Andreas Hepp and Nick Couldry

Introduction: media events in globalized media cultures

Book section

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

MEDIA EVENTS IN GLOBALIZED MEDIA CULTURES

Andreas Hepp and Nick Couldry

The interest in exceptional forms of media communication can be traced back to the

beginning of interdisciplinary media and communication research. We can think for

example of Hadley Cantril's (1940) study on the panic caused by Orson Welles' radio

play *The Invasion from Mars* (written with the assistance of Hazel Gaudet and Herta

Herzog). We find early research on outstanding ceremonial events in broadcasting (cf.

Lang and Lang 1969 [1952]; Shils and Young 1956; Chaney 1983). Other authors, more

cynically, like Daniel Boorstin (1963), complained about an increasing number of

"pseudo events" in media communication. However, in their 1970s and 1980s work,

culminating in the pathbreaking book of 1992, it was Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz who

brought this hitherto somewhat neglected discussion to a new stage, drawing our

attention to certain phenomena they called "media events".

In this introductory chapter we want to consider this intervention carefully, in its full theoretical context in order to establish the basis for researching media events today as an important aspect of power processes in a "global age" (Albrow 1996; Beck 2007). In doing so we want to reflect on the academic discussion that started from Daniel Dayan's and Elihu Katz' book *Media Events*, and resulted in a re-thinking and extension of the original concept. While we find highly important arguments in the original discussion, we need to update our understanding of contemporary media events within an analysis of globalized media cultures. Through these reflections we come — at least that is our endeavor — to a core definition of media events in a global age, that can offer an orientating frame not only for the different chapters of this book but also for future research.

MEDIA EVENTS: AN INTERVENTION

From today's perspective we can understand the book *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* and its preceding articles and chapters[i] by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz as an intervention in media and communication studies in at least a double sense: *theoretically,* it brought together the traditions of social science's mass communication research with semiotics-influenced media and cultural studies, trying to capture a new phenomenon of broadcasting; *methodologically,* it broke with the notion that a focus on the "average"—the "ordinary" viewer, the "normal" program or the "regular" production—is the only or necessary approach to studying media

communication in present cultures and societies. In contrast, and making a highly innovative link to anthropological research, Dayan and Katz argued strongly for the relevance of "single", "outstanding" ritual ceremonies in media communication: the media event.

Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz's intervention was made through a highly nuanced understanding of the phenomena of media events . In short, they defined media events, metaphorically, as "high holidays of mass communication" (Dayan and Katz 1992: 1),[ii] or more concretely as a "genre" of media communication that can be defined on syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels (Dayan and Katz 1992: 9-14): On the _syntactic level,_ media events are "interruptions of routine"; they monopolize media communication across different channels and programs, are broadcast live, pre-planned and organized outside the media. On the _semantic level,_ media events are staged as "historic" occasions with ceremonial reverence and the message of reconciliation. And on the _pragmatic level,_ media events enthral very large audiences who view them in a festive style. The main point of these criteria is that each of them as a single attribute can be found also in other forms of media communication; however when they come together, they constitute the distinctive "genre" of media events.

Drawing on Max Weber's three ideal types of authority (rational-legal, traditional and charismatic: Weber 1972: 124) Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz distinguish three basic

"scripts" of media events. First, the "contest" (like the Olympics) developed as a cyclical media event, taking place under agreed rules in an arena, stadium, forum or studio, person by person, marked by the drama of "who will win?" and presented in a non-partisan way to a judging audience, organized around *rational-legal* authority, and focussed on the present. Second, the "conquest" (like the televization of the first steps on the moon) which operates as a single media event, lying beyond any rules at the frontiers and limits of social space, with a hero acting against norms, belief or nature, marked by the drama of "will the hero succeed?" and presented in a bardic way to a witnessing audience, organized around *charismatic* authority focussed on the future. Third, the "coronation" (including in this category the funeral) which is not a fixed but recurrent media event, taking place based on traditions in public spaces, marked by the drama of "will the ritual succeed?" and presented in a reverent way to an audience renewing the contract with the center, confirming *traditional* authority, focussed on the past. The idea is that within this frame of three basic "scripts" all different media events can be analyzed, something Dayan and Katz go on to do focussing on the production and negotiation of media events, their performance in media coverage and their celebration by the audiences.

If we look at this intervention from today's perspective we can characterize it as an approach to <u>*ritual media events*</u> (Hepp 2004a: 326-32): the main argument for studying media events can be seen in their ritual character, and their role in the integration of societies. In this sense the approach to media events outlined by Daniel Dayan and

Elihu Katz can be understood as an attempt to describe important "mediated rituals" (Rothenbuhler 1998: 79), that is "ritual celebrations" that "may play the role of periodic social gatherings for the celebration of society as discussed by Durkheim" (Rothenbuhler 1998: 79). So Dayan and Katz's approach is marked by a "neo-Durkheimian" (Couldry 2003: 61) perspective in the way media events are researched as occasions "where television makes possible an extraordinary shared experience of watching events at society's 'centre'" (Couldry 2003: 61). Dayan and Katz formulate this, linking to Edward Shils (1975), when they write that the origin of media events "is not in the secular routines of the media but in the 'sacred centre' (Shils 1975) that endows them with the authority to preempt our time and attention" (Dayan and Katz 1992: 32). On this reading, media events *as a form of ritual* become a force of social integration:

> during the liminal moments [of media events], totality and simultaneity are unbound, organizers and broadcasters resonate together; competing channels merge into one; viewers present themselves at the same time and in every place. All eyes are fixed on the ceremonial centre, through which each nuclear cell is connected to all the rest. Social integration of the highest order is thus achieved via mass communication.
>
> (Dayan and Katz 1992: 15)

So in Dayan and Katz's account, the relevance of media events depends on their character as one of the most important institutions 'integrating' the highly dispersed

members of national societies — and maybe also beyond. We return later to some potential problems with this formulation.

APPROACHING MEDIA EVENTS: RE-THINKING AND EXTENDING

If we want to appreciate the reception of this ritual approach to media events, we first of all have to consider its origin more carefully. Our reference to the number of articles and chapters by Dayan and Katz published in the 1980s and early 1990s already indicates that the book *Media Events* was the outcome of a longer research process, beginning shortly after Anwar el-Sadat's journey to Jerusalem in 1977 (cf. Dayan and Katz 1992: 295). In this process, from 1980 to 1984 Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz held a number of seminars at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Annenberg School, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. At these seminars, a number of students participated who are nowadays well-known in the field of media and communication research; among others Tamar Liebes, Eric Rothenbuhler, Barbie Zelizer and Gabriel Weimann. These seminars not only influenced Dayan and Katz's approach to media events.[iii] Additionally one can find in the work of the young scholars at that time a thoroughgoing assessment of the original approach. This can be demonstrated from the work of Eric Rothenbuhler, Barbara Zelizer and Gabriel Weimann.

While taking the general approach of Dayan and Katz, Eric Rothenbuhler (1985; 1988) investigates the audience of the media event of the 1984 Olympics based on a representative telephone survey, asking whether the Olympics qualified as a celebration of a coherent set of values, beliefs and symbols through the formation of an special public around the media event. The idea was to examine how far the media event can be understood as a celebration of the "civil religion" of American society. Maybe the most striking point of this early empirical work is that while Rothenbuhler does not avoid the frame of standardized mass communication research or the analytical frame of the integrative character of ritual media events, his interpretation of his data already indicates the potentially contradictory character of the supposed 'integrative function' of media events. He highlights the inconsistency of media events when arguing (albeit in relation to Parsons) that "both the games and the values they celebrated were diffuse phenomena throughout American society" (Rothenbuhler 1985: 200f). This intense discussion was continued in the doctoral dissertation by Barbie Zelizer, published as a book with the title *Covering the Body: Kennedy Assassination, the Media and the Shaping of Collective Memory*. Taking the Kennedy assassination, Zelizer (1993) does not merely investigate the Kennedy funeral as a ritual media event (in Dayan and Katz's sense, a form of "coronation"), but the Kennedy assassination and resulting media coverage in its entirety. In this way, she demonstrates how far such a media coverage is intended as performances by the media or by other social actors who have an interest in _constructing_ reality in specific and perhaps conflicting ways, in order to establish

certain discursive positions and to maintain power. Within such a power analysis, we find an emergent critique of media events as a genre.

An additional assessment can be seen in the early work of Gabriel Weimann (1987; 1990), who was interested in researching media coverage of terrorism within the frame of media events research. Very early on she insisted on an understanding of "mass-mediated terrorism" as a further scenario of media events she called "coercions", meeting many of the criteria of ritual media events but in a conflict orientated way where rules are not affirmed but contested (cf. Weimann and Winn 1994: 108). Implicit here was a critique of Dayan and Katz's typification (conquest, contest and coronation) of media events which seems to have no space for such a conflictual process.

We can organize these early moments in the development of the media events approach into three main points of wider importance that structure the discussion that follows: a critique of a certain reading of the ritual perspective on media events, a critique of the core definition of media events as genres, and finally a critique of the narrowness of the three typical scenarios of media events (cf. Hepp and Krotz 2008: 266-7). Let us now discuss each in turn.

1. *Ritual perspective*: Dayan and Katz defined media events as rituals of mediated communicative integration and their considerations are often marked by a neo-

Durkheimian perspective focusing on the question of possible (national) order, although their argument can also be developed in other ways. The problematic assumption that needs to be isolated here is the consideration that "rituals are significant because they 'hold society together' and do so by affirming a common set of values" (Couldry 2003: 65): critiques of that assumption can be traced back to the early debate on media events, although such critiques were not always remembered when the "media events" concept came to be more broadly popularized by other writers. The problem with the account of media events if understood from within such a perspective lies with the implicit understanding of societies as being stable and marked by a shared set of values — an assumption that is highly doubtful when we consider contemporary fragmented 'late' or 'post-' modern societies, and maybe has always been doubtful. This problem is magnified when we move beyond a national perspective—the implicit frame of the Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz's original argument—to a global perspective. When we do so, the suggestion of media events as rituals of affirmed values becomes additionally misleading as the variety of media events-based representations increases (cf. Hepp 2004a: 332-40): when we consider examples like the Olympics it is obvious that they are mediated very differently, depending on the region and nation where you live.

Overcoming the problems of this neo-Durkheimian reading of "media events" would mean not assuming an integrative role of ritual media events but investigating them as "media rituals" (Couldry 2003) in a different sense, that is as forms of media communication that *construct* the "myth of the mediated centre". In such a perspective,

media events are forms of communication that articulate the power-related, hegemonic imagination of the media as the centre of present societies, as the expression of the important incidents within that society. Such an approach can allow considerable flexibility over the implications for value consensus (or otherwise) of both media events and indeed (see Bell 1992) for ritual itself. Therefore, a critical approach to media events should move these processes of construction themselves into the foreground of our analysis.

2. *Defining media events as genres*: Already in his review of Dayan and Katz's book , Paddy Scannell (1995: 153) had argued that the reverent and priestly style of presenting media events was not necessarily given (or at most could be seen as part of a specific historical style). Scannell (1999; 2002) himself has worked rather with a basic distinction between happenings (things that happen to us like an earthquake or a plane crash) and events (things that we make happen) and researches media events in their historical context as mediatized performances, an approach which overlaps with writers such as Roger Silverstone (1999: 68-77). In relation to Diana's funeral Roger Silverstone argues as follows:

> "The Diana funeral provides, in an extraggerated but triumphant way, an example
> of the way in which the blurring of audience and performer takes place on a
> public stage, both in the media and beyond its reach (though, of course, never
> completely beyond its reach). It also takes place on a stage, as a result of its
> mediation, which removes it from the realm of the personal and transforms each

moment into a fragment of a national or even global event. We might want, as a consequence, to think about it quite differently. To think of its participation in the funeral not as a shared and committing moment, but as a performance without responsibility; a sharing of private grief without pubic mourning." (Silverstone 1999: 75).

From another direction, John Fiske outlines a different understanding of media events, emphasizing that a distinction between "media events" and "real events" is not appropriate for present-day, mediatized cultures: "The term *media event* is an indication that in a postmodern world we can no longer rely on a stable relationship or clear distinction between 'real' event and its mediated representation" (Fiske 1994: 2, emphasis in original). Leaving aside the problematic claim that all of 'us' have shifted into a 'postmodern world', there is an interesting point here. While there are events beyond the media in local settings, Fiske insists that only translocally mediated events (that is, events whose significance is transmitted across borders) gain a broader socio-cultural relevance in contemporary societies. But these events are the articulation of competing cultural discourses. In this sense a media event is for him a "'discursive event' […], not a discourse *about* an event" (Fiske 1994: 2, emphasis in original).

Related trajectories can also be found in the work by Douglas Kellner, using the concept of the "media spectacle" (Kellner 2003). Referring back to Guy Debord's (1983) *Society of the Spectacle* rather than anthropological theory, Kellner describes spectacles as a regular phenomenon of consumer societies that is of broad significance. Media

spectacles are organized around 'the consumption of images, commodities' as part of

the vast institutional and technical apparatus of contemporary capitalism, [and] all the

means and methods power employs, outside of direct force, to relegate subjects passive

to societal manipulation and to obscure the nature and effects of capitalism's power and

deprivations.

(Best and Kellner 1997: 4)

Within the critical analysis of Kellner, most contemporary spectacles appear as

mediatized phenomena, which is why he uses the expression "spectacular media events"

(Kellner 2004: 1).

Based on reflections like these, Simon Cottle (2008) has recently tried to extend the

concept of media events into a more general approach to "mediatized rituals". In his

definition, mediatized rituals "are those exceptional and performative media phenomena

that serve to sustain and/or mobilize collective sentiments and solidarities on the basis

of symbolization and a subjunctive orientation to what should or ought to be" (Cottle

2006: 415). Within such a frame, ritual media events in the sense of Dayan and Katz

can be ranked as "celebratory media events", alongside "moral panics" (Cohen 1972),

"conflicted media events" (Fiske 1994), "media disasters" (Liebes 1998), "media

scandals" (Lull 1997) and "mediatized public crises" (Alexander and Jacobs 1998).

While this approach at first seems instructive, integrating different "media-event-like"

phenomena into one super-category, it falls short conceptually because of its thin use of

the concept of the ritual (Couldry and Rothenbuhler 2007). In addition, Cottle's concept of mediatization seems to be undertheorized (cf. Krotz 2008; Lundby 2009). But Cottle's argument at least opens up an important point about how we describe the wider spectrum of which media events (properly understood) form part.

3.*The narrow typification of media events*: We can see here a certain pattern where many colleagues who were contributed to Dayan and Katz'z developing work highlighted the narrowness of how the "scenarios" of media events were originally typified. We can understand the work by Tamar Liebes on "disaster marathons" (Liebes 1998: 71) as an argument in this direction. Liebes conceptualizes them in the tradition of ritual media events, understanding "disasters marathons" as a "genre" (Liebes 1998: 72) that shares a high number of characteristics with media events, including its monopolistic character and its interruption of the everyday banal. The main difference is that the "celebration of disasters" (Liebes 1998: 73) is not in that form pre-planned and is marked more by an overtaking of the public domain by oppositional forces (not hegemonic ones). So while Tamar Liebes accepts—like Gabriel Weimann—the basic definition of Dayan and Katz, she argues for a broader understanding that also reflects disasters as a certain "scenario". This point was not only taken up by Elihu Katz himself in a joint publication (cf. Katz and Liebes 2007; and in this volume), but it also connects in a varying degree with other research on media events focusing for example on terrorism (Nossek 2008), on war (Wark 1994) or on political unification (Krotz 2000) as media events.

We can understand such arguments for extending the typification of ritual media events into three scenarios in a further direction, the direction of "conflict orientated media events": there are a number of outstanding forms of media communication that to a varying degree can be described using such an approach to ritual media events.

However, once we consider extended definitions of the "media event" genre, we also need to make another extension that takes account of consumer and celebrity cultures. Coming from completely different research traditions we find a number of studies that focus on such forms of "eventization" (Hepp 2004b) in this area of media. Considering different forms of "popular media events" (Hepp and Vogelgesang 2003) such as outstanding reality TV events or film events, we see similarities to the concept of ritual media events but also differences. So _popular media events_ break with the everyday but in a much more routine way, they do not monopolize the media coverage in total, but in a certain segment ('tabloid', 'boulevard'), they do not happen "live" but in a continuous development (quite often also of marketing and branding), they are mostly organized by the media themselves not just as pre-planned but as completely commercialized, they are less celebratory and more pleasure-oriented, often they polarize and generate the attention of certain "cultural segments" (scenes, youth cultures etc.) where popular media events have an outstanding role (see Göttlich in this volume).

In such a frame we can understand for example *Big Brother* not just as a reality TV format but as a kind of popular media event, transgressing the boundaries of single TV coverage (cf. Scannell 2002; Bignell 2005). Or we can grasp how certain celebrities are constructed by the use of certain popular media events (cf. Turner 2004). Taking examples like these we can see that an approach to contemporary media events must also integrate these phenomena that are more closely related to the staging and marketing of the popular (cf. Puijk 1999). While not being "ritual" in the sense of Dayan and Katz, these events nevertheless contribute strongly to processes of constructing the "mediated centre" (Couldry 2003; 2008) in contemporary cultures and societies.

To sum up so far, the outlined—albeit preliminary[iv]—selection of studies and reflections demonstrate through their critique the relevance of the intervention made by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz: media events are highly important contemporary phenomena. However, we have to re-think and extend the original approach towards ritual media events if we want to analyze their importance. Such a re-thinking and extension ire reinforced once we consider media events as aspects not only of national cultures and societies but of an increasingly globalized world.

MEDIA EVENTS IN A GLOBAL AGE: THICKENINGS OF GLOBALIZED MEDIA CULTURES

If we want to extend our reflections on conceptualizing media events to questions

concerning the globalization of media communication it is worth referring to Daniel Dayan's chapter here. In the context of an analysis of the staging of the Olympics in China 2008 he discusses the original approach to ritualized media events once more, indicating an interesting shift of emphasis.[v] Dayan argues that many aspects of the original work have to be seen in their historical context of national broadcasting. However, there are four major features within the original analysis which are still relevant; that is (1.) "emphasis" (the omnipresence of the transmitted events), (2.) "performativity" (their constructing character, creating actively realities), (3.) "loyalty" (the acceptance of the definition of the event as proposed by the organizers) and (4) "shared experience" (construction and reconstruction of a "we" in their reception) (see Dayan chapter, below). In our perspective, these four criteria are a good starting point for defining a general frame for researching media events, however they have to be contextualized in a more general understanding of contemporary globalized media cultures.

When speaking about "media cultures" specifically we include all cultures whose _primary resources_ of meaning are accessible through technology-based media. By this we do not want to say that everything is mediated technically within these cultures. But within media cultures "the media" are constructed as the main mediators of "the center". From this point of view, all media cultures have to be theorized as translocal phenomena, inasmuch as media make translocal communicative connections possible (Hepp 2008). They are not "placed" at a defined locality, but are articulated through

"disembedded" communicative processes, while still being related to a greater or lesser number of localities within or beyond particular national or regional boundaries.[vi] That said, we can understand media cultures as articulated by a connectivity of communication processes that might be based around a relatively centralized power structure (as with traditional mass media) or marked by a more multi-centered power structure (as many hope for the Internet). They may be larger or smaller in terms of the contents and interests which are focussed together. We need to allow also for "media cultures" which are highly generalized, for example the various ways in which the celebrity/ audience relationship is worked through in different media/ political territories: a point to which we return later.

Describing media cultures in this sense as translocal phenomena, we also draw on a specific understanding of culture. Some time ago, Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1995) divided the principal understandings of culture into two: a territorial and a translocal one. The essence of his arguments is that territorial concepts of culture are inward-looking, endogenous, focused on organicity, authenticity and identity, whereas translocal concepts of culture are outward-looking, exogenous, focused on hybridity, translation and identification. Based on our arguments it seems helpful to us to understand cultures in general in a translocal frame: all present cultures are more or less hybrid, and have to translate, change their identities and so on. In contrast to this, what is problematic for a general territorial conceptualization of culture is that it refers to a container-thinking of nation states that is not appropriate in times of globalization.

Within this concept, cultures are *from the beginning* interpreted as national cultures of

territorial states: no other template or model is considered (for critique, see Beck 2000;

Robins 2006; Hepp 2009). More helpful than such territorial bordering is to suggest that

cultures—as the sum of the classificatory systems and discursive formations on which

the production of meaning draws (see Hall 1997: 222)—transgress the local without

being necessarily focussed on territoriality as a reference point of their meaning

articulation. In this sense, cultures are a kind of "thickening" (Löfgren 2001; cf. Hepp

and Couldry 2009) of translocal processes for the articulation of meaning. Such a

theorization opens the possibility of understanding territorialization, and

deterritorialization, as contested practices through which specific cultures are articulated

in their particularity—by the media and beyond (García Canclini 1995; 2001;

Tomlinson 1999).

David Morley's metaphor of the "home territory" (Morley 2000) is, at this point,

important in a dual sense. On the one hand, it shows the specificity of these national

media cultures. It is possible to describe national media cultures whose translocal

communicative thickening has been territorialized in such a way that national frontiers

are the main borders of many communicative networks and flows. The process of

thickening the national imagined community was territorially bound. On the other hand,

Morley's metaphor of the home territory shows us quite clearly that this territoriality of

the media-influenced home no longer exists in a pure form. 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. One must contextualize such national 'media events' as part of different media networks.

This understanding of globalized media cultures makes it also possible to come to a general frame for understanding media events in the "global age". Our reflections up to this point make clear that there are limits to understanding media events on a global scale as the genre of integrative ritual they were originally thought to be. However, if with Daniel Dayan we understand "emphasis", "performativity", "loyalty" and "shared experience" as the "core" of the original definition, we can bring this together with our understanding of media cultures as resulting from specific 'thickenings' of meaning that have links of varying strength with specific territories.

The idea of _emphasis_— the omnipresence of the transmitted events—can be brought together with our argument about their thickening. If we regard media events in a global age not as phenomena that refer to a territorialized national media culture but— with 9/11, the Olympics or comparable "mega-events" (Roche 2000) in mind—as transcultural phenomena, it makes sense to understand them as thickenings of media communication, produced not only by the mass media (television, radio) but also by the Internet and other digital media, covering different forms of "mediated quasi-

interaction" (WWW, blog-journalism etc.) and "mediated interaction" (chats, online discussions etc.) of the event.[vii] In such a frame the original idea of the "monopolizing" aspect of media events seems to be much more a *situative* (and so not necessarily complete or total) thickening of media communication: at particular moments we find intensive processes of communication under way across very different media products and communicative forms.

Taking the aspect of *performativity*—the constructive character of media events—we have to link this in a global frame to struggles for power and influence in and between media cultures. Relating media events to questions of performativity reminds us that they are power-related articulations, produced with a large amount of resources and fulfilled with certain interests in mind. But when we consider outstanding media events in their transcultural character it becomes obvious that this performativity cannot be related to just *one* power center. Especially if we consider conflict-orientated media events like for example terror attacks, war or the always in part politically driven Olympics we get an understanding of the variety of interest groups and power-discourses related to the performance of these events. Reflecting power is a key aspect of performativity, and a one-dimensional analysis at this point falls short.

If we consider questions of *loyalty*—the acceptance of the definition of the event as proposed by the organizers—in the frame of globalized media cultures, we must be

careful: up to a certain point, we can detect an invocation of loyalty within the definitions of the event organizers. Turning again to the case of disasters, a media event may be marked transculturally by the refutation of original definitions or their disputation. However, another point becomes important: namely that beyond all discursive struggle and dissent media events in their transcultural extension also have something that we might call a thematic core. To take 9/11 as an example we can argue that, while the representation—and also the meaning - of this media event varied across different media cultures in its thematic core, the iconographic images of the destroyed twin towers by the terror attack worked as the unifying focus of the diversity of discourses gathered within the situative thickening of this event.

As a last criterion, Dayan named *shared experience,* that is, the construction and reconstruction of a "we" in the reception of media events. Again, we hesitate at this point when we consider media events in a global context. It seems highly unlikely that a "global we" in a media event might exist; or at least only very few media events like mediatized natural disasters can be taken as reference point for diverse discourses in this direction (cf. Volkmer 2006; Kyriakidou 2008). Rather, we would argue, media events in a global-transcultural frame open the space for the construction and reconstruction of many different constructions of a common "we", and of many varied national, ethnic, religious, sub-cultural and other voicings of that "we", all relating to how the main cultural thickenings within a media event are appropriated locally.

If we try to condense these different considerations into an—albeit fairly general—definition of media events in a global age we can formulate the following: *media events are certain situated, thickened, centering performances of mediated communication that are focused on a specific thematic core, cross different media products and reach a wide and diverse multiplicity of audiences and participants*.

A major aspect of this definition is the expression "centering performances". By this we mean various typical forms of communicative action— called "scenarios" in the original approach of Dayan and Katz and leading to their idea of media events as "genres"—through which a centering is articulated in two senses: first the thematic core of the media event is "central" to the event's narratives; second this core is related to the "center" of a certain social entity ('a society', 'a deterritorial community', 'the world').[viii] Hence, media events are deeply related to processes of constructing the "mediated center". As a consequence they are in general power-related and so must be analyzed critically, that is, in terms of *how* they are constructed *as centering*. In this context we must consider to what extent media events are intended—by the media or by other social actors who have interests in constructing reality in specific, maybe conflicting ways - to establish certain discursive positions and to maintain those actors' power.

However, the kind of performances by which this centering construction is articulated

vary in relation to the thematic core of a media event. This is the reason why we are confronted today by both "ritual media events" and their scenarios as described in the original approach of Dayan and Katz, by "conflictual media events" like mediatized terror attacks, disasters or wars and also by "popular media events" of celebrity culture. Therefore, any typification of a certain set of media events—something that is undertaken across the volume's different chapters—is only a snapshot of of media's events-based centering power at a certain time and therefore can only be understood as preliminary.

This brings us to our main point about researching media events. Because of their diversity the 'integrative' moment of media events is, instead of being something that can be assumed in advance as characteristic, something uncertain that must be investigated from one case to another. We always have to research critically the interrelation between the 'centering' performances of media events on the one hand and the everyday appropriation of them by audiences and populations on the other. Exactly this appropriation can also be a 'bypassing' or 're-interpretation' of the centering which the original model of media events saw prioritized. Therefore, in the case of media events too, the construction of a "mediated centre" remains an uncertain and contested process, however totalizing the *claims* that such a construction involves.

THE VOLUME: AN OVERVIEW

In all, the chapters of this volume present across their diversity the relevance of media events in contemporary globalized media cultures, structured in six parts: Part One rethinks the classical media events approach; Part Two is focused on the history and future of media events, Part Three on media events in present social and cultural theory, Part Four on the status of media events for everyday identities, Part Five on media events in global politics, and Part Six on media events in different cultural contexts. Reflecting this diversity, the volume closes with a retrospective concluding chapter.

Part one, *Media Events Rethought*, includes chapters by the authors who started this debate through their 1992 book *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*. In his chapter "Beyond Media Events"—first published 2008 in the book *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China*, co-edited with Monroe Price (pp. 391-401)— Daniel Dayan takes the original approach as a starting point to argue for a further development of a theory of media events. This seems necessary not because the basic assumptions of this publication were wrong but because media events themselves have changed in the global age. Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes also revise the original approach to media events in their chapter "'No More Peace!': How Disaster, Terror and War Have Upstaged Media Events" (originally published in *International Journal of Communication,* 1, 2007: 157-66). They argue for a rise of disruptive events such as disaster, terror and war, and believe that cynicism, disenchantment and segmentation are undermining attention to ceremonial events, while the mobility and ubiquity of

television technology, together with the downgrading of scheduled programming, provide ready access to disruption.

Such a contextualization of the original approach is extended in the three chapters of Part Two, *The History and Future of the Media Event*. Jürgen Wilke compares in his chapter "Historical Perspectives on Media Events" the Lisbon Earthquake in 1755 and the Tsunami Catastrophe in 2004. Combining these analyses with a sophisticated theoretical approach, he makes clear the necessity of a historical perspective on media events. The chapter "From Media Events to Ritual to Communicative Form" by Eric Rothenbuhler starts by re-visiting the original idea of media events, understanding it as a radical opening of mass communication research to sociological theory, anthropology, and interdisciplinary humanities, and contextualizes this approach in contemporary analyses of communicative form. Another important perspective is brought in by Douglas Kellner in his chapter "Media Events and Media Spectacles in a Critical Perspective". He connects the tradition of researching 'media events' to his own separate and well-known critique (Kellner 2003) of the regular reliance on spectacle within contemporary cultures and societies.

While Part Two opens the discussion on media events to questions of change, Part Three focuses on *Media Events in the Frame of Contemporary Social and Cultural Theory*. It is opened by the chapter "Media Events and Symbolic Power" by Friedrich

Krotz. Within this, Friedrich Krotz referring to Pierre Bourdieu argues that ritual media events can be seen as the announced investment of symbolic capital by the institution which organizes the event. Joost van Loon rethinks in "Modalities of Mediation" the category of the media event in the light of a philosophically grounded phenomenology that draws on Heidegger's philosophy of being and the reconceptualization of the space of the "social" as part of a rethinking of the work of technology within Actor Network Theory. Finally, Göran Bolin takes in his chapter "Media Events, Eurovision and Societal Centers" the example of the Eurovision Song Contest as a starting point to investigate media events within the frame of the critique of a "myth of the mediated center". In doing so he moves towards a more Habermasian critique of media events.

Researching contemporary media events also has a high relevance for understanding everyday processes of meaning articulation. This is demonstrated by the chapters in Part Four *Media Events and Everyday Identities*. This section is opened by Peter Csigo's chapter "Falling Apart, Falling Together: Dramaturgy and Commonality in the Era of 'Permanent Breach'". He revisits Dayan and Katz's approach in the light of the everyday, coming to the conclusion that whether or not a society is "held together" in late modernity depends less on broadcast-like, macro-level integration than on people's dispersed micro-performances in which they enact utopian discourses of civil society in reaction to aesthetized affective impulses. In the chapter "Media Events and Gendered Identities in South Asia – Miss World Going 'Deshi'" Norbert Wildermuth takes the popular media event of the annual Miss World nomination in India as an example to

demonstrate how media events have been drawn into a broader ideological struggle about notions of gender and national identity in South Asia. The third chapter "Media Event Culture and Lifestyle Management" by Udo Göttlich then discusses media events' influence on identity management in contemporary media and everyday culture.

Part Five, *Media Events and Global Politics*, brings a perspective into the foreground that is focused on questions of political communication. The first chapter by Nancy Rivenburgh with the title "In Pursuit of a Global Image: Media Events as Political Communication" researches the relevance of hosting political events to gain prestige and favorable opinion via international media representations. In "9/11 and the Change of Globalized Media Events " Agnieszka Stepinska discusses one of the most prominent political media events of the last decade, the 9/11 attacks and related changes in contemporary public spheres. The section is completed by Ingrid Volkmer and Florian Deffner, who in their chapter "Eventspheres as Discursive Forms: (Re-) Negotiating the 'Mediated Center' in New Network Cultures" investigate the articulation of new, so-called transcultural "event-spheres" in today's globalized political communications.

In Part Six of the volume, labeled *Media Events and Cultural Contexts*, the relevance of media events in important cultural fields of the present is discussed. The section is opened with the chapter "Sports Events: The Olympics in Greece" by Roy Panagiotopoulou, reflecting on the example of the Olympic games as characteristic of

an "eventization" of the field of sport and therefore the promotion of a diversity of national images. Lisa Leung in "Performing Global 'News': Indigenizing WTO as Media Event" researches the eventization of (social movement) politics, and how this is based on notions of "professionalism", "ethics", and "media globalization" and media's practice of representing such notions in the recent history of Hongkong. In the chapter "Religious Media Events: The Catholic 'World Youth Day' as an Example for the Mediatization and Individualization of Religion" Andreas Hepp and Veronika Krönert deal with a hybrid religious media event as the manifestation of current changes in the field of religion.

Finally, the volume concludes with a chapter by Stewart Hoover, reviewing the arguments put forward in the book and reflecting the relevance of media events for contemporary cultural transformations. In all we hope that these different chapters make clear the continued relevance of ritual and popular media events in today's globalized media cultures and provide a point of departure for future empirical research and theoretical reflection, within media and cultural studies and media anthropology. The debate that Dayan and Katz started remains, as they say, 'to be continued'.

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NOTES

[i] Cf. Dayan and Katz 1995; Katz and Dayan 1985; Katz et al. 1981.

[ii] This is also the title of the French version of the book, cf. Dayan and Katz 1996.

[iii] For example Dayan and Katz (1988: 183)credit Eric Rothenbuhler for "making explicit the connection between Durkheim's moral ceremonies and media events".

[iv] Other important contributions are for example Maurice Roche's (2000) analysis of "mega-events" as globalized forms of media events, Göran Bolin's (2006) historical contextual contextualization of contemporary media events and Roel Puijk's (2000) and Knut Lundby's (1997) analyses of the religious dimensions of media events.

[v] One impetus for our Bremen conference was the debate (Religion and Media conference, July 2006, Sigtuna, Sweden) between Daniel Dayan and Nick Couldry about the latter's critique of the original media events model, which brought out the common ground between their then current positions.

[vi] It is important however not to confuse two questions: the degree to which a locality is translocally connected through communication and the degree to which people living in that locality live their life within the physical space of that locality. The latter can never be reduced to zero, since as physical beings we all must reside somewhere.

[vii] Cf. Thompson (1995: 85) for the distinction of these forms of communication.

[viii] That said, we also must bear in mind the variety of the geographical scales on which media events operate, whether regional or national (with some being aimed at particular population sectors) or indeed global.