

2 Arriving on the World Stage

In the summer of 2010, I had reserved several weeks of research time to visit Shanghai and explore the expansive Expo territory. Media coverage both in China and abroad had reported on the many superlatives that marked the event: it was meant to be the world fair featuring the largest number of nations, the largest territory, and the most visitors. The city itself was plastered with expo posters and public service announcements, some extolling the virtues of a ‘better city, better life’ — the official slogan of the event — while others used the expo as an occasion to promote specific institutions or companies. One large poster announced that ‘soldiers and civilians welcome the expo hand in hand’ (军民携手迎世博); another advertised ‘harmony alcohol’ (Hejiu 和酒), a drink that according to the ads also proudly witnessed previous national events such as Hong Kong’s return to the PRC, the establishment of direct flights to Taiwan, or the Beijing Olympics (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1: Advertisement for ‘Harmony Alcohol’ during the 2010 Shanghai World Exposition.

Image © F. Schneider 2010.

As I was travelling on the recently constructed metro line number 8 south to the expo stop at Yaohua Road, TV screens blasted expo news at commuters: '330 million visitors so far', 'temperature outside now 40 degrees Celsius', 'visitors should stay in the shade; drink plenty of liquids'. At the stop, I filed through the underground tunnels with the crowd, past the security check and main entrance, and up onto the walkway spanning the 'Expo Axis', an elevated concourse that ran from the southern Pudong entrances north across the territory. The red China Pavilion towered to the east, commanding immediate attention, and beyond it lay an impressive landscape of futuristic constructions. To the west, behind the large Expo centre and the theme pavilions, bizarre buildings rose before the backdrop of the massive Lupu Bridge. Below, thousands of people were lining up to enter popular exhibits, pouring into the shaded areas to escape the sun, marvelling at the grand edifices all around, snapping selfies, and filming the vistas on their mobiles. The lights, the sounds, the super-sized attractions, everything seemed designed to overwhelm.

The Shanghai World Exposition was a spectacle, a large-scale staged event that is organised in such a way that it has a profound impact on participants, due to its elaborate designs and multi-modal aesthetics. It was also a 'mass' event, in that it mobilised large numbers of people, and it relied on these masses to truly become spectacular. What is more, the spectacle was 'networked', bringing together a diverse array of actors who would plan, organise, execute, and ultimately embody the expo experience, which created a challenge, but also an opportunity to experiment with various ways of handling such complex interactions.

Throughout this book, I use the term 'networked spectacle' to describe major sports events, national celebrations, and international exhibitions, but what precisely characterises such events? In this chapter, I discuss how scholarship has traditionally made sense of staged events, what role mass mobilisation plays in that context, and what happens when events are mediated, for instance through broadcasting technologies. While many of these discussions also relate to spontaneous events such as natural disasters, accidents, and unanticipated social revelations, my focus here is primarily on carefully organised and widely anticipated staged spectacles.

An important question in that context is what makes an event a 'mass event'? What distinguishes, for example, a private birthday party, a friendly game of dodge ball, or a museum exhibit from a national anniversary, the Olympic Summer Games, or a world's fair? Intuitively,

the simple answer would be that it is the scale, and the degree to which an event is relayed through mass media such as broadcasting, that makes it a mass event. This indeed captures crucial dimensions of mass events, but it does not tell the whole story.

The experience at the Shanghai Expo I have described above provides a glimpse into the impact that a mass event can have on visitors. My first visit to the event left me, frankly, awestruck. I have since heard many visitors and participants report a similar sense of wonder when they recall their visits to the site; a sense that they were witnessing something extraordinary. This sense of amazement is a crucial part of networked spectacles more generally.

What, then, makes networked spectacles tick? One important observation about these spectacles comes from sociologists who have studied mass events, and who have argued that they constitute a specific ‘genre’ of collective human activity that has much to do with ‘modernity’. Another important insight stems from media studies scholars, who point out that media technologies shape the meanings of organised media events, that basic narrative templates turn them into shared stories, and that such processes create a wellspring of collective symbols that form a ‘symbolic universe’ (Berger & Luckmann 1967: 92-108). This ‘galaxy of symbols’, as Rydell (1984: 3) calls it, is then deployed to various ends. Finally, we should keep in mind that such events have profound, transformative social impacts and that varying stakeholders try to use them for their own political or commercial purposes. Together, these considerations then provide the foundation for understanding how and why the Chinese authorities have placed such a high premium on organising these types of events.

2.1 Mass events and modernity

To have better purchase on the workings of networked spectacles, this chapter explores the meanings of terms like ‘mass’, ‘media’, and ‘spectacle’, moving from discussions of organised large-scale events to mediated spectacles, and examining along the way what makes sport events, parades, or world fairs the highly political affairs I refer to as networked spectacles throughout this book. First, it is prudent to ask what marks an event as a ‘mass’ event. I have suggested above that the answer might simply be scale. After all, a group of friends playing

music together is a decidedly different 'happening' from a rock concert with an audience of thousands. However, it is not the scale alone that 'massifies' events. Scale is a shorthand; a container for a set of complex processes that inform how such events work. The scale of an event has organisational and social consequences, it is linked to the broad public appeal that organisers attempt to build into such an event, and it has psychological implications for those who participate in it.

All of these dimensions are closely tied to modernity. Modernity is a set of human actions and cognitive frameworks that imply certain ways of going about life. Where they are adopted, these modern ways of life have profound implications, radically restructuring our world across at least five dimensions, all of which are interconnected: economics, the environment, politics, society, and thought.

Economically, modernity emphasises industrialisation, urbanisation, and economies of scale. It implies increased connectivity between natural resources and chains of production, and widespread dissemination of material goods for rapid increases in welfare. These results, and the many shortcomings or 'distortions' that accompany them, can be brought about by a variety of mechanisms, be they centrally planned or derived from the capitalist model of ostensibly free markets.

The construction of modern economies is closely intertwined with urban development, industrial construction, and resource extraction, which in turn recast our natural environment in often radically new ways, with all the detrimental environmental impacts associated with invasive human activity. The scale of these changes has led some scholars to refer to our current historical period as the Anthropocene, an age in which humans affect their global environment more than that environment affects them (see Duara 2015).

Politically, modern modes of organisation combine territorially defined participatory politics and hierarchical decision-making structures to make it possible to govern the large numbers of people required for advanced industrial production, that is: the 'masses'. Much as with economic models, the challenge of governing large populations across expansive territories has generated diverse strategies, some authoritarian, others democratic, but all tied to the invention of the nation-state, a quintessential technology of modernity (see Gellner 1983/2006).

Socially and culturally, modernity creates pressures to reform or wholly abandon previously influential institutions, removing or

revamping the power of clans, families, temples, and churches, relegating many communal activities to the 'private' realm, and transferring power and the responsibility over public activities to the increasingly complex system of the nation-state.

This then also entails a conceptual rethinking of what society is and how people fit into the modern world. Modernity implies that human history is a linear progression through time, driven by philosophical enlightenment as well as scientific and technological progress, notably progress in the areas that 'shrink' our world (e.g. transportation and communication), and it prompts a number of ideological innovations meant to weave the disparate, disruptive elements of modernity into a coherent explanation of the world that suggests a fundamental yet inevitable breach with the times that came before.

Viewed this way, it should be clear that modernity does not neatly mark a specific historical phase or era. As I have discussed in the introduction, scholars of modernity have pointed out that the very idea of historical 'ages' or 'eras' is itself an invention of modernity (e.g. Graeber 2004), and I have suggested elsewhere (Schneider 2018: ch.2) that it might be fruitful instead to think of modernity as a 'mode' of social arrangement that has spawned a set of conceptual and practical technologies. This mode interacts across different times and places with other modes (e.g. 'tradition', 'the digital', etc.), imbuing each locale with modern rationales about how life should be organised, but also creating an endless array of variations on the modern theme (see also Gluck 2011, Hobwbawm 1983/2013), even if many modern assumptions have their origin in a specific 'Euromodernity' (Dirlik 2011c: 4) derived from enlightenment-era experiences dating back roughly three centuries (see also Dirlik 2011a). As a consequence, many contemporary societies strive to be 'modern', and yet, for example, Chinese modernity is not quite the same as American modernity, British modernity, Japanese modernity, and so forth. This is the result of complex human acts of social assemblage.

The reason I sketch these contours of modernity here is that the very idea of a 'mass' event is a decidedly modern affair. It is through the modern mode of thinking that artists, politicians, merchants, dissidents and so on invent the mass public in the first place; modernity opens up innovative ways for actors to inspire group cohesion, provide entertainment, teach certain lessons, illustrate their beliefs, and make a particular social reality plausible. As Collins (2004: 1647) writes, large-scale sporting events are, for instance, 'scheduled, predictable, and

contrived (using a ritual technology to generate what might be considered an artificial ritual experience), and they bring together a community that has no other coherence, and no other purpose, than the experience of the peaks of ritual emotions itself’.

Of course, pre-modern societies also featured large communal events, such as pagan festivals and religious celebrations (see Dowden 2000: 178-179 & 202-203), or contests like the ancient Olympic Games or Roman gladiator matches (see the various contributions in Christensen et al. 2014, particularly Dunkle 2014, Fagan 2014, and Kyle 2014). There are indeed parallels between these precursors and later mass events, which often pick up on traditional themes and tropes to then reinvent them in contemporary contexts. However, pre-modern antecedents that involved large numbers of people are themselves better classified as ‘large-scale events’ rather than as ‘mass events’, since the latter take on new qualities in terms of organisation, participation, and social relevance. During mass events, actors incorporate and tie together various elements of modernity, which sets these events apart from earlier examples. Take the idea of the international event: pre-modern events in ancient Athens or Rome, for example, may to some extent have been multi-cultural, drawing participants from diverse locales in the Hellenic and Roman worlds, but such spectacles were never ‘inter-national’ (i.e. taking place between nations) — the technology of the ‘nation’ had not yet been invented, and an ‘international’ order emerged only at the onset of modernity (Anderson 2006), after the late middle ages in Europe (Gellner 1983/2006).

In that sense, the mass event is itself a modern technology, and as such it requires a number of ideational and organisational changes to the templates that pre-modern events arguably provided, for instance recasting participants as ‘the masses’, designing the event as a vehicle for popular mobilisation, presenting the event as ‘historic’ and as an instance of ‘progress’, and tying its organisational practices to the nation-state and modern forms of industrial production.

This close link between mass events and modernity has ensured that these events have become a calling card for signalling modernist credentials. This is the case for national mass events like parades and mass assemblies, which serve to mobilise large numbers of people in the name of a modern cause while also signalling the citizenry’s ostensible support for that cause. Military parades are a good example of how a mass event template has become adopted and shared as a genre of

modernity (see Figure 2.2), even among actors who would otherwise insist that their modern projects shared very little in common. Despite variations in execution and message, the general format and iconography of contemporary American, French, Dutch, Russian, Chinese, or North Korean national celebrations overlap eerily with each other, as well as with past mass events organised e.g. in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, or Mao's China. A good example of this is military parades. It would seem that a society does not qualify as a modern nation if its state does not march its means of exerting violence across urban boulevards and squares at regular intervals. It should come as no surprise that those who agitate on behalf of radically nativist modern projects, for instance Donald Trump, are so enamoured by such displays of state power. Indeed, the lack of such events in countries like contemporary Germany and Japan often gives both foreign and domestic pundits with conservative, realist leanings cause to lament that these nation-states are not (yet) 'normal' members of international society.



Figure 2.2: Parades on France's Bastille Day, 14 July 1790 and 2014. Image (left): Wikimedia Commons 2017; Image (right): Pierre-Yves Beaudouin 2014 (both Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 4.0). (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bastille_Day_2014_Paris_-_Color_guards_034.jpg)

It is not just national mass events like military parades and state anniversaries that provide modernist certification. Events like Olympic Games and World Expositions similarly offer organisers the opportunity to showcase their relevance on the world stage in a widely accepted and shared international format. It is a mark of honour and respect to be awarded the chance to host one of these prestigious events, and host cities and countries use such occasions to boost their own 'brand'. This

has real social and economic consequences, which I will return to below, but the relevance of international events is to no small degree symbolic.

East Asian examples are illustrative in this regard: in Japan, the 1964 Tokyo Olympics were a watershed moment in the country's post-war reconstruction. The event signalled to the international community that the State of Japan had moved on from its wartime past and was ready to be a member of the international community. Moreover, the Olympic Games provided an opportunity to redesign the city of Tokyo in ways that would revitalise its symbolic relevance as the country's post-war capital (Tagsold 2010). Six years later, the Osaka World Exposition extended this sense of a fresh start, showing off futuristic architectural designs and technological innovations that would herald a new era of prosperity and respect for modern Japan (Wilson 2012).

South Korea's government attempted to follow the Japanese example in 1988 by hosting the Olympic Games in its capital Seoul. The leadership had initially hoped to legitimate its dictatorial politics, though the event later turned out inadvertently to have created a stage for the democratic opposition further to promote South Korea's political transition towards electoral reform (see Bridges 2008 and Larson & Park 1993), demonstrating how modern mass events can become arenas for complex domestic political assemblages.

The PRC leadership seems to have at least implicitly modelled its approach to international mass events on Japan's example as well. As Wasserstrom (2016: 10-11) writes:

China's leaders might have, at least in private, considered the Tokyo 1964/Beijing 2008 analogy compelling on several levels — even if their suspicion of a historic adversary (and present competitor) made them reluctant to voice this sentiment openly. China, too, had been rapidly climbing the global economic hierarchy and wanted to move higher still. It was preparing to follow its turn at the Olympics with its own Expo ... China's own modern history had seen moments of such destructive extremism (the Great Leap Forward) and defeat (Japanese invasions in the 1930s) that, by 2008, it had good reason to want to put those experiences far behind it.

The Beijing Olympics and Shanghai World Exposition showcased, in quick succession, images of a hyper-modern China that was ready to be a responsible partner in world affairs, and this imagery in turn promised

to legitimate the leadership's model of development, 'one that is neither purely state socialist nor free market, but that advertises a vision of success for the twenty-first century' (Fernsebner 2010: 66g).

The international mass event is an excellent format for generating a sense of membership in the international community, among both domestic and foreign audiences, since it provides an opportunity to present locally produced cultural and political discourses using an internationally acceptable grammar and iconography. Events like Olympic Games and World Expositions come with a range of international community markers, whether in the form of institutionalised rituals such as flag raisings, the playing of anthems, and other ceremonies, or in the form of background processes that have established themselves as 'best-practice' procedures, e.g. commercial sponsorships, advertising, and diplomatic protocols. To demonstrate literacy in this language of the mass event is tantamount to being initiated into the club of respectable modern nations.

2.2 Common themes in mass events

The close connection between mass events and modernity imbues them with a recurring set of themes, which often interact in contradictory ways. These themes are most visible in the discourses that mass events produce — in press announcements and speeches, in exhibits and ceremonies — but they can run deep through social interactions, informing how agents produce, stage, and experience such events. Scholars of mass events have examined the many modernist dimensions of event discourses in great detail, with Maurice Roche (2003) arguably providing the most thorough discussion in his seminal book *Mega-Events and Modernity*. I will confine my brief overview to some of the most common and most hotly-debated dimensions: the legacies of imperialism and colonialism, and the ways these legacies are implicated in racist and sexist practices; capitalist themes, particularly in their neoliberal guise, with their close connection to representations of modern science, technology, and design; and the ubiquitous tensions between nationalism, internationalism, supranationalism, and cosmopolitanism.

Many mass events have their roots in imperial projects of the 18th and 19th centuries. This is certainly true of the bombastic grand military parades popular for example in Victorian England, Napoleon's France,

Tsarist Russia, or the Prussian-led German Empire. Urban sites like the Arc de Triomphe in Paris or Horse Guards Parade in London remain monuments to such traditions. Yet imperialist themes have also been at the core of many large-scale exhibitions: the modern world fair may have officially started as a national exhibition in 19th-century France and England, but the format was intimately tied to, and in some instances coterminous with, imperialist ambitions that stretched far beyond the respective domestic context.

In fact, displaying faux native villages of exotic colonial lands and the goods and peoples of fantastic 'Oriental' places was a hallmark of exposition culture (see Qureshi 2011), for instance at 'imperial expos' and insidious colonial 'human zoos' (see Figure 2.3). Examples include the exhibits at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London with their breakdown of foreign cultures into colonial resources and raw materials (Greenhalgh 2011: 98 & 103), the 'displays' of actual Apache and Igorot tribespeople at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis (Gilbert 2009), or the many 'Völkerschau' colonial events in Germany, where organisers like zookeeper Carl Hagenbeck showcased 'savages' from Austronesia, Lapland, Northern Africa, or Greenland (Dreesbach 2005). Examining American expositions at the close of the 19th century, Rydell (1984: 6) writes:

World's fairs existed as part of a broader universe of white supremacist entertainments; what distinguished them were their scientific, artistic, and political underpinnings. Whether or not they were the most important sources for shaping racial beliefs, they certainly were among the most authoritative. International expositions, where science, religion, the arts, and architecture reinforced each other, offered Americans a powerful and highly visible, modern, evolutionary justification for long-standing racial and cultural prejudices.

Roche (2003: 57-64) has chronicled similar practices in Britain, highlighting the dominance of imperialist themes during a series of expo events in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, culminating in the 1924/1925 British Empire Exhibition in London's Wembley Park. His assessment of the ideological thrust of such events is worth quoting here in full (Ibid.: 60):



Figure 2.3: Colonial Exhibitions and Human Zoos. Left: Image titled 'Chief El Capitano and Archers in Negrito Village', 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition (Missouri History Museum, public domain); Right: Poster for the 1928 Human Zoo in Stuttgart (public domain).

... imperial expos were ideological vehicles used to impress national publics, and also to present an image to other imperialist powers. They typically displayed the cultures of their colonies as different, exotic and interesting, but also as flawed, inferior, stagnant or otherwise 'in need' of the imperial nation's intervention to control their destinies. Connected with this they typically developed and promoted a uniquely national 'civilizing mission' ideology involving notions of the imperial nation's scientific and technological superiority enabling them to create tangible improvements and 'progress' through transformation and land use, culture and people in the colonies. The British, French and Americans all had their own particular versions of this 'progress-bringing' 'civilising mission' as a thematic running through and connecting both their imperial expos and their more conventionally internationalist expos.

Imperialist ambitions and colonial practices infused the world fair genre with strong racist and orientalist currents, relaying the host country's 'civilising mission', and often putting the naked bodies of 'primitives' on display to fuel European and American colonialist rationales. It has been one of the core criticism of world expositions that such racist, and frequently sexist, fantasies remain undercurrents in contemporary iterations, albeit in subtler guises. William Callahan (2012: 256), for

instance, outlines the recurring practice at the Shanghai Expo 2010 of telling ostensibly cosmopolitan stories of intercultural exchange through the trope of inter-civilisational marriages between European or American men and Chinese women, reproducing subtle power relations through gendered and racially charged stereotypes, 'suggesting that this is the proper global harmony of East and West'.

Imperialist and colonialist representations with their many insidious racist and sexist themes have indeed continued to shape the narratives of mass events throughout their history, but they have also interacted in complicated ways with other themes, for example when proponents of universal suffrage or of workers' rights promoted more egalitarian ideas through sports or exposition genres. Indeed, mass events are full of such tensions, which should not come as a surprise: such events provide diverse social and political groups access to conduits of power (Roche 2003: 39), providing microcosms in which the social, political, and economic contradictions of the times come to be reflected. In a way, they allow actors to create what Jameson (2007: 15) has called 'utopian enclaves': spaces in which alternatives to the mainstream can be imagined and acted out.

This is particularly evident in the way capitalism informs mass events and their depiction of modernity. Organising mass events is made possible through state and industry investments, and capitalist actors in turn use these events to turn a profit while simultaneously promoting discourses that justify their preferred modes of production and consumption. These discourses are often steeped in modernist tropes of technological progress, urban development, and large-scale industrial or urban achievements (factories, edifices, bridges, etc). Just take as an example the industrialist exhibits that are regularly placed at the centre of modern world expositions (see Figure 2.4 for a historical example). What is more, mass events generate 'box office' revenues and function as trade shows, create big business opportunities for merchandising and advertising, and are also generally flanked by commercial activities in the tourism industry (Yu et al. 2012).

Yet as unabashedly capitalist as these events may be, they also provide spaces to reassess prevalent modes of development, for instance by moving away from economies of scale and emphasising ecologically sustainable local production and consumption patterns. They also offer unions and labour groups an opportunity to promote their causes, and



Figure 2.4: Quintessential Modernity: The 'Gallery of Machines' at the 1889 Exposition Universelle Internationale in Paris. Image in the public domain through the US Library of Congress (tag: PD-old-auto-1923).

they shine a spotlight on the relationship between professional and amateur activities, for instance in sports.

Another recurring thematic tension surrounds the role of nations at mass events. Nationalism is very much on display at world fairs, where 'national pavilions' have been a core feature since the 1876 Philadelphia expo (Roche 2003: 45). During Olympic Games and other large sporting events, contests are frequently framed as standoffs between national teams or athletes. A case in point is the antagonism that frequently accompanies competitions between East Asian national football or baseball teams (see Mangan et al. 2013), but such nationalist antagonisms also fuel sports spectatorship more broadly. The fervour that medal tables generate among supporters of Olympic national teams serves as a reminder of this nationalist dimension in an ostensibly cosmopolitan sports endeavour (see Van Hilvoorde et al. 2010). As Rowe and his colleagues write (1998: 133), 'there is surely no cultural force more equal to the task as creating an imaginary national unity than the international sports-media complex.'

Many mass events are decidedly inter-nationalist in this sense, meaning that they portray the world as naturally divided into nations that compete — but also cooperate — with each other on fair and equal terms. Nations, their states, and the idea of ‘countries’ are often conflated at mass events, and Penelope Harvey (1996: 50–51) has made the case that this is not per se a contradiction, at least not within the European and American model of society that provides the conceptual building blocks for modern mass events. She writes:

The model depends upon a metaphor of scale, whereby the larger unit, whether this is taken to be a national or an international community, reproduces the form of its constituent parts. Both part and whole function as self-contained, coherent, bounded entities which are mutual transformations of each other through simple principles of aggregation and disaggregation. These principles of equivalence between social units (individuals, nations, states, etc.) tend to naturalize a particular form of sociality in which each individual unit is deemed to hold a particular identity which can be represented and contrasted with other similar units. Thus, while individual units differ from each other, there is an equivalence in this difference.

However, international mass events have also been instrumentalised in the name of supra-nationalist endeavours, most notoriously by Nazi Germany, but also during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union and the United States of America each tried to co-opt the Olympic movement as part of their superpower ambitions (cf. Roche 2003: 112–115). Such attempts have at times departed radically from the egalitarian and individualist models of sociality that Harvey describes, and it is an open question whether contemporary iterations also betray such supra-national motives: some observers have for instance made the case that Chinese mass events are instances of a wholly different supra-national world model (see Barabantseva 2009, 2012), one that starts from the level of ‘all under heaven’ (*tianxia* 天下; see Zhao 2005), and then extends cosmological rationales to various other relations (e.g. between state and citizen, between husband and wife, between father and son).

I will return to such arguments in later chapters, especially in chapter 6, but it is important to note here that the constituent parts and themes of mass events do not always connect neatly. This is apparent

from the tensions between nationalist and cosmopolitan discourses: sitting alongside inter-nationalist and supra-nationalist themes, mass events also have a dimension that emphasises unrestrained transnational exchanges between individual people, civil society groups, and enterprises.

Take, for example, the theme of the Beijing Olympics, which explicitly envisaged an event that would bring transnational participants and audiences together as ‘One World’ sharing ‘One Dream’, or the way that the Shanghai Expo mascot I discussed in the introduction uses the Chinese character for people (*ren* 人) as inspiration. In a similar vein, the 2010 expo logo resembles three people holding hands, forming the Chinese character for ‘world’ (*shi* 世). Such thematic choices sit awkwardly next to nationalist flag-raising ceremonies at sporting events and displays of international power hierarchies in the form of exposition pavilions.

In all of this, modernist conceptions of science, technology, and design run through the mass events, conceptually connecting discourses of neoliberal capital, industrial nation, and cosmopolitan citizens of the world. Parades and ceremonies frequently feature floats, performances, or speeches that evoke technological development and progress, but the most arresting visual representations of this discourse are found at world expositions, where organisers create futuristic visions of what society should become. Again, these visions are never entirely unified. Greenhalgh (2011: 235) points out how ideas about design and architecture have created contradictions at post-war world expositions:

Most [expos] were the site of tensions between a number of visions of design and architecture: design as a means of supporting an expanding capitalist economy, design as a disinterested art form, design as a vehicle for political propaganda, design as an enlightenment tool for the creation of a better world. More simply, they celebrated the clash of material pragmatism with idealist utopianism. Never was the desire to improve the world more completely intertwined with the determination to make money.

Mass events indeed weave together civilisational messages with nationalist glorifications, racist prejudices, and sexist stereotypes, but they also juxtapose and contrast seemingly dominant visions of materialist, capitalist modernity with alternatives: with idealistic design choices, promises of egalitarian futures, and spaces for diverse interactions. This

makes mass events highly complex, multifaceted, and ultimately messy affairs that are, in Greenhalgh's words, 'all too human' (ibid.). But how do visitors interact with these many thematic tensions, and what happens to this complexity once mass events turn into *media* events, that is: once actors with access to mass media distribution networks relay meanings about such events, turning them into 'high holidays of mass communication' that hang 'a halo over the television set' (Dayan & Katz 1994: 1)?

2.3 From mass event to media spectacle

I have so far discussed mass events, that is: large-scale events designed and staged to attract mass participation by mobilising modern subjects as citizens and/or consumers. The genre of the mass event has traditionally been patronising in its messages, often explicitly and unapologetically so: opening ceremonies, parades, and exhibits are meant to teach, to showcase, to convince, and sometimes to preach. An open question is whether these didactics can have the desired effect, but also how the planned and organised mass event 'travels' as it is communicated more widely, using modern information and communication technologies like newspapers and broadcasting. What happens when the mass event becomes a *media* event?

Arguably the seminal work on media events is Dayan & Katz's (1994) study of ceremonial events that are televised live, such as sports competitions, royal weddings, state funerals, high-profile diplomatic exchanges, and so on. As Dayan & Katz show, such events become a crucial part of public life. The broadcasting becomes an almost sacred moment that commands the attention of national and international audiences. It interrupts and disrupts everyday activities, but it does so in a highly planned and advertised fashion, which in turn makes televised events an excellent vehicle for community building, political discourses, and the construction of historic moments. Dayan & Katz outline the stories that govern such media events, which they classify into 'contests, conquests, and coronations'; each of these genres provides communicative and narrative tools to create arguments about contemporary society and inspire various kinds of loyalty.

Dayan & Katz's account was pathbreaking at the time of its publication, and even though its cases and its singular focus on television may seem anachronistic now, the many insightful observations about how audiences

experience historic events through television can tell us much about mediation and media psychology. As Sonnevend (2018: 125) writes in her appreciation of Dayan & Katz's book, 'there are still moments that glue millions and occasionally billions to screens, there are still events that are discussed for years to come, setting a standard for future occasions'.

I will pick up some of these threads below, in my discussion of media priming and framing, but I will otherwise depart from Dayan & Katz's work in two important ways. Firstly, I trace many of the social and discursive practices surrounding mass events to domains that lie outside television broadcasting (for a similar update of iconic events in the context of transnational mediation see Sonnevend 2016). TV still plays a major role in how audiences experience mass events today, but so do digital reproductions of, interventions into, and alternatives to the classic broadcasting process, e.g. in the form of edited DVDs or Youtube videos. I have also analysed cultural products such as exhibitions, newspaper articles, online commentaries, PR materials, and so on, which requires attention to wider realms of mediation.

Secondly, and maybe more crucially, my interest goes beyond mediation; it lies with the various ways in which actors negotiate, collaborate, but also contest and challenge the meanings that get assembled at mass events. I am interested in how this multitude of actors uses mass events to experiment with and establish forms of governance. This is arguably a dimension that Dayan & Katz sidestep, and it is for this reason that my own analysis focuses primarily on networks.

Nevertheless, mediation is an important component of contemporary mass events, and the term 'media event' rightly draws attention to this dimension. Much of what was true for televised mass events at the time that Dayan & Katz published their work remains true today. For instance, it is important to call into mind the different audiences that play a role during mediated events.

As Rauer (2006: 260) explains, 'audiences' interact with mediated events and their messages at three levels. The 'first-order audience' includes the people who witness the event first-hand, for instance the visitors to a world fair or the stadium crowd at a sports event. Members of this audience are an important element of the spectacle, since they participate directly and become part of the performance or activity. Their interactions create the kind of 'entrainment' that Collins (2004: 85) discusses: bodily experiences, often based on collective rhythmic activities, such as cheering, laughing, applauding, enacting a 'wave',

hugging, singing, etc, and which create a large part of the emotional dynamics that make networked spectacles so powerful (see also chapter 5 in this book). As Collins writes (*ibid.*: 75), ‘this is essentially what the lure of the game-spectacle is all about: the pleasure of those moments of having one’s own emotions raised by a noisy crowd expressing the same thing.’

The ‘second-order audience’, following Rauer (2006), consists of the media workers who filter, rework, and relay the event on the ground. These specialists create the mass-media product that will then circulate through media networks, providing semiotic signposts for how to understand the event, and blending different potential meanings to create discourse. Through these interactions, media workers of course also witness the staged spectacle as participants, making choices as to what elements to represent and in what way, and their interactions can lead them to feel swept away by the entrainment that the event encourages. Second-order actors of this sort are not removed from the spectacle, they do not stand outside it as disaffected observers; they are part of the events interaction ritual chains.

Finally, the ‘third-order audience’ consists of viewers and readers who experience the event through media, e.g. through newspapers, radio, and television broadcasts, and increasingly through digital relay technologies associated with the internet. Importantly, these audience members are not passive consumers either; they blend various meanings as they experience the mediated event, and they interact with others, relaying their impressions through their bodily reactions and discursive statements, for instance as they watch the event unfold in a pub, celebrate it at a friend’s place, read about it in the news while sitting in a café amidst strangers, or comment on it at the office after having watched it at home, alone, with a cold alcoholic beverage.

In that sense, all of these actors, whether they are part of the first, second, or third order audience, collaborate in creating the discourses through their actions, for example by cheering or booing (first order), by assembling information and commenting on the event (second order), or by discussing the event with other media users (third order). Today, digitally enabled third-order audiences may even feed their own discourses back into the media production cycle, for instance when commenting on Youtube videos, ‘liking’ certain articles on social media, or micro-blogging live and directly to members of first-, second-, or third-order audiences as events unfold in real time.

Rauer's distinction between different orders of audiences is a reminder that networked spectacles involve a staggering number of people, in different roles, who all participate in constructing discourses. This is not to say, however, that the meanings that emerge through such events are arbitrary, or that generating these meanings is a free-for-all. Not all participants are equal. Organisers of networked spectacles have the power to set the guideposts within which discourses are subsequently constructed, and gatekeepers in the mass media are positioned at crucial nodes in the complex communication networks that allow them to decide if and how the event is relayed to a mass audience.

I have discussed above how network theory might shed light on how power works during these processes. In the remainder of this chapter, I want to point out two interrelated mechanisms that allow media workers to create the mediated event and assemble its discourse in ways that encourage specific interpretations. These are the ability firstly to construct the event as a spectacle and secondly to rely on certain psychological mechanisms to affect other actors: priming audiences with symbolic meanings, setting the news agenda once the event occurs, and framing the issues that revolve around the event.

2.4 Programming the spectacle

Mass events are a genre of entertainment, but they are also what Jäger (2004) has called 'discursive events'; they are opportunities to highlight specific issues and revamp their meanings. There are of course many more types of discursive events than those I discuss in this book, many of which come to function as 'natural' rather than 'formal' rituals (Collins 2004: 70). Natural disasters, wars and crimes, major accidents, or the activities of celebrities can all become discursive events in their own right. These are occasions for actors in positions of power to legitimate authority, rationalise social processes, and construct risks (see also Beck 1992).

Discursive events provide opportunities to politicise certain issues, i.e. turning them into problems that then require state action and the allocation of public resources (see Edelman 1988: ch.2). They can even lead to a process that scholars from the Copenhagen School of international politics have called 'securitising': the construction of issues as existential threats that require emergency measures that take place

outside the sphere of established rules (Wæver 2004). Discursive events can be occasions to stage a collective crisis.

These processes can play a role in any event that becomes relayed through discourses, mediated to a large audience, and constructed as spectacularly important. Mass events are particularly interesting in this regard because they are explicitly designed to be spectacular, and positively so. Such large-scale spectacles require a certain degree of 'buy-in' on the part of the audiences. Mass events encourage participants and viewers to suspend their disbelief; they prompt audiences simultaneously to view the spectacle as exceptional while accepting its premise and its messages as so crucial that they potentially become unquestionable. Spectacles consist of discursive manipulations that invite audiences to switch off their critical faculties and embrace coherent yet artificial narratives, at least for a time. I believe this is what Guy Debord (1967/2010: 12) meant when he wrote:

The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible. It says nothing more than 'that which appears is good, that which is good appears'. The attitude which it demands in principle is passive acceptance which in fact it already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance.

To Debord, the degree to which he believed society had embraced the spectacular was a matter of profound concern. While one might take issue with Debord's interpretation of spectators as passive audiences, much of his criticism is worth taking seriously.

That said, it is also important to acknowledge that spectacles are able to generate a 'monopoly of appearance' only because they are highly appealing and indeed rewarding. They have to be, otherwise they would not succeed. Witnessing and experiencing a spectacle is profoundly gratifying, since it promises to sweep us up in a comfortable, immersive bubble of fun and wonder. This is why we are able to engross ourselves in theme parks, fun fairs, blockbuster movies, page-turner novels, triple-A video games, and so on. The spectacular is enjoyable, both on a personal level and as a social event. Our interactions at such events imbue them with meaning and 'emotional energy' (Collins 2004: 68), which makes them memorable.

However, spectacles contain within them two major elements that make them ideological, in the pejorative sense that they promote a false consciousness of social relations that ultimately threatens to reinforce systems of oppression. The first issue here is that the spectacular is created through material processes that are frequently linked to acts of exploitation, e.g. when modern spectacles like theme parks or blockbuster movies are created within a capitalist economy that enables commercial elites to extract profits by deploying wage labour. Our pleasure as members of the audience is built on numerous invisible moments of alienation for those who are producing the spectacle for us: the builders and teamsters, caterers and technicians, turnstyle workers and cleaning personnel, and the many people who had to make way for the gentrification of entire event territories, e.g. through forced evictions.

The second issue is that spectacles artificially construct a sense of significance; spectacles do violence to anyone setting priorities in their lives that differ from those that the spectacle dictates. As a practical example, just try to avoid the attention-vortex of whatever TV series, sporting event, or celebrity scandal currently demands public engagement. It can be done, but it comes at the price of communal judgement and potential social isolation. These two dimensions of the spectacle have been a matter of serious concern for scholars of popular culture, fuelling much criticism by French poststructuralists like Debord, but also by critical theory scholars from the Frankfurt School or British Cultural Studies. In this line of argument, spectacles are designed in ways that reproduce inequalities while encouraging conformity.

Regardless of how we assess the power of pop-culture spectacles, my point here is that similar operations are at play in politics more broadly. As Edelmann (1988: 7) writes, ‘regimes and proponents of political causes know that it takes much coercion, propaganda, and the portrayal of issues in terms that entertain, distort, and shock to extract a public response of any kind’. He goes on to explain how spectacles generate meanings, presciently foreshadowing the discussions about ‘post-truth’ and the nature of fact that would emerge three decades later (ibid.: 10):

Accounts of political issues, problems, crises, threats, and leaders now become devices for creating disparate assumptions and beliefs about the social and political world rather than factual statements. The very concept of ‘fact’ becomes irrelevant because every meaningful political object and person is an interpretation

that reflects and perpetuates an ideology. Taken together, they comprise a spectacle which varies with the social situation of the spectator and serves as a meaning machine: a generator of points of view and therefore of perception, anxieties, aspirations, and strategies.

Edelmann has political events in mind, such as elections, debates, scandals, and the like, but the dynamics he describes are similar to those that characterise the spectacles I examine in this book. For instance, the ways in which Olympic Games or World Exhibitions make certain discourses salient and the degree to which they infuse recognisable symbols with pathos follow the patterns that Edelmann has identified for explicitly political spectacles. However, not all of Edelmann's spectacles are planned and staged as 'media events', to return to Dayan & Katz's (1994) terminology. The difference is that media events are designed as a kind of public holiday. They are intentional interruptions of everyday life.

2.5 The psychology of networked spectacles

In contrast to discursive events like natural disasters or high-profile political scandals, the kind of networked spectacles I have in mind are planned and staged well in advance. They retain the characteristic of other media spectacles, but the way in which they are designed allows organisers and media outlets to expose audiences over extended periods of time to the symbols and messages that relate to the event. These events function like public holidays that interrupt what people perceive as their normal everyday activities, as Dayan and Katz have shown (1994: 7 & 11-12, emphasis in the original):

... advanced notice gives time for anticipation and preparation on the part of both broadcasters and audiences. There is an active period of looking forward, abetted by the promotional activity of the broadcaster. ... The interruption, when it comes, has been elaborately advertised and *rehearsed*. It entails a major commitment of manpower, technology, and resources on the part of the organizers and broadcasters. It comes not as a complete surprise — as in major newsbreaks — but as something long anticipated and looked forward to, like a holiday. In order to make certain that

the point of this ritual framing will not be lost on the audience, the broadcasters spend hours, sometimes days, rehearsing the audience in the event's itinerary, timetable, and symbolics. Even one-time events can be ritualized in this way.

Dayan and Katz describe here what social and political psychologists call 'priming' (see Iyengar et al. 1982; Domke et al. 1998), that is: an attempt to anchor meanings, associations, and emotions through continuous exposure to certain signs. Priming takes place over long periods of time and in often banal ways (Billig 2009), for example through continuous low-key interactions with national flags or the symbols we encounter on coins, bills, stamps, and other everyday objects.

Through priming, we are each socialised into a shared cultural repertoire, a minimal consensus of what should be 'normal' background knowledge across a society. Actors involved in staging networked spectacles draw from this repertoire, and they also seed new symbols that circulate in the run-up to the event, until these symbols become recognisable stand-ins for the event itself. Mascots and flags are good examples of this, and I will discuss a number of cases related to China's networked spectacles in the subsequent chapters, especially in chapter 5, which explores national symbols. Importantly, state agencies, large corporations, and in particular mass media organisations are in a position to establish and circulate seemingly banal symbols that can become the foundation for a spectacle's iconography, generating the 'monopoly of appearance' that Debord was concerned about.

Once symbols and their meanings have entered into the accepted collection of background meanings, they can be used strategically to evoke certain feelings and create particular effects. They become available as a resource for cultural production, and they provide a convenient set of anchor points for the construction of the public agenda (see McCombs 2004). By covering major events in the TV news or on newspaper front pages, media organisations draw attention to the events, increase their salience, and turn them into the kind of special holidays that Dayan and Katz (1994) have analysed. Continuous priming constructs the event as a historic moment in the minds of potential spectators, and once the actual occasion arrives, it becomes reasonable that the event would monopolise public life.

There is then a two-fold connection between priming and agenda-setting: on the one hand, the news media can fulfil their agenda-setting

role only if there already is a public consensus about the general relevance of the impending spectacle. As McCombs (*ibid.*: 13) writes:

the public is not a collective automaton passively waiting to be programmed by the media. The pattern of media coverage for some issues resonates with the public. For other issues, there is no relevance.

That relevance is constructed over long periods of time, and it is negotiated between a multitude of actors. On the other hand, the media workers and journalists who make the networked spectacle salient in public discourse need themselves to be convinced that the event warrants that kind of coverage. That conviction may be grounded in commercial rationales, organisational incentives, or ethical considerations, but it is also primed over an extended period. Priming, in that sense, is the result of lengthy interaction ritual chains that involve recurring symbolic resources, but in such a way that these resources remain the focus of low levels of attention, moving them progressively into the 'background' of social rituals. As members of their societies and as the 'second order audience' of the networked spectacle, journalists are thus socialised into the meanings that relate to the event, much like anyone else; their decisions on whether or not then to report the spectacle is informed by the understanding of its historic importance that they have arrived at in the run-up to the actual event.

The final mechanism through which networked spectacles act as 'meaning machines' (Edelmann 1988: 10) is through a process that communication scholars call framing. Whereas agenda-setting is the act of convincing people that a particular issue is worth thinking about, framing is the act of pushing a particular interpretive framework on that thought process. It is an activity through which agents try to guide the perception, understanding, or interpretation of a piece of information by drawing on a set of signs and forcing a specific code onto the communication process.

To give a practical example, it makes a difference whether I speak of digital technology in language that suggests individual liberty, empowerment, and progress, or if I speak of the same technology in language that suggests deteriorating social relations, cultural or moral decline, and mental illness. Similarly, consider how a news source can warp the discourse on refugees arriving in a country by seeding its report

with words like 'flood', 'hoards', 'chaos', etc., as opposed to 'chance', 'energetic', 'skilful', and so on. Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 43 & 120) describe how most meaning-making processes utilise 'frames', by which they mean that actors 'recruit' certain basic concepts or relations from exiting cultural tropes and entrenched background knowledge into their conceptual efforts. These processes need not be sinister, but in mass communication actors frequently deploy frames strategically, trying to invite audiences to accept the meanings that these frames imply as self-evident.

Spectacles themselves become frames in this way, not just through the use of certain word groups, but also through the use of visual and acoustic cues. This is how Beijing's Olympic Summer Games can become either an example of 'One Dream' or 'the genocide Olympics'. Framing enables people, or groups of people, to tell certain stories about the spectacle.

What is more, the 'meaning machine' that is the networked spectacle pulls together so many different discourses that it becomes the ideal site for framing all manner of issues. Environmentalism, economics, culture and society, politics... any topic that can legitimately be associated with the spectacle can become the subject of elaborate framing work, allowing different actors to create their preferred interpretation of the issue. Recall how actors at imperial expos framed their colonial ambitions: presenting foreign peoples as 'savages' and using the language of the civilising mission were precisely what generated a discourse that could be deployed in support of imperialist practices and that frequently overrode any potential ethical concerns, ultimately encouraging contemporaries to view these practices as dictated by common sense.

To sum up, I believe it is helpful to view networked spectacles as complex assemblages of meanings whose range extends much farther than the sites of the event itself. They are, as Latour (2004) would argue, never entirely 'local'. Through various media technologies, the discourses about the event and the issues related to it travel to much broader audiences than the people 'on the ground'. The events become occasions for discursive work within widespread networks.

It would be easy now to view these spectacles as technologies of mass persuasion, especially since they are at times intended to be precisely this. The Chinese government, for instance, is unapologetic about the idea that news media should 'guide public opinion', a phrase that implies a moral imperative of the party and state to frame issues of public relevance, and this rationale extends to China's networked spectacles.

The many interlocking mechanisms and layers of communication that these spectacles draw from may even suggest that they are indeed powerful tools of indoctrination, especially in the hands of a leadership that is so strongly focused on didactic ‘thought work’ and strategic communication. However, this would be a misrepresentation of how communication works and what role different people play during such events. As Roche writes in his discussion of early world fairs (2003: 76-77):

Expos, particularly imperial expos, clearly involved the production of ideological and propagandist discourses by powerful elites intended to ‘inform’ and ‘educate’ (or, more cynically, dominate and/or hegemonise) the masses in general and the new urban industrial working and middle classes in particular. However, the messages themselves were often ideologically complex, were carried in spectacular symbolic and dramatic forms open to varied interpretations, and their effects on public attitudes were also complex and ambiguous. ... Rather than seeing this simply as ideological propaganda intended to fool the masses, it is more realistic to see much of this as expressing the perceptions, values and idealism of contemporary elites, authentically expressing the fact that they were as ‘fooled’ (if this is the language we must use) as the masses by the almost magical productivity and powers of the new capital-labour relationship they had constructed.

I have quoted this passage in full because I believe Roche is right when he warns against overestimating the potential of mass events to ‘fool’ specific target audiences. This is precisely why the terminology of discourse theory and conceptual blending is helpful: discourse is communicated background knowledge; we all rely on such knowledge, and it can prime us with assumptions, focus our attention on certain issues, and frame the way we discuss them. This is not, however, to say that we are slaves to discourse. Discourse also enables, though it arguably enables different actors to very different extents. Occasions like networked spectacles allow some agents to position themselves politically and re-calibrate political discourses in ways that are beneficial to their personal or organisational projects. Indeed, if we follow the logic of discourse theorist Michel Foucault, discursive practices interact in constant feedback loops with social practices. Being able to stage, engage with, and ultimately

use staged spectacles in certain ways is a matter of positioning oneself centrally in networks, enabling collaboration among allies, preventing perceived antagonists from taking part, and programming the interaction networks with discourse. In short: it is a matter of power.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how large-scale events enable diverse actors to interact with each other, create meaning, and ultimately experience entrainment: a process of bodily engagement that makes meanings memorable and powerful. Particular sites for such interactions are mass events, that is, staged rituals that encourage large-scale participation and that are closely tied to modern modes of being, thinking, and producing. Such mass events draw many of their practices and meanings from pre-modern antecedents, but they also differ markedly from such earlier events, relying for much of their meaning-making on modern concepts such as capitalism, the individual, the metropolis, or the nation, even as such concepts may not always fit together neatly.

With the advent of modern forms of communication, mass events have largely unfolded their relevance through the way that media organisations have mediated their meanings. Events like modern sports spectacles or world expositions are not merely experienced by first-order audiences ‘on the ground’, though this level of interaction is still crucial to generate the emotional force that such events frequently relay. Actors like journalists, producers, editors, camerawomen, and so forth, plug into event networks and relay their own discourses to much broader audiences, who in turn draw conclusions about the event and its themes based on these media resources, but also through their interactions with other actors across the various ‘orders’ of audience.

Staged spectacles like national anniversaries or the Olympics sit on top of social interactions, background knowledge, and the idiosyncrasies of human psychology. As such, they promise actors who are able to position themselves centrally in a spectacle’s production and dissemination network to seed selected symbols, make certain discourses salient, and encourage meaning-making within specific frames. Networking a spectacle is a matter of power.

This is not to say that the discursive and social processes of a networked spectacle can be dictated and controlled ‘top down’. The idea

that the networked spectacle can serve as an effective vehicle to guide opinion may nevertheless be enticing to stakeholders, whether these actors are well-meaning or not. The activities of such stakeholders, for instance within the state or among branches of industry, invite complex interactions that range from negotiation and collaboration to resistance and rejection. In China, the ruling party has creatively sought to channel these interactions for its own purposes, and it is these processes of governance to which the next chapter turns.