psy's "Gangnam Style" which has over 2 billion views on YouTube (Park, 2012). Either path followed by music strengthens the Spectacle because both attract attention. Mark Pagel argues, "Elements that fail to compete for our attention will be cast off, but the survivors will be those whose allure outpaces our mind's defenses, allowing them to bypass our normal filters, and grab our attention or acquire unnerving ability to control our emotions" (2012, p 136). The attention brings in more viewership, which inevitably leads to popularity. The Spectacle grows because it can commoditize off the popularity of these music. Thus, the music industry tends to push songs into either vulgarity or comical randomness in order to make profits. Fortunately, many have come to recognize the innovation-restrictive control of the video game and music industry.

The recent growth of indie games and music has helped combat the Spectacle. To criticize the entertainment industries, independent developers and bands have created indie games and music that break from mainstream elements found in popular titles. The Internet plays a large role in their endeavor, allowing indie creators to digitally publish their works that deviate from the common marketable qualities of the Spectacle instantly, compare to the lethargic process of publishing by retail. In addition, the rising number of game engines and music production software have allowed whom were once spectators to be creators, or hobbyists. Indie developers, bands, and hobbyists all use these media in a way that brings in a new perspective that shifts away from the Spectacle, yet utilizes the Spectacle to some degree. They are using what Debord defines as detournement.

Debord argued that the only way to fight the Spectacle was through detournement, the use of actual pictures, texts, or the "existing artistic and mass-produced elements to create new combinations or ensembles" (Trier, 2014, p 16). By combining mass-produced elements and other, sometimes contrasting, elements, a new work of alternative significance could be produced. While Debord did not anticipate the rise of video games and music, Debord's definition of detournement can be stretched over these media as followed - detournement in video games and music is the use of popular genres, mechanics, mass-produced elements combined with other innovative elements to create new products that deviate from the Spectacle.

Many indie games take on popular genres or art styles and add an original twist. For example, the indie game *FEZ* is a standard 2-D platformer that adds puzzles and a mechanic that allow players to navigate through four 90 degree 2-D perspectives in a 3-D world. On the other hand, the indie game *Minecraft* utilizes retro and pixilated graphics, but renders them into a 3-D survival sandbox. In indie music videos, popular camera conventions and editing are used in conjunction with unusual elements. In Transit's *I'm so Indie*, conventions such as close ups and jump shots are employed, but alongside darker colors, reduced frame rate shots, and "paper cutout" editing. These detournements facilitate awareness of the Spectacle as the common popular elements found in these games and music clash against the innovative elements, helping in removing the Spectacle's blinding veil over consumers. While promising, the indie solution still fails to free e-entertainment from the Spectacle.

Popularity is a key factor in eliminating the Spectacle. Without it, the impact of indie's detournement is overpowered by the Spectacle's numerous commodities. Most indie games fail to catch on because nostalgia sells better. Mark Pagel adds that, "cut-throat competition among cultural forms to attract our attention is why...the Old Master paintings are so good, why the classics are such good lit., why the classics are such good literature" (2012, p 137). Despite indie games employment of nostalgic genres or mechanics, game franchises that follow an old specific formula, such as Super Mario 2-D platformers or Call of Duty, continue to increase or stabilize in sales (Patrick, 2014).

Failing to reach a larger audience, indie games fail to compete against the Spectacle's old formulaic ways. However, indie music continues to grow in popularity as "the biggest share of music sales is no longer being reaped by major labels" (Weber, 2014). With the rise in music streaming service such as Pandora and Spotify, indie music is beginning to outcompete the Spectacle's music. Unfortunately, the Spectacle remains steadfast.

Debord explains that the Spectacle can recuperate - "to intercept, commoditize, and safely incorporate radical ideas back into mainstream society" ("Spectacle", n.d.). As indie music grows in popularity, the Spectacle's chance in working its way into the genre increases. Already, the Spectacle has taken advantage of popular indie bands, such as Grouplove, and has commoditized its name on apparels, posters, and accessories. Although small, the Spectacle's impact should not be overlooked. The scarce number of popular indie games are also commoditized. Minecraft's development team, Mojang, has already held three massive conventions and sold millions of game at near handheld game prices. Furthermore, Mojang has been incorporated into the Spectacle as the rights to *Minecraft* was sold to Microsoft for 2.5 billion dollars (Owen, 2014). Companies, such as Sony Entertainment and Nintendo, have also been hiring in indie developers to produce indie games for the company (Nintendo, 2014). No longer does the radical idea of indie threatens the Spectacle. By recuperating, the Spectacle expands its control over indie games and indie music. Thus, e-entertainment remains trapped within the Spectacle.

E-entertainment will never be able to rid itself of the Spectacle. By modifying its tactics and recuperating to expand its bounds, the Spectacle continues to incorporate radical ideas as mainstream - even current detournement. The closest e-entertainment can come to escaping the Spectacle is by modifying detournement. In doing so, the Spectacle must alter its tactics in order to recuperate again, which takes time. Within such time period, detournement can be modified further in order avoid full recuperation. In order to evade the Spectacle, detournement must change at the rate the Spectacle recuperates. Although bleak, the Spectacle can only be merely eluded.

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