McKenzie Wark’s *The Spectacle of Disintegration* is a complicated narrative of the history of the Situationist International through the late 1960s. The SI was an international organization that critiqued aspects of capitalism that permeated so many modern societies. Unfortunately the book is rather inaccessible due to its complexity and assumption that the reader has some knowledge of the theory behind the SI. The book’s cover unfolds to reveal a large poster showing a visual representation of SI ideals. The poster is titled “Totality for Beginners,” but unfortunately the visual aid is just as convoluted as the theory mapped out in the book.

One thing that I was able to easily pick up on, however, was the SI’s heavy Marxist influence. Wark’s narration heavily draws upon some of the Marxist theories we covered in class. For example, in his opening chapter he talks about how society has been reduced to a system in which the powerful order and the weak watch and obey. He includes many key terms such as commodity fetishism and includes modern day examples of the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, the group that possesses all the agency in society.

He also talks about the spectacle, or an image or event aimed at provoking viewers to take some sort of action. He immediately illustrates the SI’s blaming of capitalism for using the spectacle to reduce society to a series of images that distance and convolute truth. The SI argues that capitalism forces people to confuse desires for needs. “Everyday life has been so colonized by the spectacle of the commodity form that it is unable to formulate a new relation between need and desire. It takes its desire for the commodity as if it were a need” (10).

As far as the link to participatory culture goes, it seems that Wark encourages readers to think about the bigger picture of social commentary when observing a spectacle. Because the spectacle of the commodity subverts totality and the prevents most people from thinking about the larger ties and questions that force us to think about the human condition, he states, “the trick is to follow the line that links the experience of concrete situations in everyday life to the spectacular falsification of totality” (11).

The book serves as a call to be ever vigilant of the use of spectacle to further capitalist agendas. In a society in which the barriers to participation have been lowered almost to the point of dismantlement, it is imperative to not fall for traps that use spectacle to convolute larger issues. Though the SI movement might have died in the late sixties to early seventies, its message is one that still has relevance toady. In fact, it might be more relevant today than it was back then seeing how totality can be easily convoluted in the sheer mass of connections that web 2.0 creates today. Commercialism is easier, faster, and more ubiquitous than ever before thanks to the Internet. In such a situation it is easier than ever to become lost in the minutia of everyday life and forget about taking a step back to look at the larger picture of what is happening in society not only domestically, but also internationally.

One recent example that came to mind after reading some of the theories Wark introduced in his book is that of the exploitation of cheap labor abroad to manufacture clothes. Clothing giants such as the GAP, Walmart, and Forever 21 are selling clothes at almost unprecedented low prices and producing them at a dizzying rate. These prices of course can only be possible by cutting costs somewhere in the supply chain. One way this is made possible is through the use of child labor in abysmal conditions in countries with limited government oversight. Despite the fact that few consumers would deem these practices moral or acceptable, we continue to buy these cheap clothes and support these unethical methods because we forget about the connections between “the spectacle of the sale” and the processes that make them possible.

In modern times, to connect this reading to some of our other readings from class, the message of the SI today would probably be to urge citizens across the globe to stop slacktivism. I think if they existed today they would encourage people to think critically about the implications of living a life dominated by commodity fetishism.