

ARH 6481: The Spectacle of Contemporary Art
University of Florida, School of Art + Art History, Spring 2025

Professor Douglas Gabriel
Office: Fine Arts Building C, #119-B
Office Hours: Thursdays, 10 AM–12 PM

Course Description

This course tracks formulations of the “spectacle” in theoretical writings on contemporary art and visual culture. Since Guy Debord’s incisive assessment of lived experience under modern conditions of production in the 1960s, artists, critics, and art historians have striven to nuance our understanding of the spectacularization of such phenomena as war and other forms of imperialist aggression, gender performativity, institutional power, and solidarity movements. Readings and weekly themes will be structured to outline a genealogical conceptualization of critical writings on the spectacle in relation to art and aesthetics before turning to key case studies explored in more recently published monographs.

Course Objectives

- To explore historical and recent theorizations of “spectacle” as related to visual art
- To hone critical reading and viewing practices
- To enhance professional development and skillsets related to publication and public-facing presentations

Course Materials

All readings and video files will be made available on Canvas or via Google Drive.

Course Requirements and Grading

Discussion Posts: 15%
Participation: 35%
Final Paper / Project: 50%

Discussion Posts

Discussion posts are to be completed on Canvas by 12:00 (noon) on the day of a given seminar meeting. Instructions for such posts will vary week to week depending on the material assigned, and the format and objectives of each seminar meeting.

Participation

The quality of our seminar depends on the combined energies of all participants. To ensure productive discussion, I will work hard to constrain the scale of assignments. Participants are expected to read all required readings thoroughly and to contribute actively to the seminar

discussion. Please regularly mark passages that appear pivotal to a given argument, as well as excerpts that are particularly opaque, which we can unpack as a collective.

Seminar participants will also be regularly encouraged to bring in visual materials related to their own work so that we might think through the broader applicability of the theoretical models we investigate.

Final Paper / Project

Each student may choose one of two tracks for the culminating assignment:

1. The first track involves writing a 15–20 page research paper that relates in some way to the themes and frameworks of the course. This will ideally serve your professional development in some way—either as the basis for a future article submission, material that can be incorporated into your thesis / dissertation, etc. To ensure steady progress, dates for the submission of a preliminary proposal, an abstract, and a bibliography will be set at increments throughout the course.
2. The second track involves the completion of two shorter assignments:
 - a. A formal, 15-20 minute presentation of a case study pertaining to one of the themes or frameworks covered in the class. This will take place at the end of the course, and it will feature as part of our concluding reflections. While no written component need be submitted, the presentation will be assessed for various aspects of professionalism to be outlined in class. The goal is to gain experience delivering a successful presentation of the type expected in formal conference settings.
 - b. A 900–1,000 word review of a recent book on contemporary art. A loose outline on how to write a formal book review will be circulated in class. Where appropriate, the professor may recommend platforms for publication (though this is not required to earn full credit for the assignment).

Schedule

January 14: **Introductions and Syllabus**

January 21: **Back to the Cave**

January 28: **Situating the Spectacle**

February 1 (Saturday): ***Visit to the Orlando Museum of Art to see [Torn Apart: Punk + New Wave Graphics, Fashion and Culture, 1976–86](#)***

February 11: **No Class (CAA)**

February 18: **The Desert of the Real**

February 25: **Specters of Totalitarianism**

March 4: **Shimmering Surfaces**

March 11: **Screening Procedures**

March 25: **War Zones**

April 1: **On Taking Part**

April 8: **Blackout | White Noise**

April 15: **No In-Person Class (Research Day + Individual Meetings)**

April 22: **Culminations**

Additional Information and Resources:

Land Acknowledgement

The University of Florida rests on the traditional lands of the Potano, Timucua, and Seminole peoples, territories which later had long ties with the Miccosukee and Mascogo peoples as well. As one of the 52 land-grab universities in the United States, the University of Florida has benefited from the forced cession and sale of 90,226 acres of Indigenous lands from 121 Tribal Nations under the Morrill Act of 1862.

Please learn more at the Land-Grab Universities Project and Native Land Digital:

<https://www.landgrabu.org/universities/university-of-florida>

<https://native-land.ca/>

As faculty, I recognize and respect these Indigenous communities past, present, and future, and honor the ongoing important work of dismantling settler colonialism.

Disability Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting:

<https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>.

It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this

course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals.

Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>.

Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at: <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/publicresults/>.

University of Florida Student Honor Code

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states: “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: *‘On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.’*”

In addition to The Honor Pledge, students are responsible for knowing and abiding by the Student Honor and Conduct Codes, both of which are available in full here: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/studenthonor-code-student-conduct-code/>

UF’s policies regarding academic honesty, the Honor Code, and the Conduct Code will be strictly enforced. Plagiarism, in part or in full, will be grounds for failing the course.