

The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America Study Guide

The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America by Daniel J. Boorstin

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Plot Summary

The Image takes a bold look at the political, social, and psychological impacts of "pseudo-events", or those events that create a false sense of reality. Daniel Boorstin examines how these events originated in and have been shaped by the media as well as the specific cultural dynamics of America.

Boorstin asserts America's cultural expectations of the world including "what the world holds" and "our power to shape the world" underlies the propensity to develop pseudo-events, which create even grander expectations. Boorstin continues by claiming the media has played a large role in the creation of pseudo-events. He describes the various aspects of pseudo-events and how they function. He concludes the first chapter by exploring the use of pseudo-events in politics, including Joseph McCarthy's use of morning press conferences to announce an afternoon press conference.

In the next section, Boorstin analyzes pseudo-events at the individual level. In particular, he posits that the shift from heroic figures that have actually accomplished great works to a focus on celebrity figures represents a "human pseudo-event". He discusses the impact of science on our perceptions of old heroic figures and the historical impact of totalitarian dictators on perceptions of leaders. The culture has lost the sanctity and transformative power of its leaders and heroes. Boorstin suggests that our new heroes, celebrities, act as reflections of ourselves and are thus unable to "extend our horizon".

Pseudo-events are then carried into the realm of travel. Boorstin asserts that people have changed from "travelers to tourists". Travelers to the Orient helped to pave the way for the Enlightenment through exposure to other ways of being, thinking, and perceiving. In the modern age, tourists "expect both more strangeness and more familiarity than the world naturally offers". Travel has become a kind of "commodity", and it thus it has become more of an experience and less of an activity. In a sense it is more like watching a movie of the jungle than actually being in the jungle.

Boorstin discusses pseudo-events in the context of art and literature. He suggests that the movement towards making art accessible and understandable turned it into a commodity. Boorstin describes this process as "disembodying". This made contact with the felt experience of art and literature more remote. He continues that the "search for the essence" was favored over form.

Following the cultural belief that the world can be formed to our desire, Boorstin extends his thesis and states that people also determine what is ideal. He suggests that this belief allows for God to be made into a pseudo-event. The ideal thus formed allows for the creation of an image which is a kind of publicly sanctioned ideal. The problem is that the image does not necessarily correlate to the reality of what it is supposed to portray. Boorstin then concludes with an examination into the "self-deceiving magic of prestige". He suggests that the "American Dream" is in danger of becoming an illusion. Boorstin asserts that "problems" overseas are really about our inability to "project" our dreams into those countries.



Chapter 1 - Introduction - Section III

Chapter 1 - Introduction - Section III Summary and Analysis

Boorstin introduces the book with his main thesis about the creation of pseudo-events in America and how they have come to dominate the collective consciousness. He posits that there are two main "extravagant expectations" that Americans hold. The first expectation is that there is always more that the world can provide. The second expectation is that we have unlimited power to fashion the world to our desires. Boorstin asserts that these two expectations lead to the creation of illusions and thus pseudo-events in order to maintain and strengthen those illusions. Finally, he states that our issues with foreign countries have more to do with their unwillingness to believe our illusions and that the greatest domestic changes will arise from dismantling the illusions.

In section I, Boorstin describes how the telling of news has changed from reporting what was seen to actively creating what is seen in order to "make up for the lack of spontaneous events". He introduces the term pseudo-event and describes it as a false event that is intentionally created. Boorstin lists four main aspects of pseudo-events: the event is intentionally created, the event is designed to be "reported or reproduced", the connection of the event to the "underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous", and the event is "intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy".

In section II, Boorstin discusses the impact of the Graphic Revolution, which increased the ease of creation and transmission of several different types of media. He suggests that the newfound ability to transmit images led to the preference of the image over the actual reality of the event, and the temptation to newsmen to make images that were "probable". With the advent of television news programs, there was increased pressure to deliver constant "news" in order to fill the program time as well as to financially support the company. Boorstin suggests that this phenomenon led to the creation of even more pseudo-events, including interviews. Newsmen were given a great deal of power because of the public interest in competing interpretations and commentary.

Section III describes how pseudo-events have affected the political arena. Boorstin states that the Congressional Record, "has had no more than the faintest resemblance to what is actually said there". The actual content of speeches and addresses given by political figures is news only when the speakers depart from the prepared speech. FDR was a major figure of presidential creation of pseudo-events including his solidification of the Presidential press conference and his fireside chats. Joseph McCarthy developed a technique of calling morning press conferences in order to announce afternoon press conferences in order to enhance his prestige. Boorstin also notes that the use of video cameras can give a different perspective to a television viewer than an actual viewer at the event would experience.



Chapter 1 - Section IV and V

Chapter 1 - Section IV and V Summary and Analysis

Section IV begins with Boorstin's assertion that the influx of pseudo-events has caused the confusion of participant and viewer roles and that both now exist simultaneously. He goes on to discuss the formation of the "leak" as a communication device for government officials. This practice, Boorstin states, leads almost invariably to the creation of more pseudo-events. He gives an example from the 1950s, in which a story about the imminent attack of the Chinese on a group of islands was printed and then retracted a few days later. The first story was a pseudo-event because it was printed on the basis of one admiral's opinion, taken out of context, and which was not even generally shared. The second story was also a pseudo-event because its existence was based entirely on the presence of the previous story. Boorstin suggests that leaks come in as a form of testing, to see what the reaction might be from the general populace as well as foreign countries.

Boorstin makes a point of separating pseudo-events from propaganda. He suggests that there are similarities, but that in action and intent the two concepts behave more like opposites. He continues by stating, "While a pseudo-event is an ambiguous truth, propaganda is an appealing falsehood." Hitler made great use of propaganda and the effect was to mobilize millions of people around simple bite-size falsities that were convenient to believe in. Pseudo-events, on the other hand, create distortion through complication.

In section V, Boorstin discusses a change in the way people relate to truth and to image. He suggests that the advances made in American society have served to "blur the edges of reality". Pseudo-events that are now enhanced by technological advancements often make the pseudo reality appear more attractive or believable than reality itself. Walter Lippman, author of *Public Opinion*, defined the word stereotype and how it is used. According to Lippman, a stereotype is a way of giving rapid meaning to an external person or situation in order to help one orient to a world full of confusing and overwhelming experiences. Boorstin states that stereotypes, like propaganda, tend to narrow experience, while pseudo-events tend to embellish experience.

He posits eight distinct ways in which pseudo-events can "overshadow" real or "spontaneous" events. The first way is that pseudo-events tend to be more "dramatic". The second way is that because pseudo-events have some element of planning, they are easier to distribute. The third way is that they can be repeated and thus "reinforced". The fourth way is that since the production of the events has a cost, there is a desire to get a return on the investment and therefore the events are "magnified". The fifth way is that because of the planning process, pseudo-events tend to be more coherent and thus "reassuring". The sixth way is that planned events are more easily digested and regurgitated in social settings. The seventh way is that knowledge of the event becomes

a kind of measure of "being informed". The eighth way is that "pseudo-events spawn other pseudo-events".



Chapter II Section I-III

Chapter II Section I-III Summary and Analysis

Section I begins by reiterating Boorstin's assertion that Americans have fooled themselves about how much "greatness" is contained in the world and indeed in individuals. He continues that part of this problem rests in the fact that we have so much capacity for creating fame and have erroneously equated fame with greatness. Boorstin connects the drive towards fame with the graphic revolution and the subsequent ability to create "well-knownness". He suggests that heroes can now be "mass-produced".

Boorstin suggests that the old heroic form has been eroded due to science, democratic beliefs, and a reaction to totalitarian leaders in the form of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin. He continues that "critical history" and "critical biography" have reduced heroes to mere pawns of "social forces" and historical contexts without individual worth or attributes. Boorstin states that psychological analysis has effectively turned the actions of heroes into compensations for internal psychopathology. Finally, the heroic exploits encountered spontaneously are now being overwhelmed by the deluge of pseudo-events that Americans are exposed to.

In section II, Boorstin posits that in addition to destroying old heroes, leaps in technology have made it difficult to create and recognize new heroes. There are heroic events happening in the sciences; however, these innovations and deeds are occurring outside of most people's ability to grasp. He also makes a distinction between "folk" and "mass". The folk was able to express, ritualize, and able to create heroes. The mass is far more passive, waiting for the emergence of heroes.

In section III, Boorstin explores the roots of the word celebrity, which used to mean a state of being instead of referring to an actual person. He states of the condition of being a celebrity, "The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness". Boorstin goes on to suggest that the celebrity is a kind of "human pseudo-event". Like the word celebrity, the person has been shifted from a state or being to a thing or doing. In order to maintain status as a celebrity, a person must create continuous pseudo-events and become even further disconnected from themselves and others as human beings. Boorstin concludes that unlike heroes, celebrities are unable to expand our experience because they are in essence reflections of us.



Chapter 2 - Section IV-VI

Chapter 2 - Section IV-VI Summary and Analysis

Section IV begins by comparing celebrities and heroes. Boorstin claims that heroes create themselves, whereas the media is responsible for creating celebrities. Heroes became more concrete and revered with the passage of time. By contrast, the celebrity is always contained within the present and requires a constant stream of publicity and pseudo-events to maintain celebrity status. Many celebrities have regulated the flow of publicity and image dispersal in order to maintain their status over a longer period of time. In addition, the personality quirks of celebrities are often their distinguishing characteristics and therefore need to be nurtured, creating a kind of false self.

Section V discusses the exploits of Charles Lindbergh, which in the eyes of Boorstin, were heroic. However, as Boorstin states, he fell prey to becoming a celebrity, which subsequently annulled his hero status. Lindbergh was the first person to cross the Atlantic Ocean flying solo in a single propeller airplane. Lindbergh himself seemed aware of his potential celebrity and signed a contract with the New York Times for his story. According to Boorstin, Lindbergh's publicity in the paper was "unprecedented". His publicity had the effect of turning him into a celebrity, and thus a pseudo-event. He continued to draw the public eye because of his marriage, the abduction of his son, and even the degree to which he was attempting to stay out of the press.

The disappearance of his son drew others in to enhance their own prestige, including "crime celebrities" such as Al Capone. In addition, the crime itself created new celebrities including Norman Swarzkopf. When Lindbergh's celebrity status declined, it took his hero status along with it.

In section VI, Boorstin describes the power of celebrity to obscure the heroic and ultimately to destroy it. He attributes a good deal of this power to the graphic revolution. Celebrities are constantly re-made and re-asserted through publicity and the needs of the public. Boorstin continues that even the old heroes only retain their power to the extent that they are understood as celebrities. He concludes by discussing how even the term hero has been relegated to the experiences of young children or naïve adults. He states, "Among the ironic frustrations of our age, none is more tantalizing than these efforts of ours to satisfy our extravagant expectations of human greatness."



Chapter 3 - Section I-III

Chapter 3 - Section I-III Summary and Analysis

In chapter three, Boorstin explores the changing nature of travel and its impact on the creation of pseudo-events. He states that one of the main ways that this happens is through the expectation that the "exotic" can be made common and yet still retain the nature of being exotic. What this expectation leads to is commoditization, in this case of the experience of travelling. The trip is advertised as exotic, but by the very nature of having been created and packaged in advance is anything but exotic. There is very little risk, encounters with difference, or even feelings of not being safe.

Boorstin suggests that in the past travelers helped to inspire great movements in thought, art, and ways of living. However, in the current form, travel has been reduced to a passive experience, much like watching a movie. In section I, Boorstin states that until recently, traveling was not done for fun, and certainly not by middle class Americans. Echoing the traditions of Europe travel was done by the intellectual and social elite. This changed with the advent of tourism, partially initiated by the availability of guided tours. The tourist became a passive experienter of events, and is traveling for pleasure not as a personal encounter.

Section II begins with one of the most important figures in the guided tour movement, Thomas Cook. He began train tours in England during the early 1840s and soon expanded his business to include the destinations of Ireland and Scotland. When his son joined the business, he expanded even farther to include tours of Switzerland, America, and a "Crusade to the Holy Land". He was met with resistance by the English elite, who complained about the effect of having "droves of these creatures" being led around Italian cities by tour guides. Cook responded by asserting that the common people had just as much right to see beautiful sights. Cook's travel agency to this day remains the largest in the world. Boorstin continues that travel to foreign countries had now become an American commodity that even lower class citizens were starting to access.

Section III opens by discussing how tourists are "protected" from the world they tour, especially in terms of native peoples. These encounters are instead replaced by those with fellow traveling companions. Boorstin reports of his own experience flying, "My passage through space was unnoticeable and effortless. The airplane robbed me of the landscape." The effect created is that all experience when travelling is "homogenized". Everything is pre-planned and paid for with almost no chance of danger, encounter, adventure, or in other words, a spontaneous experience. Boorstin continues that the increased air travel helped to foster the hotel industry, including such giants as Conrad Hilton. Hilton purchased his first hotel just over the border into Mexico and shortly was arranging touring packages to attract customers. He now has hotels in countries all over the world, but as Boorstin comments, they are so commoditized that "they are indistinguishable".

Chapter 3 - Section IV-VI

Chapter 3 - Section IV-VI Summary and Analysis

Section IV begins by continuing the exploration of how "local atmosphere" has been provided in exotic locations. It is the hope of these exotic locations to become places where tourists congregate and thus offer "attractions" for them to consume. He continues by discussing the role of museums as attractions for tourists to visit.

The argument is made that the objects were "liberated" from the homes of the wealthy and famous in order to be available for all to view. However, these objects have now been removed from their context and thus can create a false image of a culture, time period, or artistic movement. Boorstin asserts that, "All tourist attractions share this factitious, pseudo-eventful quality". Boorstin continues that tourist attractions inevitably give a false representation of a country because the attractions themselves have been specially selected for the tourist and only give a shallow rendering of what may be found.

Karl Baedeker was a "pioneer" in the development of the tourism guide with emphasis on giving the locals a script of what they should be doing in order to support the image that was being portrayed of the culture. Baedeker was known for his unbending attention to detail and accuracy, which he developed by experiencing the sites he wrote about first hand. He included tips for tourists in how to avoid unpleasant experiences as well as how to tip in various situations. Baedeker eventually expanded his purview to include advice on fitting in with the locals and what the local expectations were on behavior and dress. He also developed a system of rating using stars that led to a kind of "one-upmanship", concerning who had marked off the most stars on the list. Again it was a way to educate and sophisticate the common people which led to the commoditization of traveling.

In section V, Boorstin applies his critique of tourism to traveling in America. America has been "homogenized" due to the ability to eat the same food, listen to the same music, and watch the same movies. This was partially accomplished by tours within the country, including use of a train system similar to that of Cook. Boorstin states that the use of trains is diminishing partly in favor of more rapid and uniform methods of transit, including cars. He compares "motor touring" with air travel in the sense that it has the same sanitized "empty" feeling to it, leaving no contact with the surrounding area.

Boorstin opens section VI talking about the changes in our understanding of time and space. Increasingly, space is taking over and time becomes more and more meaningless in the context of travel. He suggests that the "pseudo-event" of tourism "overshadows" the experience of travel again mainly due to the graphic revolution.



Chapter 4 - Section I-IV

Chapter 4 - Section I-IV Summary and Analysis

Boorstin begins chapter four by reiterating his earlier argument that Americans have unrealistic expectations about the degree to which the world can be shaped or formed. He suggests that democracy and the graphic revolution are mostly responsible for the advent of abridgment and the mass production of art. In the effort to make art and literature accessible to all, Boorstin claims that these forms of expression were "disembodied".

He begins section I by talking about the changes to printed material. In the 1840s, books began to be made very cheap due to a variety of factors. One factor was the advent of presses which allowed for more efficient production of books. Another factor was the "Great Revolution in Publishing" in which "weeklies" began selling books as "supplements" and "extras" in order to receive lower postal rates. Although this practice was eventually cut short by the postal service and copyright laws, cheap books remained a fascination for Americans.

Boorstin asserts that the next important step had to do with improvements in the binding industry, mainly in the form of automated processes done by machines. He continues that these changes affected the same turn from traveler to tourist only within the literature and art worlds. Soon, images of masterpieces could be printed on almost any object, especially with the introduction of colored printing presses. In addition, changes to the technology of making "plaster" and "metallic" sculpture reproductions led to mass distribution, and Boorstin states, subsequent devaluation of the artwork.

In section II, Boorstin discusses the process of abridgement and its impact on the appreciation of fine literature. In particular he refers to the popularity of "digests" including "The Reader's Digest", founded by De Witt Wallace. The magazine provided a synopsis of other works, presumably to aid the consumer in having access to the highlights of the longer articles. Boorstin suggests that the digest was responsible for producing an "epic" amount of pseudo-events, including having writers write articles to be published in other magazines that could then be "digested" in the magazine.

In section III, Boorstin continues the theme of "literary decline" and discusses the beginning stages of computers. Due to the increasing availability of literature, scientists were now being forced to "abstract the abstracts".

Boorstin continues the abridgment theme in section IV with a discussion about how books have suffered from the graphic revolution. In particular he focuses on the arrival of paperback books and publisher tendencies to run reprints and stay with particular themes because they are safe instead of taking risks on new material. Boorstin states, "By 1960, as many as a third of the books on the lists of "reprint" houses were in fact originals, confessed or disguised, and this percentage was increasing."



Chapter 4 - Section V-XI

Chapter 4 - Section V-XI Summary and Analysis

Section V explores the impact of motion pictures as part of the Graphic Revolution on non-visual media. Boorstin describes movies as a kind of pseudo-event, especially in the sense that it was "more vivid and more impressive than the spontaneous original". The writing that movies were based on was thus giving secondary status, which Boorstin asserts, once again devalued the literary form. He goes on to say that one of the problems with movies is they feed an already "extravagant expectation of our power over the world" and allow us to believe that all experience can be fit into a movie. Boorstin suggests that we are in danger if we forget that the experiences that can't be captured by the camera are exactly those that can be captured in a book.

Section VI continues on the theme of the development of new "visual forms for narrative literature". In particular, he focuses on the development of Broadway shows as well as movie versions of those same shows. Boorstin points to the development of pseudo-events in the industry by describing an excerpt from *Publisher's Weekly*. He states, "In order to stir interest in the sale of movie rights to a book, the book need not yet have been written." Boorstin suggests that the very act of adapting the novel to the screen divorces the content from the original work, and thus it becomes a pseudo-event.

Boorstin discusses the "star system" in section VII. Essentially these people are "the celebrities of the entertainment world". The General Film Company, recognizing that actors and actresses would demand higher pay if they became well known, refused to give out their names. However, other filmmakers such as Carl Laemmle, Adolf Zukor, and Cecile B. De Mille, saw the advantage of publicizing the actors and actresses and the star system was born. Boorstin describes the transition from a "star film" containing a star actor, to a "film star" in which a particular actor made the film worthwhile. Boorstin concludes that "the star is a pseudo-event", particular due to the fact that it generates other pseudo-events such as fans.

Section VIII continues discussing the star system and how it has affected "traditional forms of achievement". In the publishing world it has translated to the "best-seller". However, this has had an impact on the actual ability of these books to make money. Boorstin states that best-sellers were often used as "loss-leaders" by companies such as Macy's and Gimbel's to get folks into the stores and thus barely made any money on the book itself.

Section IX discusses how art has also been affected by the star syndrome. In particular, Boorstin focuses on the destructive aspects of reproductions. The ability of machines to reproduce colors from nature removes the natural challenge to the artist to learn to mix colors. He suggests that artists are now reflecting the status quo through their non-representative, or non-form works.

Boorstin next focuses on musical impacts in section X. He discusses the impact of Muzak and how it has become a pseudo-event in and of itself. This new music is designed to create a specific environment, and has even been used to help workers become more productive on the job. He quotes an executive responsible for the design and packaging of Muzak, "After all, this is basically music to hear, not to listen to."

In section XI Boorstin concludes that the overall effect of the Graphic Revolution has been to "make all experience a commodity". We have drifted further and further away from direct experience.



Chapter 5 - Section I-III

Chapter 5 - Section I-III Summary and Analysis

In chapter five, Boorstin asserts that we have made a shift from moral value to commercial or monetary value. He states, "God himself becomes not a power but an image." He continues into section I and discusses the abundance of images and outlines their particular characteristics. The first characteristic of the image is that it is "synthetic". This means that it does not arrive spontaneously, it is created for a particular purpose. The second aspect of the image is that it is "believable". The image must "overshadow" the thing from which it was derived, but must not exceed the limits of credulity.

The third aspect of the image is that it is "passive". Boorstin suggests that the image acts as a concrete reality that already exists as opposed to being a work in progress. There is no work required in order to attain the ideals espoused by the image, it is assumed they already exist. Thus, the image becomes a replacement for the ideal. The fourth aspect of an image is that it be "vivid" and "concrete". It must be vivid enough that people experience the image as being more real than the original. Concreteness allows for less work than would be required of the public to deal with abstraction.

The fifth aspect of the image is that it is "simplified". In other words, it must be easier to deal with than the thing that it represents. Again, this allows people to be more passive in apprehending the image. The sixth aspect of the image is that it is "ambiguous". The image must exist in a kind of liminal state "between expectation and reality". This allows it to be exciting or mysterious in its own right and thus capable of producing other pseudo-events of equally ambiguous character.

Boorstin begins section II discussing the differences between "ideal-thinking" and "image-thinking". Unlike images, he suggests that ideals arose spontaneously through "tradition, history, or by God", are not made simple, are direct, and are active in the sense that they pull people forward. Boorstin then describes how images were used as tools to distinguish one product from another, and thus "branding" was created. This is also a kind of pseudo-event because it shifts the focus from the product to the name that it carries.

In section III Boorstin discusses how advertising arose out of the use of image and branding. Advertising, Boorstin asserts, is a "classic example of the pseudo-event". In particular he focuses on the advertising successes of PT Barnum and his museum. Barnum advertised his "mermaid" using colored handbills portraying a beautiful woman that was half fish. In reality he had a dead fish connected to a monkey head. Boorstin states that Barnum's brilliance was in realizing how much the public enjoyed being deceived.



Chapter 5 - Section IV-VI

Chapter 5 - Section IV-VI Summary and Analysis

In section IV, Boorstin describes how the appearance of advertising has caused a movement from focusing on "truth" to focusing on "credibility". Citing the Graphic Revolution as a primary cause, he states, "By sharpening our images we have blurred all our experiences". Boorstin asserts that there are several aspects of "successful advertising".

The first aspect is "the appeal of the neither-true-nor-false" or "ambiguity". Boorstin describes how Schlitz beer used ambiguity by advertising the fact that the bottles were "steam-sterilized", neglecting to mention the fact that all the other beer companies used the same process. However, the competition could not make the same assertion because it would appear that they were trying to copy Schlitz. The company thus enjoyed the distinction of being the "only" company to use steam. This strategy quickly caught on and began to be used across all industries.

The second aspect is "the appeal of the self-fulfilling prophecy". Boorstin suggests that this is a direct means for advertisers to create a sense of credibility that otherwise would not exist. He continues that "facts" are created that help to make an otherwise unlikely scenario seem possible or true. This is particularly true in the form of endorsements from people with celebrity status. However, the endorsements cannot stretch credibility too far and therefore much planning and deliberation is necessary to stage it correctly. Boorstin contends that because of the need for planning it becomes a pseudo-event.

The third aspect is "the appeal of the half-intelligible". Boorstin states that consumers expect that they will not understand half of what is being said because it demonstrates a kind of "progress" and advancement. The technical "jargon" and large scientific words "prove" that the company really is working hard to make a better product and that the customer's experience is at the heart of their efforts. In addition, consumers gain a certain amount of prestige by being able to wield the jargon themselves.

The fourth aspect is "The appeal of the contrived". Boorstin suggests that consumers are delighted that the advertisers invest so much effort into creating a pseudo-event. Boorstin continues that advertising helps to make a shift from what is "true" to what is "believable". He contends that due to the Graphic Revolution, it is much easier to make things believable.

In section V, Boorstin discusses how reality has become blurry. He states that even the seasons have become blurred because of the relentless drive of business and consumerism. Many things have now lost their distinction and their edges.

In section VI, Boorstin continues his thesis by stating that our "intentions" and "desires" have become less focused. He discusses Walter Lippman's book "Public Opinion" and

praises his distinction between and individual's public opinion, and a society's public opinion.



Chapter 6 - Section I and II

Chapter 6 - Section I and II Summary and Analysis

In chapter six, Boorstin suggests that the greatest challenge Americans are now dealing with is illusion. He continues that we tend to consider our problems as existing outside of America.

In section I, Boorstin asserts that America has experienced a move from "ideals to images". He suggests that part of the difficulty in foreign relations is that other countries are exposed to a flood of images that are disconnected from any sense of ideals. Boorstin states, "I suspect we suffer abroad simply because people know America through images. While our enemies profit from the fact that they are known only, or primarily, through their ideals. That is, through their professed goals of perfection."

Boorstin continues that it is not a question of what the images portray, it is more the fact that we are communicating with images at all that is the problem. He suggests that America return to its ideals and cease communicating with the rest of the world in image.

In section II, Boorstin asserts that one of the greatest challenges for America in returning to ideals is the fascination with "prestige". Prestige essentially means that people have accepted and bought into the image that we are trying to uphold. Boorstin states that this approach, like other pseudo-events, distracts from lived and felt experience and realities and thus draws negative criticism from the world community. He warns that America has spent too much time attempting to "perfect our image rather than ourselves".

Chapter 6 - Section IV and V

Chapter 6 - Section IV and V Summary and Analysis

In section III, Boorstin returns to domestic issues and suggests that they are the opposite of foreign issues. Instead of nobody buying into the image, it seems at home that everyone has bought into the image, to the extent that we exist in a kind of pseudo-reality. Boorstin states, "We fill our lives not with experience but with the images of experience." He continues that even in our linguistics we have become more removed. The amount of dissociation has become so absolute that the "natural" no longer feels real. He states that we have even created words that imply the specialness of the natural such as "non-fiction" or "unabridged".

In section IV, Boorstin discusses the "mirror effect". In essence the mirror effect states that the more we create images in order to "expand experience" the more we inevitably narrow experience and are merely looking at reflections of ourselves. Boorstin continues that we are left with the "invention of experience" rather than its "discovery". He concludes that the United States is now locked in a pattern of "social narcissism" in which "we have fallen in love with our own image".

In section V, Boorstin suggests that each individual must find their way to free themselves from the oppression of our images. We must be able to reach beyond into novel experience and ideas and thus become aware of our illusions.



Characters

Charles Lindbergh

Daniel Boorstin examines the life achievements of Charles Lindbergh in some detail because he believes that he was a good example of a hero but was subsequently "degraded into a celebrity". Boorstin asserts that this degradation separated him from the values that were associated with his heroic feats and thus he became empty. Lindbergh made a historic flight across the Atlantic Ocean in a single propeller plane. Boorstin states that although this feat qualified as heroic, on a day-to-day basis, Lindbergh was "a commonplace person".

Knowing that his story would likely make the press, Lindbergh sold the rights to his story to the New York Times before his departure. Boorstin states that his news coverage was "unprecedented". In fact, his story was so popular that the presses had difficulty in keeping up with the printing. Boorstin describes the media coverage as the "biggest human pseudo-event in modern times". In other words, the actual facts and experiences of Lindbergh's journey were straightforward and simple. The most exciting part about his story was that he was being given so much attention.

Lindbergh's feat was now being eclipsed by his fame. He attempted to extricate himself from the continuous press, but his efforts were interpreted as an attempt to increase his publicity. His marriage and the kidnapping of his son led to renewed attention in the press pushing him even further into celebrity status and leaving behind the heroic nature of his flight. Boorstin states that the press hampered the investigation in several ways including the creation of false clues. Other "celebrities" including "Salvy" Spitalo, Irving Blitz, and Al Capone increased their own publicity by becoming involved with the investigation.

Thomas Cook

Daniel Boorstin describes Thomas Cook as a "pioneer in the making and marketing of conducted tours". Cook's tours began in the mid 1800s and consisted of a discounted rate for a group of people taking a train between two cities in England. Eventually his tours expanded to Scotland and Ireland and he organized tours of the Crystal Palace Exposition. He continued to expand to more countries and cities and with his son organized tours in America, Switzerland, and the Holy Land.

Some of the English elite protested Cook's actions because they felt that he was degrading the act of traveling and marring the countryside with the endless miles of tracks that were required for the rail lines. There was a great deal of protest by Englishmen in Italy that now scores of people were flocking to the cities and moving around in large guided groups, ruining the experience of the city. This was the beginning of tourism. Cook defended the tours and proclaimed it a public service, giving lower



classes access to the beautiful places of the world. Cook's remains today "the largest travel agency in the world".

Karl Baedeker

Karl Baedeker is described by Boorstin as the "pioneer" of guidebooks, in particular those that gave a kind of script to the locals on how to behave. In the early 1940s Baedeker guides were being purchased by the newly swelling middle class in Europe, eager to use newfound wealth to travel. Baedeker himself at first refused to put anything into the guides that he had not witnessed or experienced personally. This gave his guides a reputation for being incredibly accurate and therefore trustworthy.

Baedeker gave instructions for how to deal with local pests, purchasing food, interactions with locals, etiquette for tipping, and eventually how to comport oneself as if one was local. Baedeker gave instructions for how to be tourists without being annoying to the locals, how to tone down one's personal heritage and fit in to the culture of the country they were visiting. Baedeker had a method of rating sights to see with stars, in order to, like Cook, make it easier for more people to be "cultured". However, this practice led to people checking items off of a list instead of getting a true experience.

De Witt Wallace

DeWitt Wallace was the founder of the Reader's Digest, which he started in the basement office under a speakeasy in Greenwich Village. According to Boorstin, this magazine marked a turning point in the continued development of abridgment of texts. At one point it was speculated that this magazine was read by almost a quarter of all the adults in the nation. Boorstin attributes the popularity of this publication to the continued loss of form and direct experience. As Boorstin states, "The shadow has become the substance." He continues that the digest is the epitome of the manufacture of pseudo-events.

Wallace's technique was to use his own interpretation of articles in other magazines that he transcribed by hand from the New York Public Library. Almost all of the articles that he produced were two pages so that he could fill sixty-two pages with thirty-one articles. In effect, the design was to enable the reader to get a snapshot of lots of different articles, thus the focus was on the reader and not on the writer or editor of the article.

PT Barnum

Boorstin describes PT Barnum as being a "notorious pioneer" in advertising, a true expert in the creation of pseudo-events. Barnum himself boasted about his ability to turn every event towards his own personal gain through the use of advertising techniques. One of these was a kind of "compounding pseudo-events" in which he constructed a pseudo-event and then created a second pseudo-event that was based on the first one.



He kept this creation going as long as he could in order to increase his publicity as much as possible.

In the early 1800s Barnum purchased Scudder's American Museum, which was failing at the time. He then added to the already available attractions jugglers, ventriloquists, giants, dwarves, etc. In order to advertise his newly fashioned museum, he devised the "brick man". Essentially a man kept a continual circuit of exchanging bricks at various locations and then entering the museum. Customers would pay the entrance fee to see what the point of the exercise was. Barnum also had great success advertising his "mermaid" using handbills. Boorstin states that, "Barnum's great discovery was not how easy it was to deceive the public, but rather, how much the public enjoyed being deceived."

Conrad Hilton

Conrad Hilton started the famous Hilton Hotel line by acquiring a hotel over the border in Mexico. He started it as a vacation destination with guided tours and activities to attract customers. This hotel eventually became the Chihuahua Hilton. He describes the stars that were gathered for the opening of the Istanbul Hilton and it becomes clear that it is a publicity event.

At the opening of his hotel in Istanbul he stated, "Each of our hotels is a little America." Boorstin comments on the fact that the experience of being in the Istanbul Hilton is so similar to being in any other Hilton that there is a sense of disorientation.

Donald O'Neill

Donald O'Neill, Muzak designer, suggested that his company was not so much in the business of music, more the business of "programming". The company developed particular kinds of music that seemed to go well with particular activities and times of day. He states of the desired intention for music, in particular in factories and offices, "the music must go counter to the industrial fatigue curve." O'Neill continues, "After all, this is basically music to hear, not to listen to."

The music was distributed and played in several different environments including supermarkets, bars, restaurants, airports, etc. Boorstin describes this phenomenon as "musical pseudo-events". Music thus becomes a medium for transmission of images to create moods and sell products.

Walter Lippman

Walter Lippman wrote the book *Public Opinion*, in which he works to differentiate between internal and external images. He defines the word "stereotype" as a kind of "simplified pattern" that helps people to orient themselves in the world and to give meaning to a vast array of confusing and overwhelming experiences. Boorstin asserts



that stereotypes are a kind of pseudo-event, and further that they are a kind of "propaganda". He says that generally pseudo-events seek to embellish while stereotyping tends to narrow.

Joseph McCarthy

Joseph McCarthy was a United States Senator during the 1940s and '50s. Boorstin describes him as being skilled in creating pseudo-events that shared little with the "reality" they were supposedly based on. In particular, he perfected a technique of giving press conferences in the morning so that he could announce afternoon press conferences. In addition he was often able to give a press conference in which no information was transmitted to the public which served only to heighten the public tension. Boorstin states, "Newspapermen were his most potent allies for they were his co-manufacturers of pseudo-events."

Adolf Hitler

Adolf Hitler suggested that the purpose of propaganda is to sway the "masses". Due to the relative immobility of the masses, however, the best way to get them to respond is through the consistent repetition of "simple ideas". Thus, through repetition and simplicity, truth is made to appear as if it is simpler and more straightforward than it is. Hitler stated that propaganda is intentional skewing of the truth or the message in order to get people to act in a particular way.



Objects/Places

Salt Lake City, Utah.

Horace Greeley interviewed Brigham Young, the first interview of its kind with a well-known figure.

Mein Kampf

Biography of Adolph Hitler in which he describes the purpose and use of propaganda in order to "convince the masses" to act in particular ways.

Graphic Revolution

Technological advances that made possible the reproduction and large scale distribution of various kinds of media.

Celebrity Register

A compilation of celebrities based on the degree to which they are known by others for being in the news as well as making news.

Roosevelt Field, New York.

Famous departure site for Charles Lindbergh's historic monoplane flight across the Atlantic Ocean to France.

Leicester, England

Originating point of Thomas Cook's first planned tour by train.

Northern Mexico

Site of the first Hilton hotel called the Chihuahua Hilton. Conrad Hilton took over an existing hotel and offered bus tours and other planned activities for guests.

Paris, France

Site of the Louvre public art museum, founded after the conclusion of the French Revolution in 1789.



London, England

Site of the Crystal Palace Exhibition and Madame Tussaud's wax figure museum.

Statue of David

A statue carved by Michelangelo in which he reported simply removing the excess stone to reveal the form that already existed beneath.

Ramseur, North Carolina

Forty percent of the population belonged to the Bing Crosby club and persuaded the government to name a street after him.

Fenway Park

Home of the Boston Red Sox, it was one of the locations in which Muzak was introduced as background music.

Themes

Graphic Revolution

Boorstin continually references the Graphic Revolution as playing a major role in the development of pseudo-events. He states, "It brought new forces toward popularizing, toward reshaping - and toward disembodying - works of art". These changes occurred in several ways. First, the invention of paper-making machines and "cylinder presses" significantly reduced the time and cost involved with producing books. In addition, machines were developed that improved the bookbinding process and the production of book covers. Due to these advancements, booksellers were able to produce and sell many more books for less money. This in effect made books a commodity.

A similar change occurred in the field of "graphic arts" as well. New technologies allowed for the reproduction of famous works into prints as well as adornments for coffee mugs, notepads, flags, etc. Newspapers began to have access to reproduced photographs as well as color printing techniques. Other improvements were made that allowed for the cheap reproduction of statues and sculptures.

He continues by discussing the conversion of the written word to the movie screen. The new standard of the quality of written material was determined by if it was adapted for a movie. All of these changes led to pieces of artwork becoming commodities. Boorstin asserts that due to the easy reproducibility, even the original loses value. In addition, the copies may appear even more vivid than the originals and are thus more easily believed.

Images

Boorstin asserts that America has changed its focus on ideal to a focus on images. He outlines several aspects of images - synthetic, believable, passive, vivid, concrete, simplified, and ambiguous. The image, according to Boorstin, is essentially a pseudo-event. In other words it is a kind of placeholder for something more real and serves to create other pseudo-events. He states that Americans have become entranced with their images, partly because they are so much more vivid and therefore seem more real than actual reality.

Boorstin posits that part of our difficulties abroad has to do with the fact that we spend so much time crafting and communicating our image that we are unable to communicate our ideals. Our enemies are much more skilled at communicating ideals because they don't have so many images to maintain. The use of passive images seems to create a certain amount of passivity in the people who use them as well. There is no need to actually develop oneself as long as one can project and maintain a particular image.



This fact has been especially exploited by the advertising industry. They have discovered that if a particular image is effectively communicated via a particular product, then consumers will purchase that product in order to command that particular image. The use of ambiguity means that an image can be applied in a variety of forms and allows for the most amount of people to buy into it. Boorstin suggests that the problem with Americans at home is that everyone has bought into the images that we are exposed to on a daily basis.

Safety

One of the perhaps less obvious themes in the book has to do with safety. When the focus shifted in America from reporting news to making news, it was partly due to ensuring the continued success of the television companies running twenty-four hour news programs. In other words it created safety for the news companies. In addition, because reporters were to some degree telling consumers what they wanted to hear, there is a certain feeling of safety. This theme continues into the next chapter, which discusses the differences between heroes and celebrities. Celebrities are safe - heroes have to go out and actually risk danger, even if only in the form of public embarrassment, and complete a task.

In chapter three, Boorstin talks about the movement from traveler to tourist. There is far more safety in being a tourist. Guided tours insure that there is little contact with the locals, perhaps including criminals. Tours also promise the delivery of a particular experience, so there is safety in the form of not being disappointed. There is also safety in knowing that one encountered all the "cultured" places to go and thus did their touring "correctly". Finally, tourist locales have been so sanitized that there is no longer even the danger of encountering foreign food - there is a McDonalds in almost every country in the world.

In chapter five, Boorstin discusses the move from ideal to image. When one is disconnected from an ideal there is no danger of not reaching the ideal. An image is already complete and available - there is no work required and therefore no chance of failure. Being disconnected also means not having to experience the pain of one's own or other's reality. It is an escape from true intimacy and relationship.

Style

Perspective

Daniel Boorstin has written extensively on politics with a particular focus on democracy and politics in America. He is a historian and seeks to understand current social and political dynamics through historical events. He suggests in this book that there are some negatives to the rapid development of technology and commerce, even though he received strong criticism for doing so and his work has been described as a "slander on the United States". Boorstin states that despite the views of his detractors, he wrote this book out of "affection for America".

Boorstin suggests that his task in the book is mainly to help point out some of the ways that Americans have come to deceive themselves. In the course of his studies, he has been less "impressed" by stated responsibility of various figures for our current problems and suggests that they are more a result of our successes and technological improvements that lead to complexity. His task in writing this book is to help fellow Americans discover their own illusions and perhaps help them to be able to find different "roads" to choose from.

Due to his background, Boorstin writes in a historical style, cataloguing major events in chronological fashion in order to give the reader a sense of development towards particular issues. He also writes with a certain amount of force, presumably to penetrate the fog of the illusions his reader is holding. In particular Boorstin focuses on certain developments such as the "Graphic Revolution" as a touchstone and ties various other historical, political, and sociological changes to it.

Tone

Boorstin is influenced greatly by his work studying American and European history and political development, and thus he lends a great deal of authority to his writing. He spends a good deal of time talking about the chronology of events leading up to a particular shift in the culture. This effort and authority makes his arguments compelling even in the face of strong criticism. Boorstin states in the introduction that he wrote this book as a result of his own discoveries of illusion. Thus he is often speaking from his own personal experience, which adds another layer of authority to his writing.

Boorstin's intention is to give enough history and examples of what he is pointing to that the reader is able to take their own journey into personal and cultural illusions. Through this effort, he is able to maintain a fairly neutral tone and tends to let the "facts" speak for themselves and let the reader come to their own conclusions about their veracity. However, he does reveal the extent of his belief and passion towards the end of the book, in particular when he refers to the collective narcissism of America in the sense that we have "fallen in love with our image".



Finally, Boorstin's tone conveys the loving acceptance and patience that can only come from somebody that has been through the disillusionment experience. It may be like giving up a drug or some other kind of valued possession - one needs compassionate care to move through the pain.

Structure

The book is divided into six chapters, each of them describing a particular shift towards pseudo-events that occur in particular spheres of life. The first chapter outlines the beginning of pseudo-events in the news. Boorstin suggests that the culture moved from "news gathering to news making". The second chapter explores the human realm of pseudo-events and how the making of celebrities has helped to bring about the downfall of "heroes".

The third chapter focuses on the transition from traveling to "tourism" and how people are no longer actively engaged in adventuring. In chapter four, Boorstin discusses the loss of form in relation to artwork. In particular, the ability to make so many reproductions of a particular work led to the devaluation of the original. The fifth chapter describes the movement from "ideals" to "images". Boorstin discusses the political costs of trying to communicate with our images instead of our ideals. Finally, Boorstin concludes by describing the movement from the "American Dream" to the "American Illusion" and the personal and cultural losses that stem from that movement.



Quotes

"The hero was born of time: his gestation required at least a generation."
p. 62

"The airline stewardess, a breed first developed in the United States and now found on all major international airlines, is a new subspecies of womankind. She is the Madonna of the Airways, a pretty symbol of the new homogenized blandness of the tourist's world."
p. 95

"The tourist looks for caricature; travel agents at home and national tourist bureaus abroad are quick to oblige."
p. 106

"Whether we see models of greatness, or experience elsewhere on the earth, we look into a mirror instead of outside a window, and we see only ourselves."
p. 117

"We have lost our grip on reality when we have let ourselves believe (as we are eager to be reassured by movie-makers and their press agents) that the movie can ever give us the nub of the matter."
p. 148

"The high cost of making new stars led a producer who had a star with proven box-office appeal to exploit him in every conceivable way before his appeal wore out."
p. 157

"The life in America which I have described is a spectator sport in which we ourselves make the props and are the sole performers."
p. 183

"The everyday images which flood our experience have this advantage over the tricks of magic: even after we have been taken behind the scenes, we can still enjoy the pleasures of deception."
p. 194

"The trade-mark is a kind of shorthand symbol for a corporation. It is a memory trigger."
p. 195

"This can be summed up as the shift in common experience from an emphasis on "truth" to an emphasis on "credibility"."
p. 212



"A deft administrator these days must have similar skills. He must master "the technique of denying the truth without actually lying"."

p. 234

"Our images suggest arrogance: in them we set ourselves up as a mold for the world."

p. 244

"When we talk of prestige abroad we are talking not of ourselves, but of the shadows of ourselves which we can somehow project."

p. 247

"This is the age of contrivance. The artificial has become so commonplace that the natural begins to seem contrived."

p. 253

"We might say now that chewing gum is the television of the mouth. There is no danger so long as we do not think that by chewing gum we are getting nourishment."

p. 258



Topics for Discussion

Boorstin states that the Graphic Revolution played a large role in the development of pseudo-events. However, it is also clear that the Graphic Revolution provided several benefits to the culture. Should there be a process for discussing the impacts of new advancements? Why or why not? What factors should be discussed in that process?

Boorstin suggests that part of our difficulty with foreign relations is because of our desire to have other peoples accept the illusions that we have created. Do you think this is true? Why or why not? What are the implications for foreign and domestic policy? What are the personal implications of dealing with our own illusions?

As a result of the prevalence of pseudo-events, Boorstin suggests Americans have become more removed from direct experience. What are the benefits and negatives of abstract versus concrete thinking?

In the book, Democracy is listed as one of the driving forces in the commoditization and subsequent devaluation of art, literature, and travel. Should all people be granted access to these things? Why or why not? Is it possible to provide all people access without the objects being de-valued?

Is it ethical to use Muzak in places of business to increase worker productivity or sales of products? Why or why not? What limits, if any, should be placed on the use of Muzak?

What does the modern day hero look like? In what ways can society support movement towards heroes instead of celebrities? Who are your heroes and why?

Which is less ethical, the use of propaganda techniques like those implied by Hitler, or the use of pseudo-events?

Can celebrities also be heroes? Why or why not?