MEDIATIZED RITUALS IN A GLOBAL ERA

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Mediatized rituals

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 subjunctive orientation to what should or ought to be
TYPOLOGY

• Celebratory media events
• Contested media events
• Media disasters
• Mediated scandals
• Mediatized public crisis
• Moral panics
Mediatized ritual 1: Celebratory media events

Interrupts regular broadcasting routines
Reverence and ceremony
Monopolistic (all media channels focus on event)
Hegemonic
Live
Pulls large audiences
Organized outside of media
Integrate society and evoke renewal of loyalty
Mediatized ritual 2: **Conflicted media events**

Tap into deep-seated conflicts that normally remain subterranean – e.g. race, class, gender

Struggle for cultural hegemony in and through media event
Mediatized ritual 3: Media disasters

Traumatic and historically momentous happenings
High media performativity
Circulate potent symbols
Mobilize solidarities
Authorities usually caught off-guard
Open up possibilities for political critique and censure
Often recycled media frames – “scale and body counts” “tragedy and trauma” “heroism” “miraculous escapes” “elites on parade”
Mediatized ritual 4: **Media scandals**

“Scandal serves as a term to delineate a breach in moral conduct and authority. A media scandal occurs when private acts that disgrace or offend the idealized, dominant morality of a social community are made public and narrativized by the media, producing a range of effects from ideological and cultural retrenchment to disruption and change.” *(Lull and Hinerman, 1997: 3, emphasis in original)*

**Symbolic affairs**

Public performances/ritual displays to salvage institutional/personal reputations.
CASE:
GLOBAL MEDIATIZED SPORTS EVENTS
Question

To what extent may global mega-media sports events such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup be constitutively suited to the carriage of the process of globalization:

1. Homogenization vs. Heterogenization
2. Cultural imperialism vs. cultural pluralism
3. Nationalism vs. cosmopolitanism
4. Hegemony of western culture vs. global equality
International sporting events and globalization

“...no other cultural event, no arts performance, no church, no political movement, no other international, including the United nations, indeed no other anything has ever managed to generate regularly scheduled and predictable performances which command anywhere the same focused global attention as do the Olympic ceremonies” (MacAlloon, 1996: 3)

Kirsten Frandsen (in Hjarvard)

“TV coverage of the Olympics is a good example to use in a general description of globalization, because it is possible to observe here a very direct link between technological, economical and cultural developments”
Rituals of global sporting events
Rituals of global sporting events

• Enormous effort made in producing a memorable spectacle that is as much for world wide media consumption as for local live spectators.

• The content of global sporting TV broadcasts have highly repetitive and ritualistic features:
  – Opening and closing ceremonies
  – Medal presentation ceremonies
  – Olympic hymn/official song
  – Olympic flag
  – Olympic torch
  – Parade of nations with national colors and flags
Discourses framing sporting events

Reach out and touch somebody’s hand
Make the world a better place if you can;
Come join the celebration as we salute the unity of every nation...
That we all care and it’s love and people everywhere...
We can change things if we start giving;
Why don’t you...reach out and touch?

(Lyrics from song played at opening and closing ceremonies during Los Angeles Olympics)
Commercialization of global media events

Pillars of commercialization strategy:
- TV transmission rights
- Official sponsorship of event
- Sponsorship of individual teams
- Advertising rights

Commercialization of TV rights at three levels
- Global
- Regional
- National

The role of the Internet
- entry of anarchy in the allocation of coverage rights?
Mediatization of global sporting events

“the televising of public occasions must meet the challenge not only of representing the event, but of offering the viewer a functional equivalent of the festive experience. By superimposing its own performance on the performance as organized, by displaying its reactions to the reaction of the spectator, by proposing to compensate viewers for the direct participation of which they are deprived, television becomes the primary performer in the enactment of public ceremonies” (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 78)
Planning for television: Olympics

Three main actors involved, forming a “circuit of cultural production”:

– The organizers - IOC/FIFA
– Corporate sponsors
– Media
Planning for television

Frandsen - the TV text is actually created in the interaction between various producing organizations who operate on either national, regional, or global level:

– Special television organization provides “the international feed” a type of homogenized parent material - visual signals and background sounds to all television rights holders. Access negotiated through main TV rights holder.

– At regional level - regional organizations such as the EBU (European Broadcasting Union take care of technical distribution of signals from the Games to its member organizations.

– At the national level - negotiation between different national TV stations for distribution of content.
Customizing coverage for national consumption

Mechanisms for the variation of coverage. (Roel Puijk, 2000):

- Selection - each channel has a lot to choose from and they try to find those items that are most interesting from their perspective.
- Transformation
- Contextualization
Audiences

Global audience figures - large and rising proportion of viewers (around 1 billion for the Seoul 1988 and Barcelona 1992 Olympics, 2 billion for the Atlanta Games in 1996, 3.5 billion for Sydney and Athens Olympics)

Olympic TV studies characterize the experience of watching “live” televised events in terms of “one world”, global co-presence. Differences of age, status gender, ethnicity and culture seemingly superseded by shared passion for the events and its outcome.
Tension between nationalistic sentiments and universal love of sports:

– Spectator cultures play important role in representing nation by actuating symbolism in dress, songs, flags. Yet many sports also possess a world community of followers with cross-national preferences for world players and teams.
USA 1994 FIFA World Cup

Andreas Rogenhagen (1995) captures global impact of the USA 1994 FIFA world cup final game:

– Production lines stopped in Teheran car factory while workers moved to a space where screening had been set up.

– In Cameroon, Mongo Faya’s harem was feasting, dancing and celebrating throughout the event.

– In Argentina, fans chanted their support for the Italian side, allies in their archrivalry with Brazil.

– In Lapland, a couple watching the game ran out of vodka and orange.

– Street party in Rio moved into ecstasy and triumphant hysteria when Italian Roberto Baggio missed penalty in shoot-out.

– Despondent Italian fans in Turin were speechless and drained.

– From monks in their monastery in Prague, crowds from Belarus to Costa Rica gathered around televisions from giant public screenings to small scale viewing of black and white portable sets.
KOREA/JAPAN 2002 World Cup

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Small football nation”</td>
<td>“Big football nation”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not qualify</td>
<td>Did not qualify</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fans adopted favorite team</td>
<td>Prior right-wing political wave</td>
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<td>More diverse viewing positions/sympathies</td>
<td>Support for national teams of immigrants’ home nations</td>
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KOREA/JAPAN 2002 World Cup

England – tabloid headlines:

‘The whole of England has been brought together with a dream of victory. We want it, we need it, we crave it. The country is speaking with one voice: DO IT FOR US!’

‘ENGLAND’S soccer heroes will inflict pain on the Danes today by booting them out of the World Cup’

‘FINISH THE JOB LADS’
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