sciendo

Nordic Journal of
MEDIA STUDIES

The life and times of media events

A tribute to Elihu Katz

Paddy Scannell

University of Michigan, USA

Abstract

I have just learnt that Elihu Katz – a dearly loved friend and colleague – has died at the age of 95. This abstract is a valediction forbidding mourning. *Media Events*, written with Daniel Dayan, was the culminating work of a career spanning six decades – a career launched by *Personal Influence*, written with his doctoral supervisor, Professor Paul Lazarsfeld, of Columbia University, New York, and published in 1955. In my contribution to this issue, I try to do two things: firstly, to indicate how *Media Events* opened up a novel way of thinking about television and, at the same time, to think of it as a summa, the distillation of a lifetime's work in the academic field of communication and media studies. I wanted especially to point towards its *stimmung* – that untranslatable ordinary German word for mood, or disposition: an attitude to life, the world, and television. I start with Katz's earliest academic work – his master's thesis completed at Columbia in the 1940s, felicitously but not accidentally called *The Happiness Game*. The *stimmung* of this work is the same as that of *Media Events*. *That* vision, as Daniel Dayan has claimed, was *not* a mirage. What he and Katz saw in *La Télévision Céremoniélle* (the book's French title when he translated it) was every bit as true as the dominant academic view of the politics of television whose hegemonic sociological take on "the real world" they both attempted to counter.

Keywords: events, television, historical time, life time, happiness, anthropology, the sociology of ceremony

Life time and historical time

Media events exist in two orders of time: the times of life and the times of history. These two existential temporal orders are separate but related. The time of life describes the lifespan of individual human beings from the moment of birth, through the time of lived experience, to the moment of death. This is the now! The time of the present, of the living. Life time is embedded in the surpassing temporal order of history. History and writing go together: The latter discloses the former. Life time is a temporality that we share with all living creatures, human

Scannell, P. (2022). The life and times of media events: A tribute to Elihu Katz. *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, *4*(1), 118–133. https://doi.org/10.2478/njms-2022-0007

or not. But historical time is unique to human beings and describes the world that humankind past, present, and future has, does, and will go on creating. This human world is something that we no longer share with other living creatures, and it exists outside of the temporality of the prelapsarian living world. In this article, I would like to essay two things: to describe *Media Events* by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992) as part of human life time that points us to a certain view of *broadcast* television which exists in and for the present, while belonging to the time of history.

Elihu Katz has a unique place in the history of the academic study of communication in America and Europe. *Media Events*, like almost all his work, is co-authored. The basic concept of the book belongs to Katz alone; however, as we shall see, Daniel Dayan brought intellectual heft to their study, and he has subsequently theorised it in a way that fits the television of "media events" into the twenty-first century's galaxy of old and new media – those of the last century (radio and television) and those of this. I will return to Dayan's important conceptualisation of post-9/11 television, but am treating the book as a personal summation of a lifetime's work in the study of communication by Elihu Katz. I want in particular to show the continuity of his work, from his first piece of academic research to this culminating study of "the live broadcasting of history", a timespan of 42 years. To do so, I sketch an account of his first, and perhaps his only, singly authored work, *The Happiness Game: A Content Analysis of Radio Fan Mail* (Katz, 1950/2012a). This, Katz's master's thesis (still unpublished, but in the archives of Columbia University and reprinted with permission in the *International Journal of Communication* in 2012), bears a striking similarity to *Media Events*, which came out over 40 years later. A working life went by, the topic and medium is different, yet Katz's attitude to life (and, now, television) remained the same.

The pursuit of happiness

I first came across *The Happiness Game* while working with Elihu Katz at the University of Pennsylvania in 2010. Katz unearthed an ancient copy, which I read avidly and subsequently thought it deserved to be made public. I organised a panel, which included John Peters and Peter Simonson, for the 2011 International Communication Association (ICA) conference to publicise and discuss it. It was subsequently made public as a feature in volume 6 of the 2012 *International Journal of Communication*. My introduction of the section (Scannell, 2012) was followed by contributions by John (Peters, 2012) and Peter (Simonson, 2012), and Katz (2012b) wrapped the whole thing up with a fascinating memoir – "In pursuit of an MA" – that well repays reading. The thesis (Katz, 1950/2012a) was also included.

Katz's master's thesis was supervised by Leo Lowenthal, and drew on recently published work by Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert Merton, and Erich Fromm. Lowenthal

– who, as Katz recalls (personal correspondence), was then preparing to become director of research for Voice of America – proposed the topic and somehow obtained from CBS (perhaps through Lazarsfeld) several thousand letters sent to the network during early 1948. These letters were sorted and assigned to various graduate students for analysis (Katz received "personal correspondence"). It was a happy chance that the letters assigned to Katz were from (overwhelmingly female) listeners in response to a request from a popular radio broadcaster, Ted Malone. Malone asked regular listeners of his daytime show to note whenever they felt happy throughout the month of February 1948, and at the end of the month to send him a letter detailing their happiest day. Over two thousand letters were received, and from this, a sample of 236 letters was selected and submitted to a careful content analysis, which formed the substance of Katz's thesis.

That *The Happiness Game* was Elihu Katz's first research project is even more impressive when one considers how fascinating it is. The questions Katz asked are still relevant: What did happiness mean? What did it mean for the women who answered Malone? What did it mean in the context of the time? Was happiness something of special concern to Americans? (The right to the pursuit of happiness is, after all, proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence.) Two of the chapter headings illustrate the essence of Katz's study: "Is everybody happy?" and "Is everybody *really* happy?" (Katz, 1950/2012a: 15, 99). Happiness is pursued in America "because there is a cultural emphasis on being happy" (Katz, 1950/2012a: 15). Starting from the understanding that Americans are continuously made to feel that they are supposed to be and have every reason to be happy and that it's their own fault if they're not, Katz examined the letters in order to establish 1) what criteria Americans apply when determining their happiness; 2) what "'scientific' evaluational criteria" can be applied to determine whether an individual (or a nation) is *really* happy; and 3) how the criteria of the letter-writers compare with the "scientific" criteria of happiness (Katz, 1950/2012a: 17).

It was a deliberate narrative strategy (and the key to the whole study) that the discussion of the scientific evaluations of happiness is long deferred – in fact, it wasn't until the last appendix (Katz, 1950/2012a: 135) that the strategy underpinning all that had gone before was finally revealed. Instead of starting with the usual crew of academic experts and authorities in a dutiful review of their correct views on everything – the orthodox review of the literature in any usual post-graduate thesis – Katz deliberately began by acknowledging the importance of the pursuit of happiness in American culture. From there, he proceeded directly to analysing the letters and what they revealed about what happiness meant to the letter-writers – how they understood it. It might be objected, Katz conceded, that he did not spent enough time defining "happiness". A social scientist, it may be said, "cannot accept a word [happiness] that has been in constant use and has had so many meanings and unquestioningly make it the subject for a study. *Let it be repeated that this is precisely what we have done* [emphasis added]" (Katz, 1950/2012a: 135). Katz refused to come up with an a priori definition of

happiness culled from the literature in order to apply it to the data, the letters themselves and their writers. These were taken at face-value. Several kinds of happiness were discovered, and thus it was possible to specify, empirically, the popular usage of the word "happiness". There was not one kind of happiness that precluded or contradicted the others (Katz, 1950/2012a: 136).

It is only after the results were in that Katz searched for scientific concepts of happiness in the literature, though "scientific" is perhaps an overstatement, as the discussions exhibit that kind of punditry expected of *maître penseurs* of the professorial class (and not just from France). Exploring views from both sides of the Atlantic, Katz (1950/2012a: 100) maintained they mostly diverged from the views expressed by the letter-writers, the majority of whom experienced happiness as a surprise. This idea of happiness as unrelated to any purposeful activity is inconceivable for Bertrand Russell and Robert Lynd. And for Eric Fromm, Katz's main finding from the letters (that happy events came as a surprise) would simply confirm the letter-writers' reports as illusory, because according to Fromm, "the pursuit of happiness is indeed nothing but the pursuit of significance" (as cited in Katz, 1950/2012a: 100).

Listeners came to be understood as a mass audience in the emerging sociology of mass communication, and it is an unusual and distinctive feature of Katz's thesis that he did not include this perspective. Katz took a studiously non-judgmental view of the letter-writers – again in sharp contrast with the emerging body of academic literature on the radio audience. From this very early study of radio and its listeners, something beyond recognition within the sociology of mass communication emerged, namely that the new mass audience is more than just data for the social scientist. It consists of people who are persons in their own right with their own real lives which they live and share with others. The letter-writers were real people who wrote to Ted Malone about their own personal experience of happiness. There are no individuals in the sociology of mass communication, because from that perspective, the masses have no differentiated individual existence.

Media Events

Fast forward to *Media Events*. Much time has passed from the 1950 study of radio to the 1992 study of television, but the *stimmung* of the early work is recaptured in *Media Events*. Both works are studies of broadcasting: radio (Katz, 1950/2012a), and television (Dayan & Katz, 1992). And happiness is a common theme. By now Katz was working in the US at the University of Pennsylvania, but his home was in Jerusalem, where his wife and family lived. He had established the study of communication at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem where he had taught from 1956, becoming a professor of sociology and communication in 1963. By this time, Katz had an international reputation, and it was doubtless this that moved the Israeli Government, in the immediate aftermath of the Six-Day War, to invite him to become the founding director of television in Israel. Katz had no

experience of working in television, but nor did anyone else in Israel, and Katz knew *something* about it, if only as an academic observer. He accepted this wholly unexpected political challenge – an unanticipated happiness? – and stuck with the job for two years (it was fraught with political infighting) before returning to the more tranquil waters of academic life. Nevertheless, within 18 months he had spearheaded the launch of a dual television service for both Israelis and Arabs. It began with the live coverage of Independence Day celebrations in Jerusalem – a portent of academic things to come.

On his return to academic life, Katz soon recruited a younger colleague in the Hebrew University's Communication Institute as a partner in a study of television that was taking shape in his mind. Daniel Dayan was not an American; he grew up in Morocco and went to France for his higher education, enrolling in the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*, or the Institute for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences (it had split off from the Sorbonne). His first degree was in anthropology, followed by a master's in comparative literature. From Paris, he decamped to California, taking an additional master's in communications and film at Stanford, then back to Paris for a doctoral degree in aesthetics (aka semiotics) – supervised by Roland Barthes, no less. His first full-time job, after some post-doctoral research in Paris, was at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he was "discovered" by Elihu Katz and invited to join up in what became a ten-year collaborative project on what eventually became *Media Events*. Katz had the original idea; Dayan would provide the intellectual ballast. During the 1980s, both men commuted between work in America and home in Europe, managing to catch up with each other and their joint study of events whenever and wherever they could.

It was Dayan who renamed the book *La Télevision Cérémonielle* [literal translation: ceremonial television] as he translated it into French, and this was a more exact description of it than its original title. It *was* only about television, and within that a new kind of genre specific to broadcasting: the live coverage of great occasions. *Media Events* was about "the festive viewing of television" (Dayan & Katz, 1992: 1). It was concerned with historic occasions that transfixed a nation, or even the world, as they were televised live as they were happening. They included epic contests of politics and sports, charismatic missions (the voyages to Jerusalem of Anwar el-Sadat and the Pope were singled out) and the rites of passage of the great (the funeral of John F. Kennedy, for example). These all fell into what Katz called contests, conquests, and coronations, although Dayan thought this taxonomy was a bit too glib (Katz, personal correspondence). *Media Events* hung "a halo over the television set" (Dayan & Katz, 1992: 1) and transformed the viewing experience. The book was an attempt to classify this new genre of television, and "to bring the anthropology of ceremony to bear on the process of mass communication" (Dayan & Katz, 1992: 1–2).

The main characteristic of this television with a halo was that it interrupted routine television output. Secondly, the programmes were live and in real time:

The time of the occasion and the time of its television coverage were the same (no recorded highlights). Thirdly, they were known in advance and pre-planned. They were not unexpected intrusions, and thus part of their aura (or halo) was the anticipation of the occasion before it came to pass. Television was not so much an outside observer looking in, as an intrinsic part of the event itself. Even if televised events addressed conflict – and many did – their coverage stressed reconciliation, not its obverse. They were, as a genre, oriented to consensus. Their overall effect was to integrate societies as a whole in a collective heartbeat, evoking a renewal of loyalty to society and its legitimate authority. They were, in a word, hegemonic. And yet… for Dayan and Katz, media "events" might well be hegemonic occasions, but they placed more emphasis on their ceremonial character rather than their political meaning. Media events were celebratory. They were fun. What made them different from everyday television was precisely their consensual character, as people forgot for the moment the gritty antagonisms of ordinary life and came together, via television, in a huge, shared experience.

Dayan and Katz's overall view of the festive character of great occasions did not fit well with the standard academic view of the role of television in modern societies, and the book takes a combative stance to its readership right from the start:

> The live broadcasting of history [the book's subtitle]? Don't they know that history is process not events? Certainly not ceremonial events! Don't they know that media events are hegemonic manipulations? (Dayan & Katz, 1992: vii)

The mischievous tone belongs to Elihu Katz. This cocking a snook at the field shows how well the authors understood what was new and different about their overall thesis. It differed from the social-scientific view of students of political communication, as well as the standard cultural studies view of television-as-ideology. Looking back from present time, to when the book was being written, Daniel Dayan points out that it captured the zeitgeist of the 1980s. The Cold War was over, and terrorism had not yet come to the fore as the major provider of television political performances:

> Thus, we were in fact depicting a period in which the most significant events were not displays of anger or evocations of violence, but expressions of hope. […] Our book feels amazingly optimistic in retrospect. (Daniel Dayan, as cited in Sumiala et al., 2018)

Undoubtedly, 9/11 transformed the meaning of media events, or at least how they were understood, as the emphasis changed from their festive to their catastrophic impact. And at the same time, the question raised by *Media Events* – as to whether the event was a new genre of television – was displaced, as the witness to catastrophe came to the fore and became increasingly aligned with the question of global news. The witness of television goes back to Luc Boltanski's (1993/1999) seminal

La souffrance au distance [*Distant Suffering*]. It was translated to English in 1999, and became increasingly influential post 9/11. With conflict, catastrophe, and division foregrounded, the original view of festive television began to seem outdated.

MacArthur Day

One important stalking horse in *Media Events* was the study of MacArthur Day by two graduate students, Gladys and Kurt Lang (Lang & Lang, 1952/2004). Their seminal article, first published in 1952, on "the unique perspective of television", was acknowledged as such by both Katz and Dayan (2003) a few years after *Media Events* came out. My discussion of Lang and Lang's study draws on two versions of it: the original article, very slightly abridged in Peters and Simonson's volume, *Mass communication and American social thought* (Lang & Lang, 1952/2004) and a revised version of it (Lang & Lang, 1968). The original was about television. The revised version was by two authors with well-established careers in political communication. My discussion brings out the difference.

Lang and Lang's study, *The unique perspective of television and its effect*, was the first ever American study of television, as far as I know. It examined the effect of television on "a live event" – the public motorcade of General MacArthur and wife through the streets of downtown Chicago in 1951 – and was given the imprimatur of "a canonic text in media research" by Katz and his collaborators in the edited collection of that title (Katz et al., 2003). It allowed Katz in particular the opportunity for a little soul-searching over their debt of gratitude to the Langs for saying in 1952 what they (Dayan and Katz) got around to forty years later (Katz & Dayan, 2003: 121). The Langs' article in many ways shaped the ways in which the politics of television was thought of by academics thereafter. Its importance was generously acknowledged, but Katz in particular differed from their interpretation of the events of the day in two important ways: what kind of event it *was*, and what the difference was between being there in the crowd who saw MacArthur in the flesh, and those who saw the event on television.

The first concerns the nature of the event itself. The second concerns the difference between the event as experienced by those who were there and by those who watched it on television. What kind of an event was it? Was it a political event, a news event, or a ceremonial event? It could be more than one of these things, and possibly all of them. The same event can be a different thing for different people, depending on their position in relation to it. A goal is a moment of exhilaration for one set of participants at the soccer match, and of gloom and despondency for the other set. The televised funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997 was an occasion of mourning for British viewers and for British television – a solemn, ceremonial occasion (a televised event). For everyone else – the worldwide audience (it was watched live and as it took place in over 200 countries) – it was the ritual climax of a major news story, and treated in that way by, for instance, the American Cable Network News company (CNN). Events have an inner and outer

meaning: a meaning for those most immediately caught up in them and one for those who are not.

Dayan and Katz were neither scholars of political communication nor of news journalism, but the Langs were. *They* saw the celebration of General MacArthur as a political occasion (MacArthur was a highly controversial political figure at the time) whose real (i.e., political) meaning was obscured by television. The Langs paid careful attention to television coverage of the motorcade and made three important points about its effect. Firstly, they noted television's "technological bias" (1952/2004: 335b, a phrase deleted in the 1968 text). By this, they meant the bias of the camera: the shot selection by the producers of the televised event which expressed choices about what to foreground visually and what, as a consequence, remained in the invisible background – the determination by the camera of what was important and what was not. From the moment the general came within range, the television cameras maintained a close-up focus on him and his immediate entourage (especially his wife): "the selectivity of the coverage with its emphasis on close ups [made it] possible for each viewer to see himself in a *personal* relationship to the general [emphasis original]" (Lang & Lang, 1952/2004: 333a). Television produced "a 'personalizing' effect that put the focus on MacArthur while allowing the [political] background to remain obscure" (Lang & Lang, 1968: 43). The maintenance of this close-up perspective generated the effect of a continuously cheering, wildly enthusiastic crowd. What the cameras never showed was what happened as soon as the cavalcade had passed – the crowd falling silent and melting away. Second, there was the crucial role of the commentary which instigated an atmosphere of anticipation in the long wait for the general to come into view, and which then underscored the personalising effect of the camera with a range of comments that included references to "the very famous MacArthur wave" and "the already legendary charm and grace" of Mrs. MacArthur (Lang & Lang, 1968: 43, 44). Third there was the impact of television itself on the event, modifying it in certain ways by virtue of its (television's) presence. Thus, for instance:

> The cheering, waving, and shouting was often largely a response to the aiming of the camera. The crowd was thrilled to be on television, and many attempted to make themselves apparent to acquaintances who might be watching. Casual conversation continually showed that being on television was among the greatest thrills of the day. (Lang & Lang, 1952/2004: 335a)

Behaviours were altered by the presence of television. People played up to the cameras and the event itself was played up for television viewers.

In sum, for the Langs, television hyped up the event and distorted it. They took the real thing to be the responses of the crowds on the street (they were taking a course on crowd behaviour at the time), and television to be a simulacrum that distorted its reality. By the time Dayan and Katz wrote *Media Events*, television had become an everyday reality. It was no longer a novelty. They agreed with the Langs that there were two "events" – the MacArthur Day parade, and

television's coverage – but not that one was real and the other not. The event "on the ground" and television's coverage of it were different, but related, realities. That said, what of the claim that television distorted the reality of the event of that day? Did television (as an apparatus) personalise the coverage of the motorcade, and did they hype it up? The Langs saw it as a political moment (whose wider political significance television ignored), and so it was for them. Katz and Dayan knew this too, but saw it as a festive, celebratory occasion, "a high holiday", when people took a break from mundane daily life (Dayan & Katz, 1992).

And as for hyping things up, this was true. Television does indeed underscore the greatness of the occasion, simply by being there. The crowds on the street *and* television coverage of it made MacArthur Day a big thing, irrespective of its political meaning and significance. Large crowds are an integral component of media events. One consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic was that large gatherings in public were forbidden. This was disastrous for sports – a big soccer match without a cheering, booing crowd is unthinkable. Imagine a royal wedding without a throng of people to cheer the happy couple on their way. There is perhaps no better instance of what Dayan and Katz meant by a "media event" than a (British) royal wedding. It is by no means obvious why a wedding involving a member of the British royal family (and the more senior, the better) should rivet mankind, but it did:

> No feeling could seem more childish than the enthusiasm of the English at the marriage of the Prince of Wales. They treated as a great political event, what, looked at as a matter of pure business, was very small indeed. But no feeling could be more like common human nature as it is, and as it is likely to be. The women – one half of the human race at least – care fifty times more for a marriage than a ministry. All but a few cynics like to see a pretty novel touching for a moment the dry scenes of the grave world. A princely marriage is the brilliant edition of a universal fact, and, as such, it rivets mankind. (Bagehot, 1867/2001: 85)

Following on from their anticipatory response to academic criticism, Dayan and Katz (1992: vii) asked rhetorically, "Don't they know that the royal wedding of 1980 simply blotted out the ethnic rioting on the streets of London the day before?" Of course, they knew, and you might (if you were a cynic) say that it was a hegemonic occasion. The remarks above, on a princely wedding as "a brilliant edition of a universal fact", were made by Walter Bagehot (1867/2001: 85) – a distinguished journalist, and one of the first editors of *The Economist* – commenting on the marriage of an earlier heir to the throne in 1863.

Bagehot distinguished between the "dignified" parts (the monarchy) and the "efficient" parts (the government) of the British constitution, suggesting that the dignified part (epitomised by a royal wedding or funeral) served to distract the masses, allowing the efficient part to get on with running the country. A royal wedding had no political significance, but it rivetted humankind.

The end of television?

Are they both – media events, and the kind of television that participated in their creation – over? Elihu Katz raised that very question at the beginning of this century, and I worked with him in assembling a collection of essays, *The end of television? Its impact on the world so far* (Katz & Scannell, 2009). It certainly seemed so to Katz at the time (I insisted on the question mark. Katz would have done without it). The television service that he created for Israel now appeared to be fast disappearing from history. I think of the last century as, among other things, the Age of Broadcasting – radio for the first half of the twentieth century, television for the second. In the time before the digitisation of everything, television had a seemingly settled institutional character: Central broadcasting institutions provided programmes for whole populations who all watched the same stuff night after night. The television industry then had what Dayan (2009) calls "a monopoly of attention". The audiences for broadcasting had very little choice in what they listened to or watched. Thus, it made sense to critique the effect of radio and television, direct or indirect on the mass audience as a deception of some kind – ideology, or hegemony, in short. That monopoly was broken by multichannel viewing and a different, non-broadcast form of television that began to displace what came now to be thought of as "old" – or retronymically, *broadcast* – television.

Twenty-first–century new television came out of the US. Amanda Lotz (2007) calls it video on demand, or VoD. It was no longer dependent on what she thinks of as the "tyranny" of the schedules of twentieth-century broadcasting. Netflix and others are all up-to-the-minute versions of the eighteenth-century circulating library, as Lotz (2018: 181–186) argues. In today's world, Netflix caused a sensation in the television industry when it released all twelve episodes of *House of Cards* (Fincher et al., 2013–2108) at the same time, waving goodbye to the schedules. You could now watch a whole drama series in one go. This box-set long-form fiction is as specific to VoD as the never-ending fictional format (or soap opera) is specific to broadcast television. It is a private, individual pleasure that you can binge-watch any time you like. But the never-ending fictional formats of broadcasting's day-by-day fictions have an anyone-as-someone structure (Scannell, 2000) that is both a personal and a public pleasure. Tied to the daily schedules, they hold the world in place through time as well.

Media Events subscribes to a certain view of history, what Fernand Braudel (1980: 28) calls *histoire* événementielle, the times of events:

> Let us say that instead of a history of events, we should speak of a short time span, proportionate to individuals, to our daily life, to our illusions, to our hasty awareness – above all the time of the chronicle and the journalist… The daily paper offers us all the mediocre accidents of ordinary life: a fire, a railway crash, the price of wheat, a crime, a theatrical production, a flood

> […] Social science has almost what amounts to a horror of the event. And not without some justification, for the short time span is the most capricious and the most delusive of all.

For Braudel – to oversimplify – the past belongs to history, the present to sociology. History is made in the present, where else? But we, who live in the present, are in no position to evaluate the future impact (the historical effect) of actions taken in the present, the time of everyday life. History, as Soren Kierkegaard observed, is lived going forward, but understood looking back. Only in the past does the present make sense. For Braudel, writing in the 1950s, the time of everyday life was the time of the newspaper and the journalist. For Dayan and Katz, the time of everyday life was intercalated with the times of television and the ceremonial occasions it presented.

Media events exist in and for the present – an interruption of the schedules, a high holiday, a momentary break from usual daily life. But who can say what makes certain events historic? Katz, in his pre-television days, co-wrote with Rolf Meyersohn a brilliant article on fads (Meyersohn & Katz, 1957) – long forgotten perhaps, but prescient, now that the question of personal influence, and influencers in particular, is a born-again topic in academic research. If the present is foregrounded (as it is in *Media Events*), it becomes impossible to tell whether anything on television is more than a "here-today-gone-tomorrow" sort of thing (a fad or fashion) or a historical event. Who knows? Braudel's view of history cannot answer this conundrum. For him, history works on the past–present axis. The time of everyday life – the time of media events, *histoire* événementielle – belongs to the present and is illusory. The future remains forever unknown, and is not the concern of history.

An "old" broadcaster like the BBC is no longer simply a central national network of programme distribution and content. It has now become what Daniel Dayan (2009) calls a global television "mega network". There are, he points out, a number of these centres scattered round the world – in London, Paris, Dohar, and New York. There is no single World News Service, as there is no single political or economic world centre. His mega televisions *monstrate*. They show what's going on around the world in news hotspots, and do so in interaction with new social media. These solid televisions of the centre interact with "liquid" peripheral media that *pre*monstrate and *re*monstrate in a temporal dialectic of before and after. The notorious photographs taken by an American soldier of the abuse of prisoners in Abu Ghraib – taken on a mobile phone – were privately circulated and then put online, where they went viral. From there they were picked up and shown on central mainstream media creating immediate international outrage and gravely damaging the legitimacy of the American-led armed intervention in Iraq (Gourevitch & Morris, 2008). In Dayan's elegant reworking of core–periphery network theory, *pre*monstration comes before the monstrations of televisions of the centre. *Re*monstration comes after them – a second showing that serves as a

reproach (or remonstration) and critique of the monstrations of the centre. Thus, the interconnectivity between centre and periphery is redefined. Each has its own techno-social networks. Each is always on the lookout for what the other is up to. Each might be the primary source of breaking news (Dayan, 2009).

Television news works on the unknown, unknowable present–future. For most people, it seems to be no more than a given aspect of the present. What matters is that news is *there* each day, not that everyone watches it. It is there to make a cackle, like the geese of Rome, when something suddenly erupts: "Omigod, have you heard the news? Diana's been killed in a car crash in Paris!" And there, out of a clear blue sky at the start of another day in Manhattan, two passenger planes fly into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. Within minutes of the first plane going into the north tower, CNN was reporting the breaking story, and bore witness to its unfolding, live and as it happened, the second plane hitting the south tower, and, to top it all, both towers collapsing, suddenly, silently, awfully (Scannell, 2014: 191–224).

Twenty-four/seven news is the culmination over centuries – firstly in the long temporal formation of print journalism – of the ever-increasing importance of up-to-the-minute news in modern societies. At the start of the last century, the vast majority of people led intensely local lives, and the great world, where stuff was happening and history made, was over the hills and far away. But this began to change beyond the imagining of our great grandparents' generation. The late Raymond Williams (1974: 26–27) acutely saw the link between connectivity, centre, and periphery in the plays of Ibsen and Chekhov at the turn of the nineteenth century:

> The centre of interest was now for the first time the family home, but men and women stared from its windows, or waited anxiously for messages, to learn about forces "out there" which would determine the conditions of their lives.

The gap between these two worlds, the public and the private, "the immediate living areas and the directed places of work and government", created both the form and necessity of new kinds of communication, of "news" from elsewhere, from otherwise inaccessible sources (Williams, 1974: 26–27).

The historical time of broadcasting

If news keeps its eye on the future, how does broadcasting keep its eye on the past? Let me flesh out a little the coverage of a key media event, as discussed by Dayan and Katz, namely, state occasions involving the dignified part of the British constitution, the monarchy – with special reference to coronations and royal weddings. The bottom-line function of historical central social institutions, like the BBC, is to hold the world in place through the time of longue durée. They are designed, in the last instance, to smooth over the ruin of life time. In the past, the death

of the monarch in Britain always provoked powerful families with a claim on the throne to rise up and fight for the crown. The overcoming of such temporal ruptures to the ongoing life of British society took many centuries before solutions were found for the direptions of death. Individual human life time is mortal. Historical time is not.

The BBC started, of course, as a radio broadcaster, and in order to understand its historical function of holding the world in place through time, we must start by thinking of it as a broadcaster of radio every bit as much of television. *Together* they constitute the BBC as a broadcaster yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Right at the beginning, in 1923, the infant service wanted to broadcast the wedding of Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon (the late queen mother) to the Duke of York (the late king George VI). The BBC was not yet a power in the land, and the request was brushed aside on the grounds that "men might listen in public houses [pubs] with their hats on" (Scannell, 1996: 77). But a year or so later, in 1924, the then present King, George V, was heard officially opening the Empire Exhibition at Wembley. This was perhaps Britain's first "media event". It most certainly was a great occasion. By that time there were only a million wireless radio sets in use, but an estimated ten million people heard the king for the first time ever. The newspapers promoted (hyped up) the occasion with advance publicity, and the *Daily Mail* made arrangements for massed crowds to hear the king in major cities such as Leeds, Manchester, and Glasgow (Scannell & Cardiff, 1991: 281). This was the biggest thing the BBC had yet done, but it was far surpassed by the coronation of King George VI in 1937. By then, the BBC was well on the way to becoming an accepted national institution, and a power in the land: 58 microphones, 472 miles of wire, and 60 BBC engineers were involved in the coverage. The commentators, hidden away in a crypt beneath the church, were in full morning dress. By now, overseas broadcast services were sending their own teams to provide coverage, and the coronation was described in Czech, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, Flemish, French, German, Hungarian, Japanese, Norwegian, Spanish (for South America), Swedish, and Serbo-Croat (Wood, 1979: 101–102).

These two occasions were important way-marks in the transformation of BBC radio from what it was when it first began: a commercial network of 24 stations in the most populous parts of the land, operating in the interests of the nascent global communications business. It became a non-profit public service institution by Royal Charter and Government License in 1926. By the outbreak of war in September 1939, it had already become a central, national institution. During the war, it undertook the difficult task of maintaining the nation's morale through five weary, dispiriting years. By the end, it had become a national treasure. In its immediate aftermath, the BBC began broadcasting on television. For most British people whose memory goes back that far, the age of television really began with the coronation of the present queen in 1953. Most people then did not have a television set, but they knew someone who did. I got my very first view of television by watching the coronation at the house of my mother's friend, and was

enthralled, like countless others (for a fuller account, see Scannell, 1996: 80–86). Most readers of a certain age today can probably remember the 1980 wedding of the Prince of Wales through to the weddings of Prince William and Prince Harry, as well as the unexpected and untimely death of their mother in 1997 and the huge media storm that followed, culminating in television coverage from around the world of her state funeral procession and service in the Abbey.

The infrastructure of the schedules

There have been two underlying themes to the forgoing narrative: one to show how media events point to a new future for television, the other the long continuities in Katz's thinking. Both are underpinned by what is called broadcasting. In the last century, television was, at first, always thought of as a national thing – British, Danish, or American television, for instance. But Dayan and Katz think of it in international, even global terms. This is particularly true of Daniel Dayan's reflections on the book he co-wrote with Elihu Katz (Dayan, 2009). For them both, the question of genre remains important. The newsroom view of an event works perfectly for a catastrophe like 9/11, but not for a royal wedding, the annual Eurovision Song Contest, or any great sporting occasion. None of these has any political significance, but television's live coverage augments the greatness of the occasion (Scannell, 2014: 153–190). They support the continuity of ordinary, routine existence by their very difference from it – a celebration, a public holiday.

But the most significant aspect of *Media Events* is its pioneering focus on the *liveness* of broadcast television. This was largely overlooked in academic circles until their book came out, with most work on the topic (Bourdon, 2000; Marriott, 2007; Scannell, 2014) coming after and, perhaps in part, stimulated by, *Media Events*. Liveness is as old as broadcasting. It remains *the* trump card for today's broadcasting institutions, since the streaming giants of twenty-first–century television are glorified subscription libraries and have no resources to muster for the live coverage of, say, a big soccer match. Live broadcasting belongs to a specific institutional form of broadcast radio and television. The two genres that rely, as always, on the liveness of broadcasting are news and sport. Both guarantee that broadcast radio and television have a bright, long-lasting future. For those in the global television industry, daily news provides prestige and political clout, while sports bring in the money.

Yet liveness, this crucial aspect of *Media Events*, makes it hard to grasp the historicality of radio and television. The book's subtitle rightly describes its topic as "the live broadcasting of history"; this has the unfortunate effect, however, of promoting the living present at the expense of the temporalities of past and future. It is very hard, if not impossible, to hold all three together in one's head at the same time. The best way, I find, is to think of the schedules of radio and television broadcasting as their infrastructure, or Heidegger's care structure (the two are the same; Scannell, 2014, 2021).

The time of broadcasting, the time of history, far surpasses the time of the present, the time of the generations of the living. How could we possibly understand history as the age-long narrative of human life without acknowledging Braudel's notion of historical time, the time of longue durée? But with the important addition of the three-dimensional character of human life time. The time of individuals and the time of history (as the past) are intimately linked, but different. We, who live in the present, bear within ourselves that whole immense history. But our moral responsibility is to the generations yet unborn, the unimaginable future, stretching far beyond the short time-span of individual life. History itself is not a relative thing. It is rather that we the living at any one time stand in a relative relationship to history itself.

I have tried to hold together the time of life in the work of Elihu Katz, and the time of history through the book he wrote with Daniel Dayan. If I have succeeded, you should have a picture of the immensity of historical time – past, present, and future – within which broadcast media are intercalated. I also wanted to show something of the working life of Katz, beginning with his very first, unpublished study of happiness and culminating, five decades later, in *Media Events*. The book contains, I feel sure, the trace-memory of the time that he was in charge of television in Israel, launching it with a televised celebration of Independence Day, his own, personal media event. I began, though, with the study of happiness, because in it I see the same person, with the same attitude and cast of mind, as the co-author of *Media Events*.

References

Bagehot, W. (2001). *The English constitution* (M. Taylor, Ed.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1867)

Boltanski, L. (1999). *Distant suffering: Morality, media and politics* (G. D. Burchell, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511489402 (Original work published 1993)

Bourdon, J. (2000). Live television culture is still alive: On television as an unfulfilled promise. *Media, Culture & Society*, *22*(5), 531–556. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F016344300022005001

Braudel, F. (1980). *On history*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Dayan, D. (2009). Sharing and showing: Television as monstration. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *625*(1), 19–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716209338364

Dayan, D., & Katz, E. (1992). *Media events: The live broadcasting of history*. University of Harvard Press.

Fincher, D., Spacey, K., Roth, E., Donen, J., Brunetti, D., Davies, A., Dobbs, M., Melfi, J., Willimon, B., Manson, D., Coles, J. D., Wright, R., Pugliese, F., & Gibson, M. J. (Executive Producers). (2013–2018). *House of Cards* [TV series]. MRC; Trigger Street Productions; Wade/Thomas Productions; Knight Takes King Productions.

Gourevitch, P., & Morris, E. (2008, March 24). Exposure: The woman behind the camera at Abu Ghraib. *The New Yorker*. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/03/24/exposure-5

Katz, E. (2012a). "The Happiness Game": A content analysis of radio fan mail. *International Journal of Communication*, *6*, 1297–1445 (Original pp. 1–149). https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1633/758 (Original work published 1950)

Katz, E. (2012b). In pursuit of an MA. *International Journal of Communication*, *6*, 1290–1296. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1632/759

Katz, E., & Dayan, D. (2003). Latter-day thoughts on Lang and Lang's "MacArthur Day in Chicago". In E. Katz., J. D. Peters., T. Liebes., & A. Orloff. (Eds.), *Canonic texts in media research: Are there any? Should there be? How about these?* (pp. 121–136). Polity Press.

Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955). *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. The Free Press.

Katz, E., Peters, J. D., Liebes, T., & Orloff, A. (Eds.). (2003). *Canonic texts in media research: Are there any? Should there be? How about these?* Polity Press.

Katz, E., & Scannell, P. (Eds.). (2009). The end of television? Its impact on the world (so far) [Special issue]. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *625*. https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/anna/625/1

Lang, K., & Lang, G. E. (2004). The unique perspective of television and its effect: A pilot study. In J. D. Peters, & P. Simonson (Eds.), *Mass communication and American social thought: Key texts 1919–1968* (pp. 328–337). Rowman and Littlefield. (Original work published 1952)

Lang, K., & Lang, G. E. (1968). *Politics and television*. Quadrangle Books.

Lotz, A. (2007). *The television will be revolutionized*. New York University Press.

Lotz, A. (2018). *We now disrupt this broadcast*. MIT Press

Marriott, S. (2007). *Live television*. Sage.

Meyersohn, R., & Katz, E. (1957). Notes on a natural history of fads. *American Journal of Sociology*, *62*(6), 594–601. https://doi.org/10.1086/222108

Peters, J. D. (2012). The Happiness Game: Notes on the Katz Canon. *International Journal of Communication*, *6*, 1270–1276. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1630/761

Scannell, P. (1996). *Radio, television, and modern life*. Blackwell.

Scannell, P. (2000). For-anyone-as-someone structures. *Media, Culture & Society*, *22*(1), 5–24. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F016344300022001001

Scannell, P. (2012). In pursuit of Happiness: Introduction. *International Journal of Communication*, *6*, 1262–1269. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1629/762

Scannell, P. (2014). *Television and the meaning of 'live'*. Polity

Scannell, P. (2021). *Love and communication*. Polity

Scannell, P., & Cardiff, D. (1991). *A social history of British broadcasting, 1922–1939*. Blackwell.

Simonson, P. (2012). Mail and Females at the Bureau: The Happiness Game in the gendered contexts of early U.S. communications research. *International Journal of Communication*, *6*, 1277–1289. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1631/760

Sumiala J. M., Valaskivi, K., & Dayan, D. (2018). From media events to expressive events: An interview with Daniel Dayan. *Television & New Media*, *19*(2), 177–187. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1527476417741673

Williams, R. (1974). *Television: Technology and cultural form*. Methuen Paperbacks.

Wood, R. (1979). *A world in your ear*. Macmillan.

© 2022 Respective authors. This is an Open Access work licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Public licence (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of the licence, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/