

# Moral Claims in the Age of Spectacles

Brian M. Lowe

# Moral Claims in the Age of Spectacles

Shaping the Social Imaginary

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Brian M. Lowe  
Sociology  
SUNY College at Oneonta  
Oneonta, New York, USA

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*For Ethan*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is a book about intersections between mediated representations and their production, dissemination and evolution, social scientific understandings of morality, social and political problems associated with differing and often conflicting forms of moral understandings, and the discernable social and political ramifications of these interactions. Despite the fact that the research trajectory on which this book is based doesn't fall gently into one or more easily recognizable academic categories, I was very lucky to find a number of interested and supportive friends and colleagues who helped me as I endeavored to tease out how these different parts fit together.

This project was buoyed by a number of thoughtful and generous individuals. A significant inspiration for this project was Stephen Duncombe's wonderful book *Dream: Re-Imagining Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (2007). I was so taken by its thesis—that many of the aspects of popular culture often derided for being distractions from “real” concerns could become vehicles for addressing them—that I constructed an undergraduate course examining how “spectacle” could both pacify and provoke. I was greatly heartened when I reached out to him about my research and found him to be very supportive and encouraging. I remain thankful for his kind attention. I am also very grateful that my friend and colleague Doug Marshall was willing to discuss spectacle and propaganda with me, and was kind enough to invite me to share some of these ideas with his students and colleagues at the University of South Alabama.

I have also been very fortunate to have colleagues from different academic fields assist me in developing some of the ideas presented here. In

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# INTRODUCTION

## THIS PROJECT BEGAN WITH *SUPERMAN*

In May 1995, American actor Christopher Reeve—best known for playing the title role in Richard Donner’s 1978 film *Superman*—was severely injured in an equestrian accident in Culpeper, Virginia. He was subsequently airlifted via “Pegasus” to the University of Virginia Hospital, where he was operated on by neurosurgeon Dr. John Jane. Reeve convalesced at the University of Virginia, and began fundraising and advocating for research around spinal cord injury and paralysis, the consequence of his accident that had left him a quadriplegic. In the months and years following, Reeve would raise millions of dollars for spinal cord injury research and facilitate collaborations with existing organizations, including the Paralyzed Veterans of America and the Rick Hansen Foundation. These efforts would ultimately outlive both Christopher Reeve and his wife Dana in the form of the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation. I know some of this because I was an indirect observer through my wife Elaine, who became involved in organizing a conference for scientists studying spinal cord injuries and neurological regeneration while working in the Neuroscience Department at the University of Virginia. Through her descriptions and news reports about the conference, it became evident that “star power” was real: together with Reeve, these groups generated donations and public attention far beyond the levels they had prior to Reeve joining them. Beyond finding all of this exciting, I also found it somewhat perplexing. As a Sociology graduate student studying social movements, it was not easy to explain the “added value” that Reeve brought. His presence and efforts seemed to

accelerate the rate of funding for research that could lead to treatments for paralysis. Existing theories, such as Resource Mobilization and Frame Analysis, did not adequately account for the role of prominent people in enhancing a movement—especially when the person was not prominent in terms of scientific research. Moreover, how did Reeve’s public appearances serve to elevate the cause of finding a treatment for paralysis into “the right thing to do”—a moral cause?

In 1996, Reeve delivered a speech at the 68th Academy Awards ceremony that seemed to capture something of this capacity for “star power” not simply to direct attention, but to make a compelling moral case, as described by Andre Soares:

Reeve then briefly spoke about “the power of film to present painful but important issues to the public,” remembering how impressed he had been with Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove*, which got him thinking about “the madness of nuclear destruction,” and with Stanley Kramer’s *The Defiant Ones*, which “taught us about race relations.”

He also praised “motion pictures that have courageously put social issues ahead of box office success,” naming more recent titles such as Oliver Stone’s *Platoon*, Jonathan Demme’s *Philadelphia*, and George Miller’s *Lorenzo’s Oil*. “They’ve enlightened us, they’ve challenged us, and they’ve given us the opportunity to learn.”

Following a montage that included several Movies with a Message, among them John Ford’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, Norman Jewison’s *In the Heat of the Night*, Richard Brooks’ *In Cold Blood*, Hal Ashby’s *Coming Home*, and Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, Reeve added: “Hollywood needs to do more. Let’s continue to take risks. Let’s tackle the issues. In many ways our film community can do it better than anyone else. There is no challenge, artistic or otherwise, that we can’t meet. (“Christopher Reeve ‘Superman’ Movies and Surprise Oscar Ceremony Speech” by Andre Soares, Alt Film Guide, <http://www.altfg.com/film/christopher-reeve-superman/>)

Reeve was identifying what psychologist Paul Rozin (1997) termed *moralization*: the capacity for something to become imbued with moral significance. In Reeve’s case, he was arguing that film, like other art forms, could not only focus attention on “the issues” but infuse those issues with moral significance. Scholars of social movements, such as Charles Tilly and James M. Jasper, have argued that social movements have been making moralization efforts for centuries, including attempting to transform the moral standing of practices such as slavery, the legal standing and treatment

of women, the place of alcohol and related phenomena (especially drunk driving), and more recently the treatment of nonhuman animals and the environment. Reeve's efforts to promote fruitful research into spinal cord injuries and treatments was an effort to both raise funds and demonstrate the significance of spinal cord injury research. As with any organization that receives donations, there must always be an effort to keep the issue or concern in the forefront of the public consciousness, lest it be eclipsed by other issues. One way to do this is through *moralization*: if finding a cure for paralysis, or ending the suffering of captive orcas, or ending unwarranted police violence, holds moral significance and is therefore "the right thing to do," then much of the goal of remaining prominent in the public's attention is achieved. But what about the implication of Reeve's assertion that movies—and by extension television and other forms of popular cultural expression—could bring moral attention to "the issues"?

Some social scientists have categorized the influence of mediated popular culture on the wider society as "spectacle." While the term *spectacle* itself dates back to the Middle Ages, what could be regarded as spectacles have existed for centuries: from the gladiatorial games of the Roman Empire, to the coronation of monarchs, to religious processions and public feast days. All of these historical cases exemplify powerful elites attempting to use spectacle in order to reinforce their legitimacy. In modernity, the discussion of spectacle arguably begins with the work of Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995) and *Comments on The Society of the Spectacle* (2002). In brief, Debord expressed concern that modern societies were becoming dominated by "spectacles" that encouraged us to act like passive observers and not engage in efforts to alter society, instead lulled into complacency through "the permanent opium war" that was being waged on our perceptions. For this reason Debord and other Situationists (scholars with deep Marxist roots) attempted to disrupt spectacles such as films by adding nonsensical sounds or dialogue, so that audiences would be forced to recognize that the film was only a film and not to be mistaken for reality. Debord was not alone in recognizing the potential for celebrity status to alter society's perceptions of those who were primarily "famous for being famous." Daniel Boorstin's 1962 *The Image* anticipates the capacity for mediated images of persons and events to transcend what otherwise would have been recognized as significant. Boorstin identified "pseudo-events" as those that are self-referential (such as the opening of a casino) rather than signifying something beyond the event (such as recognizing the passage of legislation and the potential consequences of that act).

The trajectory of Debord's work was amplified by French sociologist Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994). In this work, Baudrillard argues that we are increasingly "seduced" by the simulacra and simulations created through mass media, preferring the "hyperreality" of these images and representations to less attractive and more nuanced reality. This thesis was popularized in *The Matrix* (1999), a film written and directed by the Wachowski brothers, who required that the film cast read *Simulacra and Simulation*. (The book itself makes a brief appearance early in the film, both to show audiences the title and to demonstrate the camouflaging nature of simulations: the book has been hollowed out in order to store illicit software.) The film (the first in a popular trilogy) is about simulation and hyperreality: the main character, Thomas Anderson (played by Keanu Reeves), appears to be a software engineer living in an unnamed city (although all the streets and intersections named in *The Matrix* are in Chicago) whose alternate identity is the hacker "Neo". The film follows "Neo" as he discovers that his entire existence has actually been within a computer-generated simulation intended to keep him, and the rest of humanity, as passive sources of energy for sentient machines that now dominate Earth following a cataclysmic war. "Neo" is liberated by a small group of free humans who fight the machines both in the ugly, dirty and very dangerous Earth of the future and by slipping back into "the matrix"—the simulated world of the late twentieth century—in order to disrupt the machines and to try to rescue other humans who have penetrated the simulation. The analogy is clear: the computer simulation holds humanity captive partly because it is simply more appealing than the dirty, corroded reality that we see on the *Nebuchadnezzar*, the craft that "Neo" is taken to after his rescue. (The illusion is so gripping that Cypher, another crew member of the *Nebuchadnezzar*, betrays his companions in exchange for the promise of being returned to the Matrix, so that he can live a life of illusory luxury.)

In *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (2009), Chris Hedges takes the case against spectacle even further, arguing that spectacle has discouraged literacy and critical thought, leaving the United States beset with distractions that conceal the growing injustices in the country and images that promote continuous consumption and the acquisition of wealth. A similar argument is made in *Democracy Incorporated* (2008), in which Wolin proposes the existence of "inverted totalitarianism." The authoritarian totalitarianism of the twentieth century—such as the fascist "cults of personality" around Hitler and Mussolini—have been

supplanted by a spectacle that conceals the persons who actually wield power, making the current spectacle look all the more inevitable. More recently, in *Notes on the Death of Culture* (2015), Mario Vargas Llosa argues that we have entered the “Civilization of the Spectacle”: “What do we mean by civilization of the spectacle? The civilization of a world in which pride of place, in terms of a scale of values, is given to entertainment, and where having a good time, escaping boredom, is the universal passion” (Llosa 2015: 23–24). While not as apocalyptic as Hedges, Llosa follows a familiar trajectory: contemporary culture has become dominated by the frivolous and the distracting, leaving us increasingly unable to grapple with serious and weighty issues. These thinkers would all seem to challenge Reeves in his hope that popular culture could be harnessed for loftier purposes.

A somewhat different perspective comes from the works of Murray Edelman and Douglas Kellner. In *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (1988), Edelman suggests that most spectacles generate political quiescence and are created by elites for that purpose. However, occasionally the spectacle fails, leaving room for defiance: the prisoner in court looks too dignified to be guilty, or the political newcomer seizes the agenda. Similarly ambivalent, Douglas Kellner in *Media Spectacle* (2003) recognizes mass media’s ability to distract—and potentially how that distraction can serve as a vehicle for more subversive narratives. For example, the (first) trial of O.J. Simpson in 1995 received more minutes of television coverage on the main American television networks than did the siege of Sarajevo in the collapsing Yugoslavia. Clearly, the siege and killings that would later be known as “ethnic cleansing” were infinitely more important than one murder trial of a former professional football player turned actor. However, Kellner argues that the trials also served as a vehicle for introducing conversations about the role of money in the criminal justice system: could a middle-class man be acquitted with the physical evidence arrayed against him, as it was in the case of Simpson? Similarly, a nationwide discussion of domestic violence emerged from the case as well, emphasizing the often ignored reality that most murdered women die at the hands of their intimates. Neither Edelman nor Kellner are celebrating spectacle, but they recognize that, sometimes, it can be bent to serve purposes other than those of its creators.

The most optimistic vision of spectacle appears in Stephen Duncombe’s *Dream: Reimagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (2007). Duncombe’s argument is that, rather than fearing or loathing the spectacle,

political progressives should embrace it. Duncombe contends that progressives harbor an imagined history (more about the social imaginary and imaginal in Chap. 2) about the supposed antithesis of the spectacle, empiricism: “Appeals to truth and reality, and faith in rational thought and action, are based in a fantasy of the past, or rather past fantasy” (Duncombe 2007: 5). This fantasy is of a golden age of reasoned empiricism during which arguments rose and fell solely based on the power of the evidence marshaled to defend them. Instead, Duncombe argues that we should acknowledge how narratives and spectacles have driven compelling arguments in the past, and will continue to do so in the future: “Spectacle is our way of making sense of the world. Truth and power belong to those who tell the better story” (Duncombe 2007: 8). Rather than bemoan the fact that Western societies are saturated with spectacles, progressives should embrace and attempt to deploy them to make evidence more compelling and empirically based narratives more tangible. Duncombe would support Reeve’s exhortation to use film and popular cultural narratives to push social and political change—what Duncombe calls “ethical spectacles” (Duncombe 2007: 17).

#### CASE STUDY: ENTERTAINMENT AND POLITICS MERGE

One of the difficulties in studying spectacles in contemporary Western societies is appreciating how they have become comparatively so ubiquitous, even since Debord considered *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967. The blending of fictional narratives, compelling images and evidence becomes difficult to contemplate, especially when they seem to violate previous divisions between (for example) “hard” and “soft” news. In the spirit of spectacle, perhaps it’s easier to begin with, appropriately, a scene from a movie:

**Doc:** So tell me, future boy, who’s President of the United States in 1985?

**Marty:** Ronald Reagan.

**Doc:** Ronald Reagan, the actor? Then who’s vice president, Jerry Lewis? I suppose Jane Wymann is the first lady ... I got enough practical jokes for one evening. Good night, future boy.

This incredulous exchange is from Robert Zemeckis’s 1985 film *Back to the Future*, during a scene in which Marty McFly (played by Michael J. Fox) attempts to convince “Doc” Brown (played by Christopher Lloyd)

that he has just time traveled into 1955 in a DeLorean-encased time machine that Brown will build and test in 1985. Brown's initial skepticism, apparently propelled more by the thought that an *actor* could become president than the possibility of time travel, is dispelled when Marty shows him the DeLorean time machine and a videotape of Doc and Marty on the night of Marty's departure. Viewing the tape, Doc holds the video camera and exclaims, "This is truly amazing, a portable television studio. No wonder your president has to be an actor, he's gotta look good on television."

Unlike the "Doc" Brown of 1955, twenty-first-century Americans are comparatively blasé about the entanglements between film and television actors and politics. John McTiernan's 1987 *Predator* featured two actors who would become governors: Arnold Schwarzenegger (Governor of California from 2003 to 2011) and Jesse Ventura (Governor of Minnesota from 1999 to 2003). *Saturday Night Live* alumnus Al Franken won a contentious election in 2008 for the United States Senate and was re-elected in 2014. Beyond actors holding elected offices, the connections between prominent figures in the mediated performing arts (film, television and music) and public perceptions of social and political problems has expanded dramatically since the American actor Danny Kaye became the first celebrity Goodwill Ambassador of the United Nations in 1954. For example, the June 2014 summit against wartime rape that was attended by representatives from 117 countries was co-hosted by British Foreign Secretary William Hague and American film actress Angelina Jolie ("Angelina Jolie and William Hague launch fight against wartime rape," Barney Henderson, *The Guardian*, June 10, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/10889171/Angelina-Jolie-and-William-Hague-launch-fight-against-wartime-rape.html>). The creation of the Satellite Sentinel Project in 2010 by activist John Prendergast and American film and television actor and director George Clooney has provided satellite imagery of the Darfur region in South Sudan in the hopes of documenting, and ideally deterring, alleged human rights violations and genocide in that area. These efforts have included generating media coverage of the conflicts in South Sudan, including a February 2015 *New York Times* op-ed ("George Clooney on Sudan's Rape of Darfur," by George Clooney, John Prendergast and Akshaya Kumar, *The New York Times*, February 26, 2015, A27).

Such entanglements are not limited to politics. Transcending the boundaries between mediated personas and collective action, the 2014 ALS Association "Ice-Bucket Challenge"—in which participants poured ice

water over themselves to simulate the sensations of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), recording the event and disseminating the video on social media—raised an estimated US\$114 million in 2014 for the ALS Association to fund research for a disease better known for one of its early victims, New York Yankee Hall of Fame baseball player Lou Gehrig (<http://www.alsa.org/>). This campaign was unexpectedly successful, perhaps because it created an empathetic and sensory experience for both audiences and participants for what those afflicted with ALS actually experience.

This Introduction was written in the wake of one of the most compelling examples of spectacle to date: the election of Donald. J. Trump as President of the United States. Trump began his improbable campaign as a Republican candidate with no formal political experience, but with a great deal of notoriety based on his well-positioned presence for decades in popular culture through television programs, books, tabloid newspapers and films. Outside of business media, Trump was a recurrent figure in film and television (credited by IMDb with nineteen appearances as an “actor” in film and television), notwithstanding his involvement in both *The Apprentice* (which began airing in 2004) and *Celebrity Apprentice* (which first aired in 2010). Trump also harnessed printed media, publishing eight books between 1987 and 2011 (notably, all of them about his business experience or his political beliefs). Additionally, Trump has religiously attached his surname to luxury apartment buildings, casinos, golf courses and resorts, as well as a myriad of products including (labeled) clothing and even (briefly) steaks and wine. Trump even attempted to create a so-called “Trump University” that lacked a physical campus (and became the subject of a 25 million dollar (U.S.) lawsuit that Trump settled with the Attorney General of New York State). Beyond these physical and mediated manifestations of Trump, he has been a voracious Twitter user, acquiring an estimated nearly 14 million followers by Election Day 2016 (<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump?lang=en>). (His opponent, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, had nearly 11 million Twitter followers by Election Day 2016, having joined Twitter in April 2013) (<https://twitter.com/HillaryClinton>). Despite campaigning against sixteen other Republican presidential aspirants, by May 2016 only Trump remained. This was despite the fact that the Republican Party machinery attempted to deflect his rise throughout the primaries. Contrary to long-held Political Science orthodoxies, such as those posed in *The Party Decides* (2008) (stating that political party insiders maintain significant, if concealed, influence over the selection of party nominees), Trump seized the Republican

Party nomination. After a contentious primary against Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, Secretary Clinton had the support of the Democratic Party, but that advantage did not overwhelm Trump's deployment of spectacle. Even public events with the musical power couple Beyoncé and Jay Z could not produce the voter turnout that Clinton needed to win the Electoral College (although Clinton did win the popular vote.) In sum, Trump's cultivated persona resonated within mediated spectacles to such a degree that he overcame Republican resistance and a concerted effort by the Democratic Party to win the 2016 presidential campaign.

This book is not strictly about political spectacles, but it does consider how spectacles infused with moral perceptions and emotions can produce political outcomes—whether it is Trump's appearances in popular culture that serve to make him a viable candidate, or appeals from celebrities that are embraced by political leaders, such as in 2014 when United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon designated American actor Leonardo DiCaprio as a United Nations Messenger of Peace (specifically related to Climate Change)(<http://www.un.org/climatechange/summit/2014/09/secretary-general-designates-leonardo-di-caprio-un-messenger-peace/>). This book suggests, in fact, that the line between mediated representations and political outcomes is thin and permeable. For example, programs such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* entertained audiences with often biting satire that required a level of political knowledge in order to understand the jokes. Both programs were awarded Emmys as well as Peabody Awards—the latter typically reserved for journalists. *The Colbert Report* won two Peabodys for revealing the arguably ridiculous nature of Super PACs. While the subject matter included both politics and entertainment, both programs also expressed a significant amount of moral indignation, such as when Colbert compared the structure of Super PACs to money-laundering with his guest, former Federal Election Commission Chair Trevor Potter, who did not disagree with the analogy. Just as Reeve had intended for the film, in this case politically informed comedy addressed and explained a complex, confusing and potentially massively boring subject and made it funny.

## HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

One of the central themes of this project is the emergence of what I call “spectacular morality.” While it is especially palpable today, like most socio-logical processes it has historical precedents and antecedents. As the means

of cultural and artistic production become less attached to oligopolistic and powerful economic actors (through the capacity to express ideas in writing, film and most recently video without necessarily requiring a patron or a venue for the dissemination of these mediated representations) the forms of spectacular morality increase. These relationships are often complex and difficult to discern as popular cultural expressions or as the promotion of moral or ethical ideals. For example, screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, one of the Hollywood Ten, who was blacklisted for both his supposed Communist relationships and his refusal to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee, expressed some of his political and social views through his screenplays for films such as *Spartacus*. However, as Ceplair and Trumbo (2015) argue, “Trumbo was, at heart, a political person who also happened to write movie scripts” (Ceplair and Trumbo 2015: 6). In a similar vein, Lichter, Baumgartner and Morris (2015) observe that American politics has been influenced by political comedy that sometimes brings discernable political action, as in the case of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and its scathing attacks on Congress for allowing funding for the medical benefits of 9/11 responders to end. *The Daily Show* repeatedly emphasized that the first responders who selflessly worked in the ruins of the Twin Towers subsequently came to suffer a myriad of health problems due to their exposure to the toxic mixture of combustible materials at the site of the attacks. *The Daily Show* deliberately shamed Congress into action, partly through bringing some of the responders onto the program in a spectacular effort to make their suffering tangible. As Darren Samuelsohn of *Politico* reported in 2015, the actions of Jon Stewart and *The Daily Show* have been credited with restoring such funding for first responders:

For his final show of 2010, Stewart criticized the Senate Republicans filibustering a bill to set up the health program for the 9/11 first responders and survivors and who began experiencing a range of medical problems, from cancer to lung disease and post-traumatic stress disorder. Four of those post-9/11 workers suffering from serious illnesses were guests on the show.

Many advocates still credit Stewart with making the whole thing happen. After the segment aired, the Senate in the closing hours of its 2010 lame duck session ultimately approved a compromise five-year, \$4.2 billion bill by a unanimous voice vote. House Democratic leaders about to relinquish their majority with the next Congress had to summon a couple of lawmakers back to Washington for the vote on final passage, which came about a week after Stewart’s segment aired.

“We call him the Christmas miracle of 2010,” said Scott Chernoff, a retired officer from the New York Police Department who was at the World Trade

Center site on Sept. 11 and then spent about 300 hours working security at Ground Zero in its aftermath. (“Jon Stewart’s Next Act: Lobbyist?” by Darren Samuelsohn, Politico, July 31, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/07/jon-stewarts-next-act-lobbyist-000179#ixzz3uQEU5csz>)

Empathy and moral outrage, coupled with comedy, on a cable television show helped sway Congress when traditional lobbying apparently failed.

These cases point to the existence of *spectacular morality*: how mediated representations can communicate moral claims, understandings and emotions such as empathy and outrage. Another theme of this book is what Rubin (2015) termed the “co-causal” relationship between spectacles and the potential for some kind of moralization in the wider society. Rubin uses the concept of co-causality to examine the relationships between form of government and morality. He posits that following the “fall” of Rome until the year 1000, most of Western Europe was dominated by “the morality of honor” in which one’s reputation (especially for elite adult males) was tied to one’s prowess in battle and loyalty to superiors—which was commensurate with the highly localized fiefdoms and social networks of that time. Similarly, the morality of higher purposes—with both the religious connotation of serving God and later serving the realm through one’s monarch—emerged alongside centralized nation-states with public property. Rubin contends that a new form of morality—self-fulfillment—has emerged alongside the growth of government and the expansion of individual rights. One question that this project hopes to illuminate is: what are the relationships between certain social formations and certain kinds of spectacles? In contemporary Western societies, where any laptop can serve as a venue for viewing a video and increasingly for producing one, will we still see the fragmentation predicted by postmodernists as it becomes increasingly easy for individuals to form groups based on their “spectacular preferences,” regardless of geographic location? Or will spectacles come to serve unifying purposes, as in 1985 when over one billion people (mostly Westerners) watched the televised broadcast of “Live Aid,” an extended performance by the most prominent and famous popular musical performers raising money for famine relief in Ethiopia, and both contributed donations and pressured Western governments to do the same?

Another theme of this project is the premise that spectacles, once created, are to some degree out of the control of their creators. As this book documents, there are many examples of spectacles having untoward or

unforeseen effects apart from those intended by the creator. This is not to discount the possibility, as Debord and Hedges argue, that spectacles pacify and distract—or create a skewed version of reality. General Patrick Finnegan, Dean of West Point, and FBI interrogator Joe Navarro were acting with spectacular literacy when they traveled to Los Angeles in 2007 in order to meet with the producers of the television series *24*, because “cadets and trainees steeped in *24* were turning a deaf ear to instructions about the illegality of torture and its limited effectiveness” (Bayles 2014: 66). *24* featured Jack Bauer (played by Kiefer Sutherland) in a variety of national security crises, each of which unfolded over a period of twenty-four hours, during which Bauer occasionally resorted to torture under extreme duress. In short, West Point and the FBI realized that the mediated representation of torture on *24* was eclipsing the knowledge and training provided by professional educators. However, as Bayles describes in *Through a Screen Darkly: Popular Culture, Public Diplomacy, and America’s Image Abroad* (2014), the way in which those outside the United States come to perceive America is influenced by the content of popular culture that was never intended for the purpose of developing international relations. David Milne, in *Worldmaking: The Art and Science of Diplomacy* (2015), goes even further and argues that the perceptions of the diplomats attempting to shape portions of the world through their policies are themselves impacted by mediated representations of art and popular culture, such as George Kennan’s reaction to atomic weapons being shaped by Shakespeare and the New Testament (Milne 2015: 4–5). If national security and diplomats are not entirely immune to the influence of spectacle, what can be said about either its intentional creators or those who inadvertently become swept up in it?

### ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

As the above examples already suggest, this project occupies a potentially vast space. Arguably, spectacles include films that encourage us to think about “the issues,” as Christopher Reeve hoped. They include celebrities who speak on behalf of or against a particular political candidate, or even more importantly an ideal. They include representations of claims in visual form, as in the case of Live Aid, that galvanize action in ways that well-documented reports fail to do. They involve television programs and films that impact how those outside the United States understand America,

even when the creators had no intention of doing so. Therefore, this book relies on case studies to show at least some of the complexities involved in discerning the degree of impact(s) of spectacles. In this sense, this is an effort at what the American sociologist Robert K. Merton termed *middle range theory*: drawing together a variety of similar cases of a phenomenon in order to discern their similarities and begin inductively seeking trends and patterns with the ultimate goal of developing stronger and larger theories in the future.

Chapters 1 and 2 are primarily theoretical, intended as a review of the past scholarship on spectacle, including the critical concepts of the *social imaginary* and the *imaginal*. As Charles Taylor (2003) explained in relation to the social imaginary, “my focus is on the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings ... [and] is carried in images, stories, and legends” (Taylor 2003: 23). The social imaginal, as discussed by Chiara Bottici (2014), is fundamental to how we understand the world: “the imaginal, as that which is made of images, of pictorial (re)presentations that are always also presentations in themselves ... can be the result of both individual imagination and the social imaginary – as well as of a complex yet to be determined interaction between the two” (Bottici 2014: 73). Taken together, these concepts suggest that social life would effectively be impossible without shared imagined categories, therefore implying that spectacle itself is a necessary aspect of social life. Chapter 3 considers the role(s) of *bricolage* in developing spectacles, when different material and symbolic resources are synthesized in innovative patterns. Chapter 4 considers how spectacles develop and extend *identities* through utilizing available technologies and circulating through *popular culture*. Chapter 5 considers the *locations* of spectacles and how developments in social life and political campaigns and governing made spectacles more diffuse, and therefore more difficult to avoid. Chapter 6 examines forms of spectacular representation through which interpretations of different events—such as the Holocaust being recast as a “crime against humanity” (a legal concept not widely accepted before World War II)—were both created and promoted. Finally, Chapter 7 examines spectacles created in relation to controversies surrounding nonhuman animals, such as the use of captive orcas by SeaWorld. This chapter, more so than the others, endeavors to demonstrate that spectacles can act as “force multipliers” in that a well-crafted and disseminated spectacle can attract public attention and ignite change in a way that mere information cannot.