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**Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation: Seeck, Hannele and Rantanen, Terhi (2015) *Media events, spectacles and risky globalization: a critical review and possible avenues for future research*. [Media, Culture & Society](#), 37 (2). pp. 163-179. ISSN 0163-4437

DOI: [10.1177/0163443714553493](https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443714553493)

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This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/63594/>
Available in LSE Research Online: September 2015

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This is the final draft post-refereeing (prior copyediting and final layout) for the article.

Seeck, Hannele and Rantanen, Terhi (2015) Media events, spectacles and risky globalization: a critical review and possible avenues for future research. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37 (2). pp. 163-179. ISSN 0163-4437

MEDIA EVENTS, SPECTACLES AND RISKY GLOBALIZATION: A CRITICAL REVIEW AND POSSIBLE AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Hannele Seeck and Terhi Rantanen

Introduction

The concepts of the media event or spectacle were originally developed in order to analyse the power that the media have in creating media events or spectacles in contemporary societies (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Kellner, 1998, 2003). More recently, media anthropologists, particularly media ritual researchers, have been productive in developing media event theories. Despite the differences between various theorists, all these theories explicitly or implicitly argue that the media use the power they have over their audiences in their ability to create and shape events and spectacles that they define as the most important. In so doing, the media regularly and repeatedly maintain and reproduce their hegemonic power.

Although a key element in the concepts of both media events and rituals is the pre-determined recurrence of events as media rituals (Couldry, 2003; Rothenbuhler, 1998) or of mediatized rituals (Cottle, 2006), these concepts have also been applied to events that occur unexpectedly, such as school shootings and other mass killings, natural disasters and major accidents (Kellner, 2004, 2005, 2008a, 2008b; Katz and Liebes, 2007), thus extending the concepts' applicability to many types of event. Katz and Liebes (2007), Liebes (1998), Blondheim and Liebes (2002) and Kellner (2003, 2004, 2008a, 2008b) have broadened the understanding of these theories of media events and spectacles in the context of *disruptive* events.

However, with the increasing availability and use of new media, ordinary people around the world are able to take action and not wait until the old media stage events as the models suggest. In some cases they have been able to take a leading role, not only by connecting people in need but also by influencing the ways in which the old media stage these events. Most earlier event and spectacle theorists focused on news, applying their concepts to analysing its content in order to show how news created and shaped events. However, since the original theories were developed, the concept of news has changed. In the past, news was defined as a specific type of writing that used the concept of time and of an event in order to construct a news story (Rantanen, 2009: 2). Many researchers now refer to the difficulty of defining what news is (Rantanen, 2009; Fenton, 2010). Due to the constant 24-hour flow of news, with news being on all the time instead of marking the time by providing news events at certain times as morning newspapers or TV news broadcasts did in the past, the relationship between news, time and event is changing. Old media that previously had a monopoly over events at certain times are now challenged by new social media that make their own events. In short, since the concepts of media events and media spectacles originate from the pre-globalization period of dominant national broadcasters and mass print media, we need to deliberate upon their ability to capture the important emergent phenomena that characterize our contemporary global age.

Even if the concepts of media events and spectacles do seem to maintain much of their explanatory power, this article argues that in the age of social media, risks and globalization, and of a changing concept of media environments, we need to review their applicability and consider where the areas for potential future research lie. This is why we argue that we need, on the one hand, to review the research conducted to date on media events and media spectacles and, on the other hand, to explore the challenges posed to these concepts by risk (Beck, 2009), globalization (Giddens, 1990, 1991, 1999; Rantanen, 2005), social media (Castells 1996, 2009) and 'new' news.

This article is structured as follows. First, we review the concepts of media event and media spectacle. We then explore what we see as the main problems with these concepts in a contemporary context. We posit that the main phenomena that challenge the current conceptualizations of media event and media spectacle are: (1) the understanding of risk; (2) the context of disasters; (3) globalization and the mediation of news in the context of

transnational and transitional societies. Altogether, our findings indicate that in the context of global risk society constant disruptions and unplanned events, together with the changes in news transmission, need to be taken as a starting point also in the research frames used to understand the mediation of events in contemporary society.

Media Events and Media Spectacles

Media events

Media event theory was developed particularly in the 1980s (Katz, 1980; Katz, Dayan and Motyl, 1981; Dayan and Katz, 1985, 1986; Katz and Dayan, 1983, 1985; Dayan and Katz, 1988), culminating in 1992 in Dayan and Katz's book *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*. In our view, the undeniable value of their concept of the media event lies in a historical situation that started after World War 2, a time of powerful and rather closed nation-states with a dominant national, often public-service, broadcasting company. The media events of the time were typically pre-staged speeches by national leaders, meetings of heads of state and funerals of key politicians and monarchs often broadcast as news at certain times, such as in the evening nine o'clock news bulletin. The 'important' events were televised and an ordinary citizen viewed televised events passively at home. Certainly, television's visual images, its flow of news, its marathon mode provided perfect empirical case studies of staging media events. As Blondheim and Liebes (2002: 275) observe, TV can dictate the length of coverage, and thus the perceived importance, of an event.

Dayan and Katz (1992: ix) define media events as events that spotlight some central value or some aspect of collective memory. In their view, such events often portray an idealized version of society. For this to work, the portrait must be authenticated by the public (Dayan and Katz, 1992: ix). Media events progress through time as they are first negotiated among organizers, broadcasters and audiences, then performed by broadcasters, and lastly celebrated by audiences at home (Dayan and Katz, 1992: x). The media event model emphasizes that it is the media that produce/stage these events. Media

events exclude unplanned events covered by the media: an assassination is not a media event, the funeral following it is (Hallin and Mancini, 1992: 121). However, the difference is not always clear. Fiske (1994: 1-2) asks whether we can separate media events from non-media events - or are all events today, or at least the ones that matter, necessarily media events? He concludes that events do happen, but those that are not mediated do not count, or at least count only in their immediate locales.

Depending on the level of a nation's authoritarianism, in pre-staged events like speeches by national leaders, the subject matter often largely defines whether or not the occasion becomes a media event (Kellner, 2003). Although Dayan and Katz (1992) made a distinction between media events (pre-planned) and news events (not pre-planned, but newsworthy), the problem with both versions is their predictability. As Cottle (2006: 418) points out, their concept of a media event was 'primarily concerned with ceremonial or celebratory occasions of state and government, and the ritualization and affirmation of, and integrative appeals to, national collectivity'. However, most news comes from official sources, as many studies have shown (see, for example, Perry, 2007).

Indeed, media event theory - because it was not called 'news event theory' - has been used to research all kinds of events, for example, sports events (Alabarces et al., 2001) and government-staged media events (Liebes, 1998). Recently, this theory has been used, for example, to analyse the roles that celebrities play in charity media events (Driessens et al., 2012), to understand how ordinary people are constructed as the public through vox-pop interviews in televised coverage (Dekavalla, 2012) and how the construction of 'ironic events' takes place as a result of making politically sensitive situations appear ironic by positioning values (Ridanpää, 2012).

Wardle and West (2004: 195) argue that, in the context of Dayan and Katz's theory, the media often adopt a 'priestly' role with regard to media events. They themselves analyse Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee celebrations and show how the press promoted nationalism through this civic event. Liebes (1998: 73) writes that media events are 'carefully staged occasions in which press and broadcast media cooperate with government in relating to the event as genuine celebration, voluntarily relinquishing their tough, independent, cynical stance of critics to guide audiences toward such high moments of integration'. Liebes (1998: 73) provides the Rabin-Arafat handshake on the

White House lawn in 1994 as an example of such government-staged media events that also provide the ‘fitting signs and symbols to enhance the emotional’ in order to permit the ceremonial resolution of these crisis, potentially challenging the embedded predictability of media events/spectacles’. Ryfe (1999: 81) examines Franklin Roosevelt’s fireside chats through the framework of the media event and finds that they ‘expressed a new sense of American imagined community and mobilized the public behind New Deal’. Both examples, we would argue, could also be applied to news that indeed has a priestly role in defining what is important news through the timing of coverage of events.

News used to be a recurrent story that was repeated at certain times. Media event theorists extended it into the media in general. Adapting the Durkheimian view of the social function of ritual, Katz and Dayan argue that media events tend to integrate societies: they dissolve or de-emphasize social divisions and bring the members of a community together around a shared sense of identity (Hallin and Mancini, 1992: 121). However, the events and messages are transmitted primarily *nationally* and, even if viewers can decide whether or not to watch what is broadcast, they have little say about its content. The special status of news as a genre had in the past emphasized the importance of a shared sense: it staged important events to the nation as an imagined community most of whose members had never met one another but still had to be led to believe that they shared the same past, present and future.

In the media event model, there was no phoning in to shows, voting people in or out by text-messaging, sending videos or ‘tweeting’ to newsrooms. Instead, pre-staged events were talked about afterwards with family members or neighbours, perhaps in local cafes and pubs. This goes hand in hand with an authoritarian, top-down model of society, with an exclusive elite that, through these events, time after time produces and reproduces its position of power and authority, mainly staging them as news events. Thus, publicity is essentially a means of sustaining power and position. Nations are sustained as ‘imaged communities’ (Anderson, 1983) through key national news events broadcast year in and year out and assuming the status of ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

Katz and Liebes (2007: 158) argue, drawing on the work of Dayan and Katz (1992), that the live broadcasting of ceremonial events is decreasing in importance and possibly

also in frequency. At the same time, the live broadcasting of disruptive events such as disasters, terror and war is taking centre stage. They reason that this change is due to (1) profound changes in the organization and technology of broadcasting organizations; (2) increased cynicism with regard both to ‘great men’ and to excessively close relations between the media and the establishment; and (3) a decline in the appeal of media events due to their staged and short-lived nature (Katz and Liebes, 2007: 159). We think that Katz and Liebes’s criticism could also be applied to the changing concept of news.

Two Streams of Critique

We find two streams of critique to be particularly important in defining the later use of the original media event theory: (1) the critique from the media ritual researchers, which has brought out the ceremonial and ritual character of media events and enabled an understanding of their communal and emotional aspects; (2) the critique and further development of Katz and Liebes (2007), with their concept of the traumatic event. Indeed, much of the critique and development of media event theory has come from media ritual researchers (Couldry, 2003; Rothenbuhler, 1998). They also offer plausible research frames. Media *rituals* are defined as formalized actions that reproduce the idea of the media as offering privileged points of access to the centre of society (Couldry, 2003: 29). This is an important point, since this is exactly what news does when it gives audiences access to ‘important’ events. Increasingly, the concept of media ritual has been used, for example, to analyse TV reality shows such as Big Brother, Idols and Star Academy (Couldry, 2002; Reijnders et al., 2007; Kraidy, 2009), images of death (Sumiala-Seppänen and Stocchetti, 2007), mourning rituals (Pantti and Sumiala-Seppänen, 2009) and on-line communities (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2009; Wheaton, 2010), as well as to conceptualize the link between media event theories and nationalism (Mihelj, 2008). The most recent use of media events theories led us to question at least two issues; (1) whether news has lost its importance and (2) if not, whether media events theories can be applied to all kinds of media events.

The concept of *mediatized* ritual, on the other hand, has been used specifically to study high-profile media phenomena (Cottle, 2006: 415; Cottle, 2008: 136-138). According to

Cottle (2006: 416), the types of media event that can be conceptualized as ‘mediatized rituals’ are extraordinary in that they are ‘salient and obtrude in terms of high-level media exposure and collective media performativity across different media outlets across space and time’ (Cottle, 2006: 416), which in our view is a step closer to the concept of a media spectacle (Kellner, 2003, 2009). However, the concept of mediatized ritual is not altogether unproblematic; there are issues related to its distinctiveness and conceptual development in relation to the previous studies of media rituals in particular and to media anthropology in general (see Couldry and Rothenbuhler, 2007; Cottle, 2006). Altogether, most of the discussion to date of media events has focused on their ceremonial aspects and ritual character, and has used the framework of Durkheimian sociology (Scannell, 2009: 232). It was, and still is, possible to argue that news used to be ceremonial, priestly and predictable, especially when it was delivered by state or public service broadcasters, because it was delivered at certain times and audiences knew what news was about (i.e., about ‘important’ events).

Another prominent way forward is that of Katz and Liebes (2007). Their concept of a *traumatic* event differs from that of a ceremonial event (Dayan and Katz, 1992), in that such events are defined as disruptive rather than integrative, unplanned rather than planned, and typically unexpected and unwelcome. Liebes (1998: 74) argues that, since disasters are not pre-planned, the media need to react rather than ‘pre-act’ to them. They often happen in such a way that neither the authorities nor the media have time to prepare, but have to react *in situ*. It is much more difficult for the media to produce media events where disasters are concerned, since these cannot be designed in advance. From the viewpoint of the media, ‘stories of disaster invite a hermeneutic search for the culprit, someone to whom to assign the blame. The less possible it is to point to the actual villain, the less the chance of satisfactory resolution, and the more powerful the role of television in providing the framing’ (Liebes, 1998: 74). Altogether, they are ‘a different genre’ (Katz and Liebes, 2007: 158) in their ‘interruption of routine’ (Couldry, 2007: 692), as well as in their performative nature (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Couldry, 2007). Interestingly, the very concept of news actually includes both predictable and unpredictable events. The presence of both elements is exactly what makes news a recognizable genre.

It is also interesting to note that much of the work on media event theories has actually been based on news studies, although these studies were not carried out in the field of journalism or of news studies. One of the strengths of these theories is that they aim to tell us about something larger than news, about the relationship between the media and society. Their weakness is that empirically they mainly concentrate on news, but do not take into account its special nature, news as a specific genre, how the very concept of news has been based on the relationship between time and events. We wonder whether the earlier theories should be called news event or news ritual theories, rather than media event and media ritual theories. However, the two lines of research on media rituals and traumatic events that arose from the critiques of the original media event theory point to the sorts of solution we would argue are needed in order to capture the concept of a media event in the context of global risk society.

Media spectacles

The concept of spectacle was originally introduced by Debord (1967, 1999), who argued that social life had been replaced by its representation. He writes that the spectacle prevents individuals from realising that the society of (global) spectacle is split between reality and image, with the real consumer becoming a consumer of illusions. According to Debord, the spectacle is not a collection of images, but rather a *social relation* among people that is mediated by images (Debord, 1999). He further argues that the spectacle that emerged under late capitalism represents a new form of state control. In his words, 'the spectacle is the bad dream of modern society in chains, expressing nothing more than its wish to sleep' (Debord, 1999; Giroux, 2006: 35-37). This is, of course, an important aspect to consider when looking critically at the concept of news. Critical researchers argue that, rather than informing citizens, news actually controls them by deciding what it is and is not important to know (see, for example, Herman and Chomsky, 1994).

Kellner, who applies Debord's concept to his own research, argues that the concept of the *media* spectacle can be used to analyse *all* events, news and information, including such events as the O. J. Simpson murder trials, the Clinton sex scandals, the life and death of Princess Diana and mass killings such as the shooting rampage at Virginia Tech (Kellner, 2005: xvi; 2008b: 29-30). Defined in this way, *any* event can potentially be

made into a media spectacle. Kellner divides them into megaspectacles (for example, the O. J. Simpson drama or the ‘war on terrorism’), provided by the mainstream media, and interactive spectacles (where audiences talk back and interact with one another) (Kellner, 1992, 2005). Cottle (2006: 418) posits that, in pointing out the spectacular and celebratory character of occasions, the concepts both of media events and of spectacles seem well suited to analysing pre-planned events such as official visits, royal weddings and coronations. In short, the media do little but either follow the script that has been given to them or invent their own script, which must follow that of the organizers. However, by broadcasting events and by interrupting their regular flow of programmes, the media increase the spectacular nature of these events. They interrupt routines by broadcasting media events as they occur in real time and thus intervening in the ‘normal’ rhythm of broadcasting and of audiences’ lives. By so doing they celebrate reconciliation, not conflict. (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 9; Kellner, 2008a). The concept of spectacle has often been applied to the study of sporting spectacles such as the Olympics (Tomlinson, 1996) and soccer matches (Lee, 2005), to examining the spectacle of suffering and death, for example in the Second Iraq War (Konstantinidou, 2008) and the Kosovo conflict (Catmur, 2000), and to studying medicalized/mediated spectacles such as the surgical separation of Siamese twins (van Dijk, 2002).

The concept of spectacle has been less used to study disasters, with some exceptions, most notably the works of Kellner on ‘*terror spectacles*’ such as September 11 (Kellner, 2004; Kellner 2002) or school shootings (Kellner, 2008a, 2008b). Kellner notes that the spectacles of terror make use of ‘dramatic images to catch attention, hoping thereby to catalyse unanticipated events that will spread further terror through domestic populations’ (Kellner, 2004: 3). Thus, the focus is still at the national rather than the global level and the main medium for terror spectacles is still television, through live broadcasting, which gives the spectator the feeling of drama and sensation, that s/he is ‘here’ and ‘there’, in the midst of the drama (Kellner, 2004). Thus, in many ways, the celebratory media event model is based on the pre-new media and especially the pre-social media age.

We note that Kellner has added an important element to the original media event theory by emphasizing the spectacular nature of events. His empirical data comes from the US, where the commercialization and entertainization of TV took place much earlier

than in the countries dominated by public service broadcasting. TV in the US, instead of being the stage only for preplanned *governmental* events, started constructing *different types* of spectacles, even in news that had been sensationalized by their own choice of topics and protagonists. These spectacles differ from the classic media event model, since it is not the governmental or political agenda that takes centre stage, but rather a ‘kiss and tell’ celebrity or other celebrities who are often partly, if not totally, created by the media.

Behind-the-scenes actors are the media themselves, fiercely competing for the audience with their top stories and headlines. Also, ‘kiss and tell’ celebrities and others who live their lives in the tabloids often receive significant financial gain from this publicity. Thus, publicity is a vehicle for both making money and achieving social mobility. The objects of media interest are celebrities, the rich and famous, people in unusual situations, as well as people in extraordinary situations, sometimes in disasters and other types of crisis. However, there is an inherently celebratory mood to the spectacle (see Kellner, 2009). The role of the viewer is that of an active consumer who (at least in his or her own view) selects the stories and media s/he wants to consume. Thus, the role of the individual is no longer that of passive listener/viewer of national broadcasting, but one of active consumer and spectator of selected (competing) events and of the media.

Triggers for Change and Avenues for Future Research

We would argue that each of the theories has contributed to our understanding of the role of media events and spectacles in society. The original media event theorists (Dayan, Katz, Liebes) showed how the media were able to create events by staging and timing them. Disruptive event theorists (Liebes, Katz) emphasized that not every event is pre-planned and celebratory, but the media still stage even disruptive events. Media spectacle theorists (Debord, Kellner) were able to show how media events were sensationalized and thus broadened the original event concept. Ritual researchers (Couldry, 2003; Cottle, 2006), in their exploration of the role of symbolism and images that mobilize collective sentiments and in emphasizing the ritual nature of media events, add an understanding of

the emotional and communal aspects of media events. Media rituals are also useful for examining media spectacles of which emotions and sharing are a core part.

Indeed, it is precisely the shared emotional aspects that create ‘communities’ of spectators. Spectacles offer a platform for both the individual and the collective to grieve, hate, despise or enjoy, depending on who is watching and what they are watching. The reach of a spectacle has been primarily national; however, it increasingly also has a transnational reach, an imagined community across borders. The celebratory mood requires actors in the media to be ‘interesting’, ‘charismatic’, ‘different’ – somehow out of the ordinary. The era of the spectacle requires politicians, in order to receive publicity – or at least positive publicity - to have not only a certain position of authority, such as that of minister, but in addition personal charisma.

Kellner’s model has its undeniable merits, highlighting the spectacularization of events in the battle for audiences and profits. Indeed, we find Kellner’s work on terror spectacles thought-provoking. However, we would argue that Kellner’s concept is not applicable to the context of risks (that will or will not materialize) or of long-term risks and the unpredictability and variation in their media construction over time. For example, global warming is at the same time a major spectacle with potentially global audiences and a long-term problem with no permanent solution. The spectacle model does not work well in analysing global warming, but works better in analysing events that are presented as having a clear end.

Couldry interestingly argues (2002: 291) that we have now reached the opposite of a spectacle, since much of television’s efforts are now employed in representing the ordinary, with a relative neglect of the spectacular, as television reality shows like *Big Brother* exemplify. Indeed, he calls for more research on the media’s authority and ritual power and on the ways in which these are sustained (Couldry, 2009: 41), thus reminding us of the importance of the political aspects of event theory.

Altogether, all these lines of research – the original media event theory, its modifications and the theories of media spectacles and media rituals, are useful when we try to explore the role of media in society. However, we would argue that they all are challenged by: (1) the understanding of risk, (2) the context of disasters, (3) the

globalization and mediation of news in a transnational and transitional context.

(1) Risks as events

The media are often blamed for exaggerating risks in order to sell news (Kitzinger, 1999; Wahlberg and Sjöberg, 2000). Unfortunately, to date risk has been little researched in the media event and media spectacle literature. Cottle (1998: 6) notes that, although Beck is not a media scholar (in a narrow sense), media scholars should recognize the importance of his work. Beck (1992: 46) himself once wrote that the risk society is also a science, media and information society. Disasters and crises are increasingly part of our life in late modernity. Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992, 2002, 2009) argue that, whilst humans have always been subjected to a high level of risk, modern societies are exposed to new risks – such as pollution, new illnesses, crime – that are the result of the modernization process itself. As Beck (2009: 19) points out, we now live in a *world risk society*, where all genuine threats have become global threats. He (Beck, 2009: 19) emphasizes that, in this new world risk society, *old* risks (industrial accidents and wars) and natural catastrophes (earthquakes, tsunamis) overlap, and are becoming associated with *new* risks (catastrophic climate change, global financial crises and suicide attacks). Increasingly, the new global risks *cannot* be predicted or controlled (Beck, 1992, 2009). Beck (2009: 15) emphasizes that the staging, experiences and conflicts of these global risks permeate and transform the foundations of social life and action in all its spheres, both national *and* global.

There are now new, large-scale global risks, such as climate change or overpopulation, which are represented *both* globally and locally by different media, and news. Although it may be argued that modern societies are more controlled and better prepared to deal with new risks, there have been disasters, such as 9/11, the tsunamis on Boxing Day 2004 and in Japan in 2011, the Haiti earthquake, school shootings and environmental disasters, where governments and the media have not been able to provide people in a timely and helpful manner with the accurate information needed. These disasters often have an intense and immediate global reach – for weeks, even months or years to come.

Interestingly, Beck's (1992, 2009) definitions of old and new risks do not include new risks posed by social media users themselves, such as identity theft, information wars, cyber-attacks and cyber-spying, new forms of paedophilia enabled by the Internet or groups organizing terror attacks. These new risks occur because, unlike in the past when governments and the media had control over events and spectacles, individuals can now use social media for their own purposes. Social media are sometimes vehicles for increased transparency, giving people better access. The recent case of Wikileaks exemplifies our argument. Then again, there is increased governmental control and associated risks with the use of social and mobile media, (Fuchs et al., 2012; Zajacz, 2013; Lips, 2013), since intelligence has been partly reinvented through social media (Werbin, 2011), as the NSA scandal has most recently brought to our attention.

Proponents of social media aim for greater transparency and challenge old institutions, but this also leads to their posing new types of risk, including loss of trust, threats to national security or personal humiliation. Atran (2010) posits that, in media-driven Western societies, terrorists aim to achieve publicity through creating spectacular events, acts of terror. They do so in order to cause reactions and in particular *overreactions*. In his view, in these cases of terror, the weak are attempting to amplify their acts through the media, relying on people's inherent bias in attributing big causes to big effects. Creating spectacles has thus come to be recognized as an important and powerful way of putting one's message across. This also indicates that there is a particular logic of media events and spectacular events that can be turned around and used by random people without a prior position of power or the authority to stage events.

Finally, we want to emphasize that the concepts of events/spectacles and of risks are connected. Events may or may not turn into media events. Likewise, media events may or may not turn into events. But what has not received enough attention is that both events and media events are potentially risky and may be turned into something that simply cannot be controlled either by government or by the old media. This is why we think that risk needs to be addressed much more in future research on media events and spectacles.

(2) The context of disasters – need for more research on disruptive events

Disasters are typically sudden events where there is not necessarily an initial press release or a media conference to give journalists guidelines on coverage. Instead, the media usually arrive in the midst of a chaotic situation which authorities, journalists and ordinary people are trying to make sense of. Sense-making is most likely to occur when something out of the ordinary happens (Weick, 1995), 'when individuals experience events that may be discrepant from predictions' (Louis, 1980: 241). This is typically the case with global disasters when these are reported in the news. As Katz and Liebes point out, the media - or more explicitly news organizations - do indeed have a script for how to report disasters. Disasters make the news, but by doing so they become rituals. Unlike the death of a head of state, disaster events touch mainly the lives of ordinary people. Disasters happen to everybody, and many disasters are on a mass scale, touching the lives not only of the victims, but also of their families and the communities around them. Although many news researchers have pointed out that the media 'scandalize' or 'entertainize' events by concentrating on the extraordinary and thus the spectacular, account also needs to be taken of how to cover collective joy or grief, especially in situations where the joy of some is the grief of others.

We wonder whether the concepts of media events and spectacles are in themselves too static and premeditated as terms for analysing the dynamic, unpredictable and *ad hoc* nature of disasters and other crises with a global reach. Although we acknowledge that any event can be staged and dramatized by the (old) media, we suggest that the process of dramatization is not entirely adequate when talking about ordinary people and their use of new media technology in crises and disasters.

We would like to suggest that in times of disruptive events ordinary people can use social media to complement or undermine the actions of traditional authorities and at times also of the media. This potential empowerment is highly situational and often small-scale, at least at the beginning. However, it can challenge dominant power structures, particularly when disruptive events such as disasters occur, as individuals and groups draw on their own agency (Bisht, 2013). By doing this, ordinary people, as individuals or as members of (situational) interest groups, can gain influence. The concepts of media event and media spectacle increasingly need to take into account a new type of global risk, which is created by the use of social media themselves.

School shooters have used new media in conjunction with old media: for example, in the Virginia Tech shooting, the shooter first sent a video and a statement to NBC News headquarters to explain his motives (Elmasry and Chaudri, 2010). It was as if he had carefully orchestrated and anticipated the ways in which the media would react to his actions - after his death. The fact that this was possible tells us something about the logic and nature of media events and spectacles. Ironically and rather sadly, individuals who have experienced old media events and spectacles have learned how to use new media to create new disaster events and spectacles. There are of course limits to the ability the 'manage' the media in terror attacks, as Rothenbuhler has argued in the context of 9/11 (2005). The old media, meanwhile, are badly prepared to react to these events due to their unexpected nature and the way in which everyday, ritualized media routines rely heavily on their usual and often official sources.

Authorities and the media, of course, have their own track record of reacting to disasters, but at the same time every disaster is unique and different in location, timing and in scale. For this reason, there can never be a perfect script for covering a global disaster that extends beyond national territories. This does not mean that disasters cannot be later turned into spectacular media events, but at the beginning there is often nothing but confusion about the reach of an event and its consequences. We believe that the need for understanding of disruptive events will increase.

Although, there is also critique of the disruptive event model, its conceptual parallels and symmetry and epistemologies (Rothenbuhler 2010: 37-38), we see as particularly important future research which builds on the works of Katz and Liebes (2007), Liebes (1998), Blondheim and Liebes (2002) and Kellner (2003, 2004, 2008a, 2008b) in trying to broaden the understanding of media event and spectacle theories, particularly in the context of *disruptive events*. We believe that in context of disasters, Bisht's analysis of the Bhopal gas disaster (2013, see also Punathambeker and Scannell, 2013: 7) as a representation of disaster as a global media event, through digital and mobile media, drawing on cosmopolitan memory studies, points to the types of future research frame needed to analyse disruptive events and the role of digital and mobile media in their construction and reconstruction in a way that allows for collective and individual agency.

(3) Globalization and mediation of news in a transnational and transitional context

The media environment has changed over the past decade in terms of news gathering and dissemination by social media (Meikle and Young, 2012). The definition of news has always been based on the relationship between time and events, which is now also changing since news no longer follows events, but both now take place simultaneously. In this way, news cannot be separated from events - or events are 'newsed' even before they take place (Rantanen, 2009), globally, nationally and locally. Recently, there have been a few calls for a concept of a *transnational media event* (Elde et al., 2009; Goc, 2009; Reardon, 2009). We think that this is a step in the right direction, but are wary of the concept of the transnational and prefer the term global. This is because the concept of the transnational still takes the nation as the starting point, even if 'trans' can mean both 'across' and 'beyond'. Although we recognize the political controversies that the concept of globalization carries with it, we define the global as 'a process in which worldwide economic, political, cultural and social relations have become increasingly mediated across time and space' (Rantanen, 2005: 8).

As a way forward we highlight the call made by Sabry (2013: 23-24), in his analysis of the 'Arab spring': to better capture globalization we need to move beyond the conception of time as pre-modern, modern and postmodern in order to understand the significance of time and history in a way that allows many historical times to collide. We need to examine how events such as the 'Arab spring' revolution have been mediated as global events (Sabry, 2013: 24). However, bearing in mind that local-global dynamics are complicated and rather messy, since they are often characterized by competing moral and political claims, it is important to also examine the contestations as well as the connectivity that mark mobilization (Bisht 2013: 19).

We also need more research on the processes of mediation and mediatization and media events. We need more research like that of Sun (2012: 864) on the role of the media in the process of gaining/denying voice and visibility in China. The paper shows how the processes of mediation and mediatization, in which all parties - namely the Party-state, the market, workers and the media - are engaged, amplify or constrain voice. Shumow (2012: 815), on the other hand, illustrates how the production of immigrant

media within a transnational context takes place and how transnational media spaces are produced.

As a critique of the media event model, there is a need to consider historical context and changes in the context of media events, as argued as early as 1995 by Scannell, in 2010 by Rothenbuhler and in 2013 by Ytreberg. Interruption is becoming a norm as oppose to scheduling, and action is emphasized in place of ceremony (Katz and Liebes 2007: 159, see also Rothenbuhler 2010: 35). We agree. However, we argue that there is also a need to consider societal context. The role of media events in the context of transitional societies and as a possible part of the democratization process of transitional countries remains scarce. The question of how exactly the media contribute to democratic institution-building in transitional countries remains to be answered (Jebril, Stetka and Loveless 2013: 2). There is still a limited amount of empirical evidence on the role of new media in bringing about democratic transitions (*ibid.*). We believe that we need more research on media events and spectacles and their role in transitional countries and particularly on their possible role in the democratization process of transitional countries.

We also need more research on the revolutions in the age of globalization, and the role of media, mediation and media events in contemporary revolutions. For example, Sabry argues that the unfolding of the 'Arab spring', needs to be seen in terms of trans-temporal and trans-subjective global events. (Sabry 2013: 25). We agree, but suggest that we need much more research on how these mediated global events take place.

Conclusion

In this paper we set out to examine the relevance of media event and spectacle theories in the context of the 21st century global risk society. We suggest that, although the concepts of media event, spectacle and rituals continue to be useful, they are challenged by the global risk society and the use of social media for the following reasons: (1) All concepts are static and are based on pre-staging, on the predictability of coverage; (2) All these concepts are heavily top-down, leaving very little space for any agency or resistance from

groups or individuals; (3) None of them is clear about the difference between an event, a media event and a news event, or about the relationship between the three.

We also argue that they are all challenged by the *understanding of risk*, since we observe that what has not received enough attention is the extent to which both events and media events are potentially risky and may be turned into something that simply cannot be controlled either by government or by the old media. Indeed, the social media themselves pose new types of risk that may turn into media events, as the cases of Wikileaks and NSA exemplify. We suggest that more research on *disruptive events* is also needed. In the context of the new media landscape in particular, the ritual researcher may need to take into account the concepts of temporality and unpredictability as inherent features of media events and rituals. The traumatic events researcher may benefit from the concept of global risk society and in particular from taking into account longer-term problems such as global warming. Finally, we would argue that more research needs to be carried out on transnational and transitional societies, since we need to learn more about the role of mediation, events and spectacles in democratization processes and in contemporary revolutions.

Overall, our findings indicate that in the context of global risk society constant disruptions and unplanned events, together with the changes in the media landscape in general and news transmission in particular, need to be taken as a starting point in the research frames used to analyse the mediation of events in contemporary society.

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