Sterne, Jonathan. "The Death and Life of Digital Audio." *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 31(4) (December 2006): 338–48.

———. *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

Turing, Alan. "On Computable Numbers, with an Application to the Entscheidungsproblem." *Proceedings of the London Mathematical Society*, ser. 2, 42 (1936–37): 230–65.

Ulam, Stanislaw. "Tribute to John von Neumann." *Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society* 64 (1958): 1–49.

Vaidhyanathan, Siva. *The Googlization of Everything (and Why We Should Worry)*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

Wheeler, John Archibald. "Information, Physics, Quantum: The Search for Links." In *Complexity, Entropy, and the Physics of Information*, ed. W. Zurek, 3–28. Redwood City, CA: Addison-Wesley, 1990.

Winner, Langdon. "Mythinformation." In *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for the Limits in an Age of High Technology*, 3–18. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Zittrain, Jonathan. *The Future of the Internet, and How to Stop It*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008.

10

Event

Julia Sonnevend

An event—to borrow and rephrase a popular line—"is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." Some events happen because they are planned—for instance, weddings and presidential inaugurations—while other events are sudden shocks, like cancer diagnoses and assassinations. Certain events gain significance beyond a family or a community and become public events. Events can even turn into what I call "global iconic events" (Sonnevend 2013b, 2015) that international media cover extensively and remember ritually. These events quickly occupy our old and new media, triggering the peaks and troughs of social media trend lines. Planned or unplanned, minor or earth-shattering, digital or analogue, all these events do the same thing: they structure our social lives and give reference points for our life stories and global histories.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *event* as "a thing that happens or takes place, especially one of importance." Its English-language history dates back to the sixteenth century. *Event* originates from the Latin *eventus*: from *evenire* "result, happen," from *e* "out of" and *venire* "come." Both the definition and the etymology of *event* indicate an influential and dynamic phenomenon: events are *important happenings*. Interestingly, while events are crucial for our mediated social lives, a comprehensive theoretical concept of events has not emerged within media research. It is easy to understand why media scholars relegated events to philosophers, historians, and sociologists. Events misbehave and innovate as often as teenagers do. Some events are idiosyncratic, contourless, and quite resistant to categorizing, while still others occur so frequently they escape attention altogether.

Some media researchers have nonetheless wrestled with events, especially with those historic occasions that "shook the world." For instance, Amit Pinchevski and Tamar Liebes (2010) wrote about the media coverage of the Eichmann trial, Daniel Hallin (1986) and Marita Sturken (1997) analyzed the media constructions of the Vietnam War, and Barbie Zelizer (1992) examined the media representations and retellings of the Kennedy assassination. Some scholars have moved beyond the particular case study analysis to define whole genres of media events such as media scandals (Lull and Hinerman 1997), disaster marathons (Liebes 1998), media spectacles (Kellner 2003), public apologies (Kampf 2009), and rituals of excommunication (Carey 1998). The most comprehensive and creative analysis of media events came from Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992), whose work focused on preplanned, celebratory events covered *live* by television. Mapping onto Max Weber's treatment of rational-legal, charismatic, and traditional sources of authority, Dayan and Katz presented three scripts of media events. These were *contests* (for instance, the Olympic Games and the Watergate hearings), *conquests* (such as the landing on the moon and Pope John Paul II's visit to Communist Poland), and *coronations* (for example, the funeral of President Kennedy and the royal wedding of Prince Charles). Many scholars have subsequently built on and critiqued Dayan and Katz's concept of media events (Scannell 1996, 2014; Schudson 1992; Couldry, Hepp, and Krotz 2010).

A broader discussion of "events in media," nonetheless, must move beyond the somewhat confined scope of Dayan and Katz's canonic treatment of "media events." What about events that do not have *live* coverage (like the Cambodian genocide), events that are not covered by television (like the Eichmann trial in Israel), and events that are celebrated in one country but not in another (the fall of the Berlin Wall in American and Soviet media)? In other words, what about events that are covered by media but not in the particular genre of what Dayan and Katz called "media events"? And, more specifically, how could we theorize events in a "digital age" when stories can quickly spread globally—often leaving too much or too little trace behind?

Here I will consider "events in media," including but not limited to the narrow genre of "media events." I will analyze events with a framework that accounts for both digital and predigital events. Since events predate the "digital era," and will certainly outlast it, their analysis can be done only in a framework that looks at the digital age as merely *one period in history*—a period, nonetheless, that makes certain aspects of events in media more prevalent or salient. Legal scholar Jack M. Balkin has persuasively argued for this methodological approach:

> In studying the Internet, to ask "What is genuinely new here?" is to ask the wrong question. . . . Instead of focusing on novelty, we should focus on salience. What elements of the social world does a new technology make particularly salient that went relatively unnoticed before? What features of human activity or of the human condition does a technological change foreground, emphasize, or problematize? And what are the consequences for human freedom of making this aspect more important, more pervasive, or more central than it was before? (Balkin 2004, 53)

I will take up four features of "events in media," highlighting how the digital era makes each feature more salient: (1) the power of the occurrence vis-à-vis its narrative as an "event," (2) the witnesses who tell the story of an "event," (3) the embodiments of the "event" in a variety of media, and (4) the travel of "events" across cultural and geographic boundaries.

Occurrences and Events

Every event consists of some *occurrence* on the ground and a related *narrative* of an event. The systematic mass murder perpetrated during World War II, originally narrated as a series of "atrocities," became a moral universal in the West, described over time as the "Holocaust" (Alexander 2002). After four planes were deliberately crashed in the United States on September 11, 2001, these occurrences together received the name "9/11." A sequence of occurrences in a small Connecticut town (the shooting in the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, President Obama's visit to the town, the funerals of the victims, the investigation into the shooting, protests for new gun laws, etc.) were all summarized under the Twitter hashtag "SandyHook." In all these cases a myriad of *occurrences* were pulled together and interpreted in a *narrative* of a certain genre of an "event."

While narratives and naming practices appear to be powerful tools in shaping events, they are not omnipotent. Consider the example of terrorist attacks. These occurrences can be narrated in opposing ways, as acts of wanton destruction or as acts in observance of a higher moral order. A good example of framing a terrorist attack as a regrettable but unavoidable "must" appears on a plaque on the King David Hotel in Jerusalem: "The hotel housed the Mandate Secretariat as well as the Army Headquarters. On July 22, 1946, [Zionist paramilitary] Irgun fighters at the order of the Hebrew Resistance Movement planted explosives in the basement. Warning phone calls had been made urging the hotel's occupants to leave immediately. For reasons known only to the British, the hotel was not evacuated and after 25 minutes the bombs exploded, and to the Irgun's regret and dismay, 91 persons were killed." This original wording infuriated the British insofar as it suggested that the British, not the Irgun, were responsible for the attack. Although the wording was subsequently revised, the final sentence, including the phrase "regret and dismay," remained.

This excerpt shows the power of narratives in shaping occurrences into certain types of events, but it does *not* prove that narratives can do anything. We can narrate a terrorist attack as a crime or as an accident, but hardly as a wedding. In other words, there are multiple, but *limited*, ways to read events. This feature of events is even more salient in the digital age: while there are seemingly limitless ways to express ourselves on diverse platforms, occurrences do still shape our narration of events. The abundance of digital speech platforms makes the limitations of our narratives more visible: no matter how much and how quickly we speak, a terrorist attack cannot be told as a wedding in our narratives. Occurrences still set boundaries for digital narratives.

Witnessing an Event

Who sees and tells the story of an event, who writes its "birth certificate," is central to every event's existence. Storytellers are required to bind occurrences together and elevate them into an "event." In other words, events need witnesses (Peters 2001). Media witnessing occurs in three distinct forms: witnesses *in* media (when witnesses of the occurrence share their experiences in media), witnessing *by* media (when journalists bear witness to occurrences), and witnessing *through* media (when audiences are positioned by media as witnesses to occurrences—for instance, when people watch live coverage of events on television) (Frosh and Pinchevski 2009).

These various forms of witnessing all shape the boundaries of events and communicate them to distinct primary and secondary audiences. In digital environments, the first category gains prominence: witnesses of events rapidly share their experiences on social media, often providing the initial framings of the event. If journalism is the first rough draft of history, as the phrase goes, perhaps social media accumulate the notes behind it. All events have competing witnesses who actively spread their narratives, and, as a result, there are immediately diverse sets of contrasting stories. The battle of a variety of instantaneous digital narratives and counternarratives leads to intense discussions—and often to quick forgetting.

Embodying Events in a Variety of Media

Events are more vulnerable than we would think. We easily forget them. We do this not only with birthdays and anniversaries, but also with major historic events. Each generation has its own events that it regards as earth-shattering. For instance, certain generations have "flashbulb memories" of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, while other generations remember keenly the moment they received the news about the attacked Twin Towers, the death of Michael Jackson, or the inauguration of the first African American president. But an iconic event to one generation often appears mundane to the next. Events are heavy: it is hard to carry them across time, space, and media.

Therefore, in order to endure in recitations that cross generations, occurrences need more than memorable narratives that construct them as mythical, resonant "events." They also need to be carried by a diversity of media. Even the seemingly most powerful and visually spectacular event cannot survive the passage of time without substantial narrative presence across multiple media. For instance, consider all the commemoration efforts undertaken to keep the memory of 9/11 alive: the names of victims are read aloud at Ground Zero at every anniversary, a huge cosmopolitan museum has recently opened in New York, and the event's story is embodied in countless social media campaigns, souvenirs, documentaries, and history books. Selfies taken at the 9/11 memorial occupy Instagram, Facebook, Flickr, Twitter and many other social networking sites. Owing to the event's significance and its current omnipresence, those who personally remember the day of September 11, 2001, may deem it unforgettable, even though it is not. Few college freshmen today have acute personal memories of the event that took place over a decade ago; its lasting resonance will require continued promotion of the event's simple narrative and spectacular imagery across "old" and "new" media alike. And there are many less "spectacular" events that capture the imagination of media users. Will we discuss Ferguson, Obama's immigration reform, or the recent Ebola outbreak a year—or a decade—from now? Nevertheless, these events occupy my Twitter feed (and perhaps yours) at the time of writing (November 2014). They resonate with large audiences and are indexed by popular Twitter hashtags at the same tremendous speed that they, in turn, disappear from public consciousness.

Beyond Boundaries: Events That Travel

Most events are narrated locally—on the national, regional, or social group level. But some events receive powerful and lasting transnational narration. A transnational narrative needs to be simplified and universalized; it has to remove the event's original complexity and context, thus making it transportable across boundaries. There are at least five dimensions of a global iconic event's narration: (1) foundation: the event's narrative prerequisites; (2) mythologization: the development of the event's elevated language and lasting message; (3) condensation: the event's encapsulation in a brand—a simple phrase, a short narrative, and a recognizable visual scene; (4) counternarration: competing stories about the event; and (5) remediation, when the event's brand travels across multiple media platforms and changing social and political contexts (Sonnevend 2013b).

Let's take the example of the media representations of Steve Jobs's death in 2011:

1. *Foundation*: The coverage of this event built on the already-existing global iconic power of Steve Jobs and Apple Inc.
2. *Mythologization*: The event communicated a resonant message about a "genius" inventor who single-handedly changed our digital culture.
3. *Condensation*: For two weeks after Jobs's death, the Apple website summarized his image in a few clear, condensed sentences: "Apple has lost a visionary and creative genius, and the world has lost an amazing human being. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to know and work with Steve have lost a dear friend and an inspiring mentor. Steve leaves behind a company that only he could have built, and his spirit will forever be the foundation of Apple." This message of a "visionary and creative genius," who worked with relentless "passion," is also communicated by the often-reproduced iconic photographs of Steve Jobs in his trademark black turtleneck and blue jeans uniform. These images serve as lasting visual condensations of Apple's former CEO.
4. *Counternarration*: While Steve Jobs's life was celebrated worldwide, critical views on his leadership style and personality were also immediately shared, in efforts to counter the simplification and universalization of his legacy.
5. *Remediation*: Digital technologies enable faster international diffusion of global iconic events than ever before. Steve Jobs's life and death are now communicated in a myriad of media from Wikipedia sites to private memorials to Internet memes (Shifman 2013). His legacy is also rehearsed at Apple mega events that aspire to become preplanned global iconic events themselves.

Through these transnational storytelling practices, a global iconic event comes into being. Some global iconic events are more readily transportable than others, some have more counternarratives than others, but these five dimensions are generally present in their narration.

In sum, I have examined four features of "events in media:" (1) the power of the occurrence vis-à-vis its narrative as an "event," (2) the witnesses who tell the story of an "event," (3) the embodiments of the "event" in a variety of media, and (4) the travel of "events" across cultural and geographic boundaries. I have also tried to demonstrate that digital technologies make these features of "events in media" much more salient.

Occurrences and events exist in the digital age, as they have before and as they will after. Once the digital age becomes history, it too may be framed as an event, while modern humans experience a new, postdigital age, whose name we do not and cannot yet know. Understanding "events" thus helps us apprehend the "digital event" we are experiencing right now, in one moment of history. In other words, conceptualizing events is essential if we are to understand the digital condition itself.

See in this volume: archive, community, culture, digital, meme, memory

See in Williams: development, history, mediation, modern, myth, nature, tradition

References

Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2002. "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The 'Holocaust' from Mass Murder to Trauma Drama." *European Journal of Social Theory* 5(1): 5–86.

Balkin, Jack M. 2004. "Digital Speech and Democratic Culture: A Theory of Freedom of Expression for the Information Society." *New York University Law Review* 79(1): 1–55.

Blondheim, Menahem, and Tamar Liebes. 2002. "Live Television's Disaster Marathon of September 11 and Its Subversive Potential." *Prometheus* 20(3): 271–76.

Carey, James W. 1998. "Political Ritual on Television: Episodes in the History of Shame, Degradation and Excommunication." In *Media, Ritual and Identity*, edited by Tamar Liebes and James Curran, 42–70. London: Routledge.

Cottle, Simon. 2006. "Mediatized Rituals: Beyond Manufacturing Consent." *Media, Culture & Society* 28(3): 411–32.

Couldry, Nick, Andreas Hepp, and Friedrich Krotz, eds. 2010. *Media Events in a Global Age*. London: Routledge.

Dayan, Daniel, and Elihu Katz. 1992. *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Frosh, Paul, and Amit Pinchevski. 2009. *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hallin, Daniel C. 1986. *"The Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kampf, Zohar. 2009. "Public (Non-) Apologies: The Discourse of Minimizing Responsibility." *Journal of Pragmatics* 41(11): 2257–70.

Katz, Elihu, and Tamar Liebes. 2007. "'No More Peace!': How Disaster, Terror and War Upstaged Media Events." *International Journal of Communication* 1: 157–66.

Kellner, Douglas. 2003. *Media Spectacle*. London: Routledge.

Liebes, Tamar. 1998. "Television's Disaster Marathons: A Danger for Democratic Processes?" In *Media, Ritual and Identity*, edited by Tamar Liebes and James Curran, 71–84. London: Routledge.

Lull, James, and Stephen Hinerman, eds. 1997. *Media Scandals: Morality and Desire in the Popular Market Place*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Neiger, Motti, Oren Meyers, and Eyal Zandberg. 2011. *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Peters, John D. 2001. "Witnessing." *Media, Culture & Society* 236: 707–23.

Pinchevski, Amit, and Tamar Liebes. 2010. "Severed Voices: Radio and the Mediation of Trauma in the Eichmann Trial." *Public Culture* 22(2): 265–91.

Scannell, Paddy. 1996. *Radio, Television and Modern Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.

———. 2014. *Television and the Meaning of 'Live': An Enquiry into the Human Situation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Schudson, Michael. 1992. *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past*. New York: Basic Books.

———. "The Anarchy of Events and the Anxiety of Story Telling." In *Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press*, 50–63. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Sewell, William Jr. 1996. "Historical Events as Transformations of Structure: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille." *Theory and Society* 25(6): 841–81.

Shifman, Limor. 2013. *Memes in Digital Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Sonnevend, Julia. 2013a. "Counterrevolutionary Icons." *Journalism Studies* 14(3): 336–54.

——— 2013b. "Global Iconic Events: How News Stories Travel through Time, Space and Media." PhD diss., Columbia University.

——— 2015. "'Symbol of Hope for a World without Walls': The Fall of the Berlin Wall as a Global Iconic Event." *Divinatio* 39–40: 223–33.

Sturken, Marita. 1997. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Thompson, John B. 2000. *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Wagner-Pacifici, Robin. 2010. "Theorizing the Restlessness of Events." *American Journal of Sociology* 115(5): 1351–86.

Zelizer, Barbie. 1992. *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.