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The Cultural Politics of Post-9/11 American Sport

Power, Pedagogy and the Popular

Michael Silk

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The Cultural Politics of Post-9/11 American Sport

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Power, Pedagogy and the Popular
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Preface

There are, invariably, far too many people to thank in the preparation of such a manuscript. I'd like to thank the staff at Routledge (New York) for working with me and indeed for being so patient while waiting for delivery of this manuscript. Further, I would like to acknowledge Human Kinetics publishers. The original thinking and theorizing for this manuscript was published as an article in 2005 in the *Sociology of Sport Journal* with my colleague Mark Falcous. That article served as the springboard for this text. While this work is revised, expanded, reworked, and updated, I do wish to gratefully thank Human Kinetics for allowing me the space to begin this journey and for permission (and encouragement) to continue! A number of influential scholars have aided my thought process, and it is clear from the reference list of this text to whom I am referring. One absence from this list, but a scholar to whom I am undoubtedly indebted and whose work is implicit throughout the text, is the work of C.L.R. James, who, in *Beyond a Boundary*, provided likely the earliest, perhaps the most influential, and definitively the most evocative, understanding of how sport (and indeed the sporting body)—as a popular cultural form—is imbued with power relations. A number of scholars have, in the last 10 years I have spent writing and musing on this topic, provided support and guidance. Notably, Grant Farred, Toby Miller, and Norm Denzin have provided kind and encouraging words that have gone a long way in giving me the confidence to take on such a project. There are also a number of scholars, to whom I probably do an injustice to by grouping them as serious scholars of sport, and on whose work I have relied on heavily throughout this text. I am referring here to Michael Giardina, Josh Newman, Kyle Kusz, Samantha King, Ted Butryn, and Michael Butterworth, all of whose work I have found inspirational and all of whom add to the quality of the argument in this book. In this regard, no text is really single authored; indeed, many of the chapters and thoughts in this book extend work I have completed with a number of collaborators over the last 10 years. I hope the work I have done in extending these arguments, attempting to bring coherence to the diverse range of thoughts and subjects, and the revisions I have made to the arguments do these scholars justice. As such, I cannot thank enough Mark Falcous, Bryan Bracey, Ryan

White, Jaime Schultz, and Jessica Francombe for being such amazing colleagues and students. Again, without their work, this text would simply not exist. I am also indebted to David L. Andrews, perhaps the most critical and insightful scholar of sport / cultural studies I know. Many of the ideas for this text were formulated while we worked together at the University of Maryland; many of the ideas and criticisms came from our discussions driving up and down the I-95 between College Park and Baltimore. I am exceptionally proud to be able to call Dave a great friend and am extremely thankful for all of our 'work -talk' and lunches. There are also a number of colleagues at the University of Bath, where the majority of the book was written, who have provided the intellectual conditions and space (and most importantly time) to allow me to complete this work. Finally, and by no means least (far from it!), my beautiful wife, Jennie, put up with me while I wrote this book. She knows more than anyone how long it has taken to complete; it has seen us meet, marry, and have our first child, Nancy! I am indeed lucky to have had friends and colleagues, as well as the love of Jennie and my daughter Nancy, to whom this text is dedicated.

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The Post-9/11 Sporting Nation

The tragic and horrific events that surround the day of September 11th, 2001, its pre-history and the military, cultural, political, and economic events that have taken place in its aftermath, are telling moments in the history of the US (and indeed the world). With the perspective of time (some 10 years), it is abundantly clear that the events of September 11th continue to shape the material and symbolic worlds we inhabit. At this current moment, and indeed, in the future, this day will continue to shape public conversation, what it means to be 'normal' / 'American' and thus 'abnormal' / other, military policy, economic strategizing, lawmaking, the arts, entertainment, news coverage, education, and religion, to name but a few concerns (see Morgan, 2009). By way of reflecting on this moment, I introduce this text by quoting Peter McLaren, writing in December 2001, at length, for he captured, ever so poetically and poignantly, the aftermath of these events:

> We have entered a reality zone already captured by its opposite: unreality. It is a world where nobody really wanted to venture. It is a world where order has given way to disorder; where reason has given way to unreason; where reality is compromised by truth; where guilt is presumed over innocence; where the once noble search for explanations has been replaced by a dizzying vortex of plastic flags, stars and stripes rhinestone belts, coffee klatch war strategists, Sunday barbecue patrioteering, militant denunciations of war protestors, a generalized fear of whatever lies ahead, xenophobic hostility, and point-blank outrage. Soccer moms in sports utility vehicles festooned with images of Old Glory park in dimly lit alleys and then slink into the local sex shop in search of red, white, and blue thongs for couch potato husbands strangely rejuvenated by daily doses of carnage, courtesy of CNN. Public school teachers across the country eagerly prepare new courses on Western civilization. Politicians sporting American flag lapel pins plan ways to purge domestic political dissent. Hollywood producers hunker down in their studios and plan new Rambo films. Retired generals shine in their new roles as political consultants, pronouncing the scenes

> in Afghanistan as invariably "fluid," which is a giveaway that they do not know much more than their interviewers, and probably less. Harvard Law School Professor Alan Dershowitz basks in the national limelight again, this time advocating the use of "torture warrants" in specified circumstances when the issue of "time" is crucial. Their reason paralyzed by fear and replaced by the logic of mob fury, American citizens eagerly give up their right of habeas corpus for government assurances that terrorists will be tracked down and killed, or if they are captured, for assurances that they will be tried by secret tribunal and then killed. (McLaren, 2002a, pp. 169–170)

What is most instructive in this evocative prose is the interweaving of the discourses of the state, the citizenry, the corpus, transnational corporatism, the media, and the military. McLaren was, with startling foresight, ultimately addressing the death of civil liberties, of democracy, and of American-led geo-political dominance in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001. He spoke of the role of news media in legitimizing images of death and destruction in the name of freedom and of popular texts that (covertly) act to normalize warfare, torture, the demonization and pathologization of the other, and the absolute moral (and theocratic) 'right' to impose 'democratic' values throughout the world. Absent, however, in this passage from McLaren, and indeed from a vast majority of academic and popular writing after September 11th, 2001, have been discussions of the place of mediated sporting spectacle in understanding the narratives of this date. As argued by Stempel (2006, p. 82), this is despite sport's being one of the "most explicit and mythologized public spectacles of competition, power, and domination. Consequently, they are important sites where Americans are registering, managing, and shaping the complex feelings about their power position in the post-9/11 world." This book, which draws on those who have countered this trend by centering on sport—especially the work of Michael Butterworth, Josh Newman, Michael Giardina, Kyle Kusz, Mark Falcous, Ted Butryn, and Samantha King—is but one small step towards understanding the ways in which televised sport, in concert with a coterie of commercial, state, and military 'partners,' became complicit with the Bush regime in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001.

This book, then, is about attempting to explain a moment in time, the aftermath of the events of September 11th, 2001. As will become clear, even though this is an important date, the messages, narratives, rhetoric, policies, and structures that acted upon (and within) sport in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001, have a deeper history. That is, the embedded nature of the sport and the media, the role of the media as a harbinger for war / nation, or indeed, the use of sport as de facto cultural shorthand for nation (see Silk & Andrews, 2001) did not magically appear as a knee-jerk response to the events of this day. These structures and processes have been in place for some time, and have been delineated at length in excellent scholarship

that has identified the relationships between sport, the media, and (national) culture (e.g. Andrews, 2006; Angelini & Billings, 2010; Bairner, 2001; Billings, 2008; Boyle & Haynes, 2008; King, 2009; Maguire, 1999; Newman, 2010; Rowe, 1996; Rowe, Miller, & Mckay, 1988; Wenner, 1989; 1998; Whannel, 1992). Yet, even though they were part of a continuous process, the events of September 11th, 2001, did, as Peter McLaren's narrative above alluded to, provide a new context for understanding the relationships among sport, television, culture, pedagogy, and politics. This was a moment in which the state visibly returned (if it had ever been away), in which the military further capitalized on sporting narratives, in which the ruling elites appropriated sport as a space in which to forward political rhetoric, in which the collective affinity between the Pentagon, Hollywood, and the networks reached new heights, in which corporate entities operated to contour national narratives, and in which a rhetoric of fear, terror, religiosity, and moral authority and absolutism was sutured into sporting narratives. Further, this was a decidedly undemocratic moment, in which citizenship—in its fullest sense—was suspended and in which being American meant supporting the war on terror and aligning with President George W. Bush. It was a moment in which dissent was silenced, a time in which it was not possible to fully articulate a sense of being American outside that which was normalized; it was a moment in which George W. Bush appropriated sport and television, mobilizing the affective realm of the mediated sporting spectacle—the popular—to harness, educate, and advance, through sometimes (not so) subtle rhetoric, a particular geo-political trajectory built on economic, military, religious, and ideological domination. This was a moment, then, in which the banal, the sporting popular, was harnessed, politicized, and, as an affective public pedagogy, deployed as soft-core weaponry in a hard-core militarized industrial complex, fighting wars on both a domestic and national stage. In short, this was a moment in which a number of interests—sporting, state, corporate, philanthropic, military—operated with a seeming collective affinity to conjure up nation, to define nation and its citizenry, and to demonize and pathologize others. It was, quite simply, a moment in which televised sport, as a powerful and highly visible pedagogic weapon in the armory of the Bush administration, operated to define ways of being American and thus occlude other ways of being. This book is my attempt—I could not have done it alone, and have thus drawn on a number of key scholars to aid in framing the argument—to further understanding of the ways in which the meta-narratives of the war on terror become "institutionalized" and "embedded" (Croft, 2006; Jackson, 2009) in the sporting popular.

Much has been written on the relationships between television and September 11th, 2001. The majority of this scholarship has been centered on news coverage, with some work addressing 'popular' texts such as *The West Wing*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *24*. I draw on such works throughout this text. However, in this text, I am interested most in widening the lens from

news coverage to explore how televised sport acted to channel the nation towards 'normalcy' (see Spiegel, 2004), (re)assert a particular definition of nation and of 'other,' legitimate certain national subjects over others, offer support for a state-led 'war on terror,' and (re)affirm the (neo)imperial trajectories of the neo-liberal market. In this sense, and following Ladson-Billings, I attempt to contribute to the important discussion of how the events of September 11th, 2001, were shaped, what conversations about the event were 'allowed,' and who had the relative power and capacity to influence our understandings of the event. Ladson-Billings (2003) suggested three epistemological themes, which in many ways form the underpinning for this text. First, she proposed, was the very definition of humanity. From the very moment of the first attack, official rhetoric informed us that a binary logic was pronounced: an 'us' and a 'them.' 'We' were human, moral, and civilized, whereas they were mad, lunatics, deranged; 'they' were terrorists accompanied by a compelling, yet pre-modern, symbolism that clearly labeled 'them' as 'non-Western.' Second, the date became the dividing line by which we could 'measure' *our* citizenship. For, even though September 11th was a significant date that, as Ladson-Billings (2003) proposed, colored almost all public discourse in the US, it will take history to determine whether it will become a teleological fault line. For Ladson-Billings (2003), there are an infinite number of chronological combinations—pre–April 4, 1968 (assassination of Martin Luther King) and post–April 4, 1968; pre–summer of 1963 and post–summer of 1963 (bombing of the little girls in the Birmingham, Alabama, church); pre–summer of 1955 and post–summer of 1955 (murder of Emmett Till)—that impact her ability to understand herself and any claim she had to be American. Many other Americans will have deeply personal as well as other more public reasons to anoint particular dates with the power to explain their citizenship / themselves. Yet, in this regard, after September 11th, 2001, any other (individual) notions of what is or is not important "become subjugated to this new indicator that is reinscribed in every newspaper, every broadcast and every popular media outlet" (Ladson-Billings, 2003, pp.7–8). The third epistemological undercurrent relates to the rigid, fixed, and narrow definition of who and what constituted an American in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001. With little room for dissent and challenge, Ladson-Billings (2003, p. 9) suggested a retreat to a nativist and parochial thinking about "who we are and who or what the 'Other' is", a constitution that immediately becomes problematic in a globalized world and exceptionally uncomfortable for non-white Americans. As such, the post September 11th, 2001, period was 'narrated' through a variety of 'official' (state) and unofficial (popular) forms—from *Sesame Street* to *The Hurt Locker*, *American Idol* to *Law and Order*, *24* to the embodiment of tattoos, the display of the flag to 'innocent' books that depicted 9/11 such as 'From the Mouths of Babes,' from *Wonder Woman* to *The Incredibles*, from Colin Powell on MTV to Britney Spears performing at the National Mall in Washington, DC, on the opening day of the 2003

National Football League season, and from *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* to *The West Wing*—that deployed selected meanings and rhetoric to produce a dominant way of knowing about September 11th, 2001.

SPORTING SPECTACLE & CULTURAL PEDAGOGIES

Building on these three epistemological themes, Croft (2006) suggested that the 'popular' media contained a meta-narrative of response. For Croft (2006, p. 69), the four key elements of this narration dominated and paved the way for the development of the 'war on terror' as the dominant discursive response to the events of September 11th, 2001. These were the construction of an enemy image; the avoidance of assigning blame to any party other than the enemy; a definition of core values that were at risk; and a claim to global leadership in which these values were global as well as American and in which the world accepted American leadership in protecting them. Within this text, drawing on Ladson-Billings' epistemological underpinning and Croft's meta-narratives of response, I address the supposedly apolitical and the extremely popular: sport. Throughout the text, I interrogate the position of sport in the post-9/11 era within the themes of defining humanity, the reassertion of a national 'we' based on core values, the construction of enemy and the moral 'right' to spread 'democracy' (just as democracy at 'home' becomes devalued and diminished), and the ways in which the name-date (Redfield, 2008) serves as a dividing line for citizenship and civil liberties. This involves thinking about sport in quite markedly different ways; it requires thinking about the relative importance of ideology and affect in the construction and experiencing of everyday life, interrogating cultural (sporting) texts through a focus on how they operate within the material and institutional contexts that structure everyday life (Giroux, 2001a). This is especially the case in terms of understanding the relationships between sport and television in the post-9/11 moment. For, as Butterworth (2008) argues, expanding with an intensity after 9/11, spectacular productions of the national anthem, military flyovers, and frequent calls to 'support the troops' have become nearly as much a part of mediated sport as the games themselves. As such, this involves thinking about the role sport—as a popular cultural form—played in galvanizing the powerful ideological consonance of the Bush II administration (Newman & Giardina, 2010). It involves understanding the sporting popular as a site bounding which meanings about 9/11 were legitimate and what could meaningfully be said and understood about 9/11 (Hodges, 2011).

Suggesting that sport plays a role in the delineation of particular national (and imperial) sensibilities is, of course, far from new. The twentieth century witnessed a strengthening of the bond between the discursive (re) production of specific national cultures and select sporting practices, such that sport has become arguably the most emotive—peacetime—vehicle for

harnessing and expressing bonds of national cultural affiliation. Concretely grounded in the material relations of the temporal conjuncture, the simplification, amplification, (de)politicization, and (re)invention of nation in, and through, sporting discourse readily reflects and reproduces social hierarchies, is often highly gendered, and offers particular constructions of *the* character, culture, and the historical trajectory of people—constructions that by their very nature are acts of inclusion and exclusion (cf. De Cillia, Riesgel, & Wodak, 1999; Hobsbawm, 1990; Hogan, 2003; Silk & Falcous, 2005, 2010). Indeed, these 'narratives of nation' (Hall, 1992) at major sporting events are also far from new; David Rowe and colleagues (1998) suggested major sporting events such as the Olympics, World Cup soccer, and the Commonwealth Games are the most concentrated and powerful intersections of media, nation, and sport. In this sense, sporting discourses, practices, and experiences often serve as a juncture for particular dominant groups to further (re)define the parameters of *the* 'sanctioned' identity, and are often mobilized and appropriated with regard to the organization and discipline of daily life, in the shaping and 'education' of citizens, and in the service of particular corporate-political agendas (Giroux, 2001a; Grossberg, 1992, 2006).

Despite the role sport has played in the shaping of the citizenry, critical discussions of national identity in and through American sport have to some degree been absent (Bairner, 2001). Perhaps this is due to thinking of sport—national pastimes—as some sort of escape from the patterns of domination and subordination. Changing this way of thinking can be uncomfortable, yet it is crucial for critical scholarship. As Giardina (2005) suggests, perhaps nowhere more than in the affectively charged realm of the sporting popular do the intersecting vectors of race, national identity, and cultural signification come together to reveal the malleable tensions created at the ground level of such ephemeral border crossings. As such, through this text, I aim to bring into sharper focus how, following the events of September 11th, 2001, sport within the US has been deployed by powerful elites as a tool of social reform, cultural pedagogy, and governance. Indeed, even though this has always been the case, it seems the time for such examination is especially ripe. As Baudrillard (2001) remarked, not since Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima has there been one global symbolic event of the force of the events of September 11th, 2001. Further, as Denzin (2012) proposed, the attacks of September 11th, 2001, on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, and the now nearly decade-old wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have changed the context of global social relations. Indeed, the date September 11th, 2001, has become appropriated in the US, and served as a juncture for particular dominant groups to further (re)define the parameters of the American identity, and thereby the very essence of the 'other' (Said, 1979). As Redfield (2008, p. 220) suggests, it is important not to ignore the ways in which the name-date of September 11, September 11th, 2001, or 9/11 performs important rhetorical and

political work and which anchors all talk and analysis of '9/11' to a "haunting catachresis" linked to the violent denegation of loss, and a rallying cry for a phantasmatic, absolute war. It is most normally '9/11' that has been appropriated above and beyond other important historical chronological combinations. Yet, use of this shortened mnemonic device is problematic and points to the relative capacities of dominant groups to define or refine the parameters of national rhetoric, what is remembered, by whom, and in what ways (see also Eisenstein, 2002). For example, on September 11th, 1973, in Chile, a US-backed coup ousted the democratically elected regime of Salvador Allende; however, this date has not become widely appropriated as synonymous with Chile, despite the event's being arguably more profound in the national rhetoric of Chile than 9/11/01 in the case of the US (at the very least it was certainly more murderous) (Chomsky, 1993; see also Blum, 1995; Croft, 2006; Petras & Morley, 1975). As Ladson-Billings (2003) suggested, whether '9/11' serves as a historical teleological fault line is yet to be determined; it may well be utilized as such in rhetoric, but time and reflection is still required to judge this in history. As such, and recognizing the inherently problematic nature of its use, I use the term '9/11' from this point onwards in this book rather poignantly, as part of my attempt to show the political, pedagogical, and rhetorical function of its use in public and popular texts.

As indicated above, 9/11 is not a 'starting' (or indeed an end) point; the relationships among the state, corporate organizations, and the media (many of the lines between these interest groups are blurred) have a long history. The interest in this text lies in the relationships between sport and television—likewise, it is all but impossible to conceive of the two as separate entities—especially with regard to the ways in which they operate collectively to conjure up national culture. Following Kellner (1995, p. 5), referring to the realm of the global popular, "dominant forms of globalized consumer and media culture" (re)produce and (re)constitute the symbolic characteristics of the local (nation) in bold and empowering ways. What is of import here is that we are talking about the role of 'for profit' organizations in the (re)creation of nation through sport. In this sense, and as Andrews (2006, see also Jameson, 1991; Mandel, 1999) rightly pointed out, late capitalism's culturally inflected regime of accumulation is pre-figured in the operationalizing of the mass media (simultaneously as both core product and process); sport's evolution became inextricably tied to the rhythms and regimes of an expanding media-industrial complex. Indeed, Kellner (2003) suggested that there has been an implosion of sport into media spectacle and a collapsing of boundaries between professional achievement and commercialization which attest to the commodification of all aspects of life in the media and consumer society.

Building on Debord's (1967) society of the spectacle, Kellner (2003) suggested spectacles are those phenomena of media culture that embody contemporary society's basic values, serve to enculturate individuals into

its way of life, and dramatize its conflicts and modes of conflict resolution. Kellner (2003) proposed that this includes media extravaganzas, sports events, political happenings, and those attention-grabbing occurrences that we call news—a phenomenon that itself has been subjected to the logic of spectacle and tabloidization in the era of the O.J. Simpson trials (1994–1996), the death of Princess Diana, the Bill Clinton sex scandals and impeachment (1998–1999), the Battle for the White House in Election 2000 in the US, and, extending Kellner (2003), the kidnapping of Madeline McCann in 2007 in the UK, the fascination with the rise and fall of celebrities as diverse as Britney Spears, Lindsey Lohan, and Charlie Sheen, the untimely death of Michael Jackson, the Prince William / Kate Middleton royal wedding, and, importantly, the post-9/11 war on terror in the US.

Wary of Tomlinson's (2002) warning that academics all too often superficially invocate and reify the complexities of Debordian theorizing, I offer an albeit too brief conceptualization of the spectacle—and I would direct readers to far more comprehensive accounts which detail the complexities of the sporting spectacle (e.g. Andrews, 2006; Friedman & Andrews, 2011; Tomlinson, 2002; Newman, 2010). Debord (1994 [1967]) offered a complex and multidimensional account of the spectacle. Following Andrews (2006), the spectacle is composed of the upper-case Spectacle (the proliferation of mediated mega-events) and the lower-case spectacle (relentless outpourings of the corroborating and/or parasitic culture industries). This account provides both the monumental and vernacular architecture of what is called the spectacular society, in which the spectacle—as capitalist product and process—realizes a situation in which the "commodity completes its colonization of social life" (Debord 1994a [1967], p. 29). Further, in his later work, Debord (1990 [1988]) pointed to a new, heightened stage in the evolution of the society of the spectacle: the emergence of the "integrated spectacle" (Debord 1990 [1988]), which explicates the more contemporary conditions and the seemingly inherent contradictions in the increased governance of the marketplace (in terms of the commercial direction of social practices and subjectivities). Through the integrated spectacle, he suggested, the "autocratic reign of the market economy" has reached a new level of rational efficiency, such that the "spectacle has never before put its mark to such a degree on almost the full range of socially produced behavior and objects" (Debord 1990 [1988], p. 2, 9). Indeed, in our late-capitalist age of hyper-consumption, Debord (1994, p. 13) suggests, "in form as in content the spectacle serves as the total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system."

Speaking, then, to the broader social forces that nurture and sustain a consumption economy, Kellner (2003) argued that seductive (sporting) spectacles fascinate the denizens of the media and consumer society and involve them in the semiotics of a new world of entertainment, information, and drama, which deeply influence thought and action, dramatize social conflicts, celebrate dominant values, and project our deepest hopes

and fears. Following Kellner, then, the Debordian spectacle is a tool of pacification and depoliticization; it is a "permanent opium war" (p. 44), which stupefies social subjects and distracts them from the most urgent task of real life—recovering the full range of their human powers through creative praxis. In this sense, and somewhat reworking Andrews (2006), the spectacular principles and practices advanced by mediated sporting events suggest a moment in which "the spectacle has spread itself to the point where it now permeates all reality" (Debord 1990 [1988]), p. 9).

Given, then, the relative inversion of sport, media, and consumer society and the capacity for such 'popular' texts to 'seduce,' 'influence,' and 'celebrate dominant values,' the central argument of this text is that such material and symbolic processes have become mapped onto, and appropriated within, popular forms of culture, especially sport. In this respect, media sport serves as an economy of affect through which power, privilege, politics, and position are (re)produced. That is, in the tradition of Giroux (1994; 1995; 2001b; 2002; 2004a), Kellner (1995), and others (e.g. Barrett 2006; Costa 2004; Couldry 2008) who pointed to the importance of culture and the culture industries (and the discourses they produce) in the shaping, molding, and education of citizens, sporting spectacle is a virulent public, educational, seductive, and impactful discourse that conveys values, knowledges, and power relations. Further, that these cultural pedagogies are spatialized—that is, that they 'belong' to seemingly tangible socio-spatial (national) environments and relations—generates particularly compelling processes of subject formation through pedagogical relations and practices. Indeed, Debordian theorizing provides us with a lens for thinking about how control can be associated with capital; "it made clear that the whole industry of leisure, consumption, entertainment, advertising, fantasy and other pedagogical apparatus of media culture had become crucial elements of control, and thus a primary condition of politics" (Giroux, 2006, p. 38). However, in the post-9/11 era, characterized by multiple sites of cultural production and consumption (YouTube, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and so on) that offer new modes of possibility for agency and resistance (Giroux, 2006), it is possible to question the all-encompassing power of the spectacle. In such a new world order, it is more appropriate, as Douglas Kellner (2008) suggested, that we think about passivity and activity, consumption and production. For, following Kellner (2008), rather than viewing the spectacle as an all-encompassing, totalizing, and monolithic society, critical work can address the contestations, ambiguities, and contradictions of the spectacle (what Kellner termed the reversal of the spectacle). For, as opposed to thinking of the 'spectator' as scripted and passive, consuming the "spectacle as an alienation from human potentiality for creativity and imagination" (Kellner, 2008, np.), our investigations can be attuned to the differential (passive and active) impacts of 9/11, and indeed, how different groups deploy different media (e.g. the video messages from Bin Laden or indeed Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* [see Stroud, 2007],