



Book Review:

Media Events in a Global Age

Couldry, N., Hepp, A., & Krotz, F. (eds) (2009),
Media Events in a Global Age,
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Contributor Note

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The modern Olympics has grown from a small international gathering of athletes to a major international event of global significance. Some acknowledgment of globalization is thus a prerequisite for understanding what the Olympics have become. Among those who advance globalization as a worthwhile subject of analysis, three positions suggest themselves. The first affirms that human migration and trade routes have long been global in scope; one can map the socio-geographies of globalization against the long durées of history. Secondly, it can be argued, following world systems theory, that globalization meshes with the geographic expansion of market capitalism and that current world networks are not substantially new. The third position foregrounds the distinctiveness of contemporary globalization and global capitalism. These formulations are analytically separable but the processes they refer to are intrinsically connected (Jameson 2010: 435).

Contemporary globalization is encapsulated by several developments. With the decolonization of Western empires and the demise of The Cold War, various cultural modernities intermingled across the globe, a process facilitated by

the spread of transport, information, and communication networks. Across these networks, different kinds of time measurement have taken shape. Demarcations of clock time and world zones which were standardized in the late 19th century, now confront the real time capacities of wireless telegraphy, telephony, terrestrial/satellite/cable broadcasting, networked computers and internet based social interaction. The communicational logic of simultaneity and instantaneity coexists uneasily with the chronological and geographic imperatives of clock time.

Contemporary global capitalism was presaged by the collapse of national and third world liberation movements, Soviet communism, and national Keynesianism. Real time information-communication technologies have made easier the globalization of financial flows, production networks, media organizations, and advertising strategies. Concurrently, transnational corporations, global banks, and supra-national institutions (e.g. WTO, IMF, World Bank, World Economic Forum) dominated the global system. And, governments worldwide adopted, to varying degrees, the neo-liberal policy precepts of

monetarism, privatization, deregulation, and marketization.

Globalization and global capitalism are not mutually exclusive concepts. Frederic Jameson observes that one might 'emerge into a postmodern celebration of difference and differentiation; suddenly all the cultures around the world are placed in a tolerant contact with each other in a kind of immense cultural pluralism which it would be very difficult not to welcome' (2010: 437). From an economic perspective, according to Jameson what begins to infuse our thinking is a picture of standardization on an unparalleled new scale; of forced integration as well, into a world system from which 'delinking' is henceforth impossible and even unthinking and inconceivable (Jameson 2010: 438).

The double optic of globalization and global capitalism allows us to observe the full significance of global media events. The Olympic games for example can be sanguinely depicted as a four-yearly ritual of international sporting rivalries, as a festival of transnational cosmopolitanism and as a celebration of universalistic values; human kind-ness, peace, equality, and fair play. These depictions are choreographed as a globally televised event comprised of

opening and closing ceremonies and a multitude of sporting encounters involving individuals, groups, and teams from different countries. The worldwide engagement of ordinary people via mass media and internet communication confirms the Olympics' global stature. At the same time, the Olympics are enmeshed within the commodity circuits of global capitalism. Each gathering facilitates corporate branding (of ceremonies and sports venues), and corporate sponsorship (of athletes, teams, and sports equipment). Olympic centred media events unify the commercial objectives of advertising agencies, media-communication conglomerates, and sports focussed corporations to produce a standardised culture of spectatorship and consumerism.

The editors of *Media Events in a Global Age*, Nick Couldry, Andreas Hepp, and Fredrich Krotz note how global developments have transformed media events and posed a challenge to established research findings on the subject. The seminal text here is Daniel Dayan's and Elihu Katz's *Media Events* (1992). For them, the media event was of a genre of communication which interrupted schedules and formats

across all mass media—radio, television, and print. Three basic event scripts are identified. The *contest* unfolds according to agreed rules of engagement in a designated stadium or arena. Standard examples would include the Summer and Winter Olympics, the Soccer and Rugby World Cups. The *conquest* entails the accomplishments of a hero or heroic group. Such was evident during the first Apollo moon landings in the late 1960s. The *coronation* is an elaborately prepared ceremonial ritual such as an American Presidential election, a British Royal wedding or an historic state visit from a major world leader. Each of these basic scripts unfold as live occasions appealing to disparate audiences within and across countries. Live media events thereby instantiate rituals of social integration around a shared set of values. In this regard, Couldry, Hepp, and Krotz argue that a national perspective is implicit within Dayson and Katz's schema. Live media events are assumed to be vehicles of national cohesion. As soon as a global perspective is employed, however, the variety of media events-based representations extends beyond Dayan and Katz's script categories. And, media events with major global significance such as the Olympics are mediated in multiple ways

depending on one's regional, national, and cultural background. For Couldry, Hepp, and Krotz, there has been an epochal shift in the discursive formation of mediated culture:

In a time of globalization, communicative connectivity is becoming more and more deterritorialized. With the distribution of media products across different national borders and the emergence of the internet, global communicative connectivity grows, making the thickenings of national "media cultures" relative and overlapping. (Couldry, Hepp, & Krotz 2009: 10)

On this account events are not phenomena that refer primarily to a territorialized cultural space, rather, they are transnational and transcultural phenomena produced by real time interactions between mass media outlets, the internet, and emergent social media (incorporating the technological software and personal applications of iPads, iPhones, Facebook, Twitter, and Cloud computing).

As a framework for the articles to follow, Couldry, Hepp, and Krotz's introduction is insightful but incomplete. The

globalization of communicative connectivity assisted by the internet underpins transnational networks of finance production and assumption. In this context, 'the distribution of media products across different national borders' reflects the reach of media-communication conglomerates and advertising agencies. These global capitalist organizations choreograph and exploit all kinds of media events.

The first section of the book reconsiders the nature of media events. Daniel Dayan's chapter updates his earlier work with Elihu Katz by pointing out that media events are not just representations of a single occasion or activity. More accurately, the Olympics, or a major state visit, each constitute a field of events comprised of various media voices and news frames. Thus, a major state visit from a US leader to a Middle East capital would be subject to the different live coverages of Al Jazeera, CNN, BBC, and other transnational television networks. Different aspects of the visit would be emphasized and discussed via internet streaming, blog posts, and other online commentaries.

Similarly, staged events with a long ceremonial history become less communal as individualized media

reception proliferates. As Dayan observes, 'one may watch the Olympics in a living room or even a stadium but in both cases the ubiquitous cellphone is a constant invitation to disengage from the surrounding community' (2009: 27–28). Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes argue in their chapter, that scripted media events have been upstaged by live coverage of disaster terror and war. The portability and availability of computers, phones, and cameras circulates graphic reportage of major disruptive events within 24/7 flows of breaking news. This reportage is received worldwide via computers and mobile phones, along with traditional television screens in public and private settings (2009: 32–42). Here, it is worth adding that globally transmitted information about a major disruptive event becomes rapidly drawn into other media and event related vectors of communication. Real time feedback loops thereby eventuate; their scale and density depending upon the magnitude of the event(s) in question. A financial collapse, military alert, or political assassination within a global city for example, will have multiple unscripted repercussions.

Douglas Kellner's perspective on media events is critical as well as explicatory.

He notes that mainstream corporate media in the United States processes news, information, and events in the form of sensationalized media spectacles with dramatic structure and momentum. They are commercially driven by 24/7 cable television, talk radio, internet sites and social media. For Kellner, some spectacles are specifically constructed and subject to various contestations. From September 2001 for example, the Bush/Cheney administration, media corporates, and associated opinion leaders orchestrated a 'war on terror' to facilitate the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. From 2003, the military-media orchestration of 'shock and awe' framed the invasion of Iraq. These spectacles were challenged and reinterpreted by Middle Eastern, Pan Arab television networks, and by critics of US foreign policy in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Kellner's schema also includes disruptive terror spectacles such as the initial 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. Also considered are spectacles of catastrophe deriving from natural disasters such as the Asian Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina in 2004 and 2005 respectively. For Kellner, media spectacles exemplify the times in which they occur and encapsulate prevailing relations of power

and opposition. These critical insights advance beyond purely explicatory approaches to media events. However, Kellner's substantive analysis is US rather than globally focussed. Thus, he observes that the political spectacle of the 2008 US Presidential Election was, after the Lehman's collapse 'caught up in the spectacle of the possible collapse of the US and global economy' (2009: 83). The global dimensions of this development deserve fuller examination. This would require an underlying conception of the relationship between media spectacles and global capitalism.

Kellner's contribution reiterates the difficulty of separating major events, or event fields, from their mediation. The mediation process as such is the focus of Joost van Loon's chapter. He observes that there is no simple contrast between a mediated or staged event and a so-called non-mediated authentic event that takes place outside the realm of signification. It seems then that we inhabit a simulacrum of mediated event-worlds. Yet, we can also experience media-events as a distinctive interruption of everyday life routines. Loon argues that recognizing the significance of certain media events alters our sense of time. Ontologically

speaking, the mediated event is a rupture of time, a moment of release from the orderly and unremarkable (2009: 111). Suddenly, humankind's shared sense of existence, being, or Dasein (to use Heidegger's term) is disclosed to the world. Loon's insights allow us to distinguish between scripted events, the perpetually present flow of mildly disruptive events, and spectacles of commercialism on the one hand, from mediated mega-event fields on the other. The latter category would include 9/11, the fall of Lehman Brothers or, even larger such events in the future. These occasions are imprinted retrospectively, and in different ways, on our sense of remembered life. Loon's discussion draws upon Heidegger's early work on time, technology, and existential being. The global age brings the added recognition that different *kinds* of time are experienced everywhere. Thus, 9/11, a major financial collapse of a globally significant natural disaster may enhance a sense of epochality, a sense of networked immediacy, and a new subjective sense of temporal orientation in relation to past, present, and future. Globally, these different kinds of time will be simultaneously experienced. Between localities, socio-cultural interpretations of

these time experiences may differ markedly and generate political conflict.

Most other contributors to this volume provide heuristically informed explications of particular media events. Thus, Frederick Krotz, referring to Pierre Bourdieu, argues that ritual media events may be seen as the announced investment of symbolic capital by the institution which organized the event (in this case a German national holiday). Göran Bolin takes the example of the Eurovision song contest to investigate the idea that media events have no mediated centre. Robert Wildermuth takes the popular media event of the annual Miss World nomination in India to highlight broader ideological struggles concerning gender and national identity in South Asia. Nancy Rivenburgh researches the relevance of hosting global media events to gain prestige and favourable opinion via international media representations. Lisa Leung researches the eventization of social movement politics in the cases of WTO gatherings and recent political developments in Hong Kong. Andreas Hepp and Veronika Krönert examine the Catholic 'World Youth Day' as an example of the mediatization and individualization of religion. Roy

Panagiotapoulou draws upon the 2004 Athen's Olympic Games to show how the eventization of world sport promotes a diversity of national images.

Together these chapters richly illustrate the kinetic cultural pluralism of contemporary globalization. The editors and contributors have demonstrated

conclusively that media events, broadly conceived, are enmeshed within, and marked by the 'global age'. As I have indicated, however, this is also an age of global capitalism. Editorial recognition of this configuration would add considerably to any future volume of this kind.

References

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