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The day that dreams came true

Event and eventmaking in the case of the inauguration of Barack H. Obama

On January 20 2009 Barack H. Obama was inaugurated as the 44th president of the United States of America. The inauguration was, at the same time an event, a media event and, last but not least, subjected to a large amount of individual eventmaking strategies. In this paper we intend to analyze theoretically and empirically¹ the concept of event and eventmaking and its constitutive elements such as affect, liveness, ritualization, liminality and liminoidity. Our basic assumption is that eventmaking is a fundamental cultural strategy of individuals, groups, organizations, businesses, nations and so forth in the experience economy. In this paper we look at eventmaking as a strategy of intensification and demarcation in media environments and we analyze the constitutive elements on different discursive and affective levels.

Our thesis is that eventmaking is a paradoxical activity trying to make the unforeseen happen within a strongly framed setting. Eventmaking frame and choreograph expected incidents at the same time as the non-scripted incident and so it seems that the unexpected is an inherent part of any eventmaking strategy.

Event culture, events and eventmaking

Many scholars have argued that contemporary Western cultures are now predominantly characterized by post-Fordist production which means that producing, staging and selling experiences have outstripped the production and selling of goods and services (Pine & Gillmore 1999; Jensen 1999; Løfgren & Willim 2005). The staging of events now takes place both in fields that produce experiences and events as their primary products for example tourism, and the media and entertainment industries as well as in organizations, companies, stores and areas that do not primarily produce events. Within consumer-, media- and cultural studies (Storey 2003; Hall 1999) dynamic and reciprocal models have replaced more static communication models. Second and third generations of experiences are now focused on user-generated ways of co-creative and self-directed part-taking in events (Boswijk, Thijssen, Peelen 2007, p 10) thereby shifting the focus away from encoding to decoding performers and also pointing to what we will argue is the experience economy and an important epistemological turn in society in general.

As a child of the experience orientated economy, event culture is basically instrumental. It is about operationalising the means to achieve your needs and dreams by turning them into practical, easy to handle tools. The experience economy offers the possibility to turn inhabitants, consumers and citizens into co-creators so stressing the performative and cultural productive status of the inhabitants of the experience economy. Eventmaking is one example of a tool that may be used for fusing the borders of old school sociocultural categories and new interesting social dynamics like co-creation (Bosjwijk et al 2007), floating communities (Maffesoli 1995) and affective investments in zones of empowerment (Grossberg 1997). In this cultural construction continuity is replaced by a number of events and peaks constructed to produce fragments of memories (Hervieu-Leger 1998; Storey 2003) that will together comprise our cultural lives and realities on the one hand and transcend the everyday routines that postmodern cultural performers dread and disdain.

We qualify the term event-culture on two levels. Partly, it points to a general theoretical framing of culture as something constantly in the making. If one looks at culture as something we always do (Bauman 1999) the focus will be on the unexpected and transformative force (devastating or edifying). This perspective thematizes culture *as* event-culture. Event-culture is also used to describe a growing number of activities in different fields in contemporary culture. Eventmaking is about *privileging* moments, experiences, relations, commodities, travels, national monuments, global events (the list is unending). In the event-culture we try to stage the unforeseen. Some would say that the instrumental approach prevents the unforeseen from happening. We claim, however, that eventmaking strategies in event-culture try to make things happen that may or may not occur. We examine this inherent paradox more closely in this paper.

Events and eventmaking

In the event-culture performative utterances prevail and an event is something you say-do, are part of, or make happen. Performative utterances make the event happen, for example the “I do” of the marriage vow, but for the event to be truly an event three characteristics have to be fulfilled according to Derrida: an event must be *unforeseeable* (which is not normally the case for a carefully orchestrated marriage ritual and party), an event must make a *disrupture* of the ordinary course of history and it must be absolutely *singular*. (Derrida 2003, p 446).

An event occurs when something impossible suddenly becomes possible and Derrida outlines examples of the impossibility inherent in true events. Examples of performative deeds that make the impossible possible are expressed in a series of performative verbs expressing transformation of a present situation: *to confess* (guilt), *to give* (more than expected; beyond the reversible economy of exchange), *to forgive* (the unforgivable), *to invent* (beyond competences and craft), *to receive* that which or who arrives (the uninvited).

The surplus of all these performative verbs installs fundamental changes in the relations between humans beyond the scale of symbolic exchange. The surplus means that something is added to the world that was not there yesterday and that something is included in the individual *from* the world. To qualify something as an event demands in the eyes of Derrida a profound change towards more generosity and all inclusiveness in the social and human relations between me and other.

Eventmaking, on the contrary, is the actions and stagings that are performed in order *to make something happen*. To bring about an event. To produce the specific structures and meanings of the event and its parts or, to produce more everyday

spaces that offer opportunities that transgress the everyday sociality like when people host private *pirate readings*, that is poetry readings, in their living room or in the living rooms of the authors'. Sometimes the will to change is expressed in a thoroughly planned choreography of meanings, structure and social performances as is the case with the Obama inauguration. At other times it is nothing more than a structure, a state of mind. A hypothetical form. An axis strung between the factual and the potential, between hope and reality (Sjoerslev 2008) as when new divorcees travel to Spain to engage themselves in walking the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela deciding that this journey symbolises their moving from the past to a new life. An entrepreneurial, co-creating mode of social performance entertained in order to make something happen. A sociocultural strategy. A praxis. Like when a new Harry Potter book is released and the local bookstore invites fans in at midnight or when IKEA announces it will hand away certain beds and bedroom interiors to whomever will spend the night in the IKEA store. These are all eventmaking strategies.

Eventmaking is performed as a continuation of a social (media) event, as an enrolment in the actual ongoing event *or* as some kind of derived social performativity. It might also be performed in a more subtle relation to socio-cultural surroundings or not clearly defined events. Through eventmaking the humdrum of the everyday is turned into a number of peaks and thereby the everyday is transformed. Both events and eventmaking are positions within specific communities of thought involving certain cultural framings that are setting the scene regarding the actual meaning of eventmaking and/or regarding the negotiation of social meaning (Geertz 1967; Soendergaard 1996) AND are, at the same time, producing new meaning. While the eventmaking is, on the one side, mirroring existing sociocultural meanings, it is also an attempt to (re-) frame these same realities by pointing to new spaces of possibilities, new paths to walk (Sjoerslev 2008; Goffman 1974).

When it comes to social relations, one might say that while the event is actually changing the relation of me and others, between me and the world, eventmaking is an experimental zone, in which changes *might* occur although not necessarily. A liminal or liminoid space in which rules, roles and normality are suspended in order to open the way for a different social order.

We claim that eventmaking consists of demarcations and intensifications on four interrelated levels which might not be present in specific cases of eventmaking to the same amount: 1) time (placing events in before, now and after), 2) space (ritualizing spaces by appointing qualities like here-there, sacred-profane, privileged-ordinary etc), 3) performativity (roles, statuses, persona related materiality), and 4) legitimizing narratives (fictionalizations, special meanings, contexts etc). Not all four are necessarily present in all cases or with the same intensity but these are the four strings that can be played.

Let us look more closely into the four levels:

1. At the time level, agents give privilege to certain units of time over others for instance by making a certain unit seem longer than it actually is, by ascribing it with certain meanings, by appointing certain sociocultural roles to it, by using this demarcation to define social classifications. For instance, in many families with young children tv shows broadcasted on Fridays around eight are used as an eventmaking strategy for dividing the work week and the weekend. Ritualizing time in this fashion sanctifies certain time units (here, the weekend) and reminds the family of their priorities.

2. At the space level eventmaking has to do with how the physical space is produced or altered in order to make it fit the overall intentions. In the Friday night example the family tv room is altered into a consecrated space through different kinds of staging of materiality or social technologies (Sjoerslev 2008). This might include lighting candles, moving furniture so that everyone can sit together, preparing candy bowls etc.

3. At the performativity level the persons engage in the eventmaking by taking certain roles in order to get things moving or engage in certain performances that differ from their everyday life performances. They might dress up, or, as might be the case in our Friday night example, dress *down*, take on the role as quizmaster, score keeper or whatever the TV watching might request.

4. The legitimating narrative level is about the way stories are told or bits of fictions are produced in order to create or uphold the eventmaking and its basic legitimating structures. In our example, this might be stories that relate the social agents with the media persons or stories about the tv personalities. Not necessarily stories we are interested in outside the eventmaking but they are nevertheless crucial to us within the sacred space.

Keeping the Obama inauguration in mind, this reflects two levels of eventmaking. One is the official and formal event being constituted by the ritual sequences as demonstrated below. These sequences relate to each of the four levels: 1. Being a ritual this particular eventmaking strategy contains a strong sense of demarcation of time since the eventmaking aims at turning a president elect into the 44th president of the USA. The ritual is a qualification of a *before* and an *after*. 2. The space level is reflected by lines of demarcations and by the consecrated character of the physical environment (Washington DC at large, Capitol Hill and the Mall, more specifically) and the limitations placed on behaviour within these spaces. 3. Regarding the performativity and personal role level obviously everybody performs according to certain roles and formal demands and 4. The legitimating narrative surrounding all of the activities are, of course the mythological, historical and civil religious narratives of the USA.

On a more individual level, all kinds of individual eventmaking strategies are at play – some of them reflected in the material. While some of these reflect all four characteristics some of them are solely focused on, for instance, being there (space and time) while others focus on enrolment, on Obama being black.

Eventmaking, ritual and liminality

Ritual or ritualization is one important part of many eventmaking strategies being – as it is – a performative strategy allowing for and/or producing structures and demarcations giving privilege to certain framed issues and spaces over others. In this section we present our ideas on ritual, theoretically aiming at making some analytical points on the Obama case. Basically we claim that two kinds of ritual strategies are at play, that is, the discursive and the affective. We will elaborate on this in the following sections.

Our ideas on ritual draw on the work of the British anthropologist Victor Turner whose writings in the 1960s (see for instance Turner 1967a; 1967b; 1969) were significant in developing previous works on ritual studies such as those by Henri & Mauss (1898) and Durkheim (1912), and their understanding of a ritual's connection with social life and cultural cohesion. Ideas that were also taken further by the anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (Geertz 1967). Turner's years of fieldwork in central Africa gave new insights into how rituals can both stimulate religious and non-

religious life, as well as promote social cohesion in a society or social group. In addition, he also noted how both a ritual's content *as well as* its form gives meaning to the actual ritual activities going on. His studies moved anthropology to a new phase, where a ritual's *performative* aspects stressed the actual performance of a specific ritual (more than merely an abstraction) and its aesthetic and expressive qualities overcame earlier distinctions between form and content, which is in line with Austin's ideas on speech acts (1982), and offers a way of viewing everything as form and action or *performance* (see e.g. Tambiah 1985; Kapferer 1984). Through these anthropologists' lenses socio cultural phenomena like play, sports, theatre etc. and cultural eventmaking like parades, marches, carnivals, games, that had not until then been seen as full rituals because of their lack of references to the divine, were now considered full ritual activities. Individual performers became visible and the systemic focused approaches diminished.

The performative approach's focus on individual performers is intact in the latest addition, *ritual as practice*. This perspective is indebted to Bourdieu's theory of practice (1993) and is represented by, among others, Ortner (1989, 2006) and Bell (1992, 1997). The practice perspective on ritual focuses on the ritual *action* and puts a strong emphasis on the ritual agent, in particular his or her agendas, strategies, creativity (both (un)consciously and discursive) and the contexts and sociocultural perspectives in quite a wide sense. Historian of religion Cathrine Bell uses the term *ritualization* to designate social actions that strategically differ from other actions:

In this strategic distinction between different cultural meaning systems and agents the human body plays a crucial role because it is the ritual agent's primary tool in the ritualization through which different meanings and forms are integrated, acted and negotiated and through which they become bodily subjective experiences. In our approach we are both preoccupied with how ritualizing activities produce and change social patterns and how they influence other sociocultural categories and functions as a culturally productive structuring strategy on individual, group and societal levels. In the Obama case ritualization is one of the most predominant eventmaking strategies both pointing to existing American values and virtues and at the same time connecting possibilities of change to these values.

Social anthropologists Humphrey & Laidlaw have introduced a ritualization theory that supports this approach by viewing it as an action mode, a way of doing something. Their basic argument is, that in ritual action ordinary intentionality is replaced by a *displaced* intentionality². This transformation is in itself the result of an intentional act that is the decision to adopt a ritual attitude/mode. By adopting this attitude the ritual performer enters a new space. In her intelligent reading of Humphrey & Laidlaw, Rubow points to the fact that the intentionality of the ritual itself is not a direct precondition of the ritualized action's meaning:

Instead a social and culturally prescribed action is inserted as being thing-like, that is external actions are appropriated, conceived and interpreted in relation to one's own ideas and positions. The ritualized actions are thereby prepared in the sense that it will appear determined beforehand by the ritual participants, as a 'thing' or 'an object' they have not created. But because the ritual action is experienced and felt, it will be acquired and projected with meaning whatever happens through physical [affective] involvement or in explicit interpretations. In this fashion, participants in a ritual are, on the one hand, not the authors of the action and, on the other

hand, they are, indeed the authors (Rubow 2000, p 45, my translation; Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994, p 5, 89ff).

This has several implications: Firstly, the ritual is an action that is already in social existence and has a meaning and the participants are simply using it, *but* at the same time it is the actual performers, that project their own meaning to the actions (Sjoerslev 2008). Humphrey & Laidlaw stress that it is always the actual individual production of meaning that makes the ritualization powerful in each actor's universe. Rituals do not necessarily have meaning in themselves (Staal 1996) but rather offer themselves as a form without obligating the performer to a certain content. An interesting point here is that the gains of a ritual might be either discursive, affective or both.

The inauguration dramaturgy is in existence prior to this particular version of the event and it is in fact customized to each new actual ritual by each new president. In this way each president both takes part in the tradition, and thereby gives legitimacy to his office as well as enrol in tradition by using the ritual structures and ritualized sequences of the event and, at the same time, he will quote in a way that stresses his unique character.

Secondly, rituals can be more or less strictly designed and thereby leave more or less space for individual performativity. In rituals with a relatively fixed *liturgy* the feeling of having performed the ritual correctly will be of utter importance while in more freely performative ritualizations the judgement of success seems more often to be based on a feeling of ritual effect. Within traditional religions – or in the case of American civil religious rituals like an inauguration - the liturgically strict and strongly traditionalized ritual forms are the most frequent, however, according to Humphrey & Laidlaw this does not mean that the actions are not attached with very different meanings among performers.

One illustrative example from Obama's inauguration ceremony was his taking of the oath. This is not only a classic but mandatory and, in fact absolute central element of the inauguration ceremony. In Obama's case it was given the extra special quality that the bible upon which he took the oath was Lincoln's – a fact that was repeated several times in the television broadcast. Since Lincoln's political initiatives were the ones to lead to the abolition of American slavery and since Obama is black this was, of course, a symbolic way to add nuances and individuality to the classic oath taking ritual in the ceremony.

Outside strongly traditionalized religious contexts, and this we find particularly interesting, many of the actions that people choose to use in ritualized actions are not pulled out of thin air. Often they are modifications of ritual practices within a certain religious or ritual context but used without the traditional interpretational resonance. The ritual actions are often not simply invented by the ritual performer but they are actions that are well known in the performer's cultural setting and used as matrices of practices but placed in new interpretational spaces and meaning spaces. Thus ritualizations have this double quality of, on the one hand, being able to reflect existing social communities and ideas about the world that are operative in the cultural habitus of the performer and, on the other side, having the function of reorganizing these and creating new vital narratives by pointing to new resources and power. Furthermore, it could possibly be argued, that even though ritual elements from a specific context are recycled and used with a new meaning the new interpretation or intentionality borrows some kind of *aura* from the original ritual. Rituals are at our disposal.

In the Obama case we see this at different levels of participation. Firstly, Barack Obama himself is a ritual performer borrowing ritual form and matrices from a huge number of inauguration ceremonies prior to his own. He, together with a number of more or less official co-performers (priest, military officials and musicians, senators, former presidents, artists, auditing, family members etc) borrows the aura, the legitimacy, the meanings of the inauguration ceremony at large (if he is allowed to use these structures he really IS the president). By performing them just a little different in his own way with his own accents he comes through as this particular kind of president and human being.

Secondly, at the level of individual ritualized eventmakings reflected in the material from Obama's inauguration it is noticeable that some citizens of Washington DC demonstrate to the camera how they greet everybody they meet by making high fives - a greeting that is a borrowed form from sports. The citizens perform the greeting in order to show the visitors that they are welcome in Washington DC, so giving this sports ritual new meaning.

Although Humphrey & Laidlaw theorize within the context of *religious* rituals and we are theoretically analyzing secular ritualized actions and their relationship to eventmaking, the authors' insights are vital to us because they stress the relativity of ritual action itself (to adopt a ritual attitude or mode); the relativity of the meaning associated with each ritualized action performed and of the form's cultural groundings. All ritualized actions, we claim, are actions that are demarcated from everyday actions and ascribed with non-ordinary meaning that give privilege to these actions and seek a deep connection with resources of a special nature.

Ritualizations are not a re-installation of a supreme being but rather an expression of a human need of specific, personal, bodily rituals that can move his or her life forward (Lehmann 2000). Being ritually active is to bring oneself into a position to be moved on by bringing oneself in contact with resources outside of the everyday that can only be approached through certain means and whose power can then, in some way, be taken back into the everyday when the ritual performer reintegrates him- or herself. This is our interpretation of the elements in Bell's definition above on the sacred and the profane (for other attempts, see for instance Couldry 2003; Sumiala-Seppänen 2006).

So basically, ritual and eventmaking have in common the deliberate placing of oneself outside the everyday in order to achieve something but in the ritualization performers aim at winning some kind of enforcement from extra- potent-resources through the demarcations and (re-)structurings of elements of the world while the goal of the eventmaking is for some kind of event to happen.

Keeping events and eventmaking in mind, let us introduce two kinds of ritualized actions, *marker rituals* and *everyday ritualizations*.

Marker rituals, usually referred to as rites of passage according to the term introduced in 1909 by Belgian anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, are ritualizations that mark the passing between life phases and different statuses such as the transition from child to adult, from unmarried to married etc. Marker rituals are performed, in principle once in a lifetime, they are principled irreversible, they make an actual difference and are in principle installing new socio-cultural order. They change the world – or, more precisely, they help or facilitate the world to change - they change relations and they point to a new life by solving riddles of an existential magnitude. Marker rituals install a very clear before and after and stage the scene for performing how to trespass the *limen* (tunnel, threshold).

The inauguration is a marker ritual on a different level. For Barack Obama, naturally, the inauguration ceremony is a ritual bringing about his transformation from one of more candidates for the presidency into being the commander in chief of the United States of America with all the changes of formal and informal status, obligations, prestige etc. In continuation of this level, it is also a marker ritual for the USA marking the retirement of one president and the entry into office of the new president with an expected shift of politics and ways of performing the presidency. Finally, it is a marker ritual for the global community in the sense that no matter whose politics and personal performance one might prefer, the ritual marks a major shift that is likely to have a global political impact.

The ceremony is conducted according to the ritual structure and dramaturgy of traditional marker rituals with a number of separating rites, a liminal phase (the taking of the oath) and a number of reintegrating rituals. The inauguration *as a media event* begins with all the special guests finding their seats while a military orchestra plays all kinds of marches. The inauguration event itself actually begins prior to these activities with the president to be and his family going to church in the morning and afterwards having tea in the Whitehouse with the outgoing president and his wife. The separation rites setting the scene for the event on the Mall begin with a prayer by Rick Warren chosen by Obama. Senator Diane Feinstein sets the scene for the ritual by making discursive and mythological references to the Founding Fathers of the USA, this is then followed by performing artist Aretha Franklin and eventually vice president elect Joe Biden taking his oath.

As a mediator between this and the liminal phase of the ritual, musicians Yitshak Perlman and Jojo Mar performs a piece of music composed by John Williams especially for this event. And then, Barack H. Obama takes his oath on the Lincoln Bible: the inner most sacred part of the ritual and the most intensified part of the liminal phase. This is followed by a salute from the presidents battery and the speech of the president – in the case of the master speaker Obama, this was looked forward to with great anticipation and staged in the media event as one of the most sacred parts of the inauguration ceremony. The liminal phase comes to an end with the poetry reading by Elisabeth Alexander and a second prayer conducted by priest Joe Lorry, a colleague of the late Martin Luther King which is of course very symbolic since in many peoples minds Obama is the fulfilment of the dreams of King.

The first reintegrating ritual welcoming Obama with his new presidential status is the performance of the national anthem and the raising of the Stars and Stripes. Hereafter Obama and retired president Bush leave the area. Outside the central event on the Mall other ritualizations of a reintegrating and final nature occur: Bush and his wife leave Washington in a helicopter, a lunch is held with several historical dishes and after this the 200 year traditional parade takes place.

While all of the phases in the ritual structure are of importance, the most important parts are the ritualizations performed in the liminal phase – not only because they are substantially superior and complex but because of the social, affective qualities of the phase itself.

Victor Turner took a special interest in developing the concept of the *liminal phase*, conceptualized by van Gennep but given vitality and complexity through the work of Turner, partly through his work on the African Ndembus and later in his career through his growing interest in western culture, in particular theatre and play. He developed the concept from designating the central ritual phase to constitute the

very core and heart of ritualizations – not only in relation to trespassing but also as a special subjective state ascribed with a number of qualities (Turner 1967a). He suggested the term liminality to designate a social state of being *betwixt and between*, that is moving on from one step to another. Performative anthropologist Richard Schechner, Turner's student captured the condition by the sentence "I am not me and I am not *not* me" (Schechner & Appel 1990). After moving his ritual studies focus from Africa to the West, Turner developed the concept on *the liminoid (liminoidity)*, that is the liminal-like. He made the following distinctions between the two:

The liminal

- Collective
- Calendrical/Biological
- Sociostructural rhythm
- Socially integrating in society
- Generalizing (societal consequences)
- Religiously and socially normative
- Inversion of everyday societal order
- Tribal societies

The liminoid (-like)

- Individual
- Outside societal processes
- Subcultural and private
- Idiosyncratic
- Can be subversive
- Opposition/cultural criticism
- Modern society
- Consequences only on an individual scale

(based on Turner 1967a; 1977; 1982)

Everyday ritualizations imitate the marker rituals, like the liminoid imitates the liminal and - like the eventmaking imitates the event - by demarcating space, time, performativity and meaning; by performing the non-everydayish, by seeking some kind of authenticity in the existence of the performer. These ritualizations do not have the same scope, meaning, sociality and consequence as the markers but are nonetheless important in many an individualized, instrumentalized event cultural practice either by performative enrolment in affective communities (Maffesoli 1995) or as more loose enrolments in some kind of discursive reference. In the Obama case the discursive elements seem so strong that they are never non-present in the ritualizations, even the merely affective ones.³

Thus, everyday ritualizations are about longing and imitating but the goals, meanings and actual performances are very different from the marker rituals. Everyday ritualizations do not change the world irreversibly; they give shelter, revitalizations, affirmation and are about intensification and affective communities.

In our material different people articulate and reflect different ways and motives for this kind of ritualization. Afroamericans in the USA have travelled to Washington to be there whether it is Vivian saying: "It is a Life changing experience. I was there" (Extra News DR 1 2009-01-20 at 16.00-19.30: 00:41) or the black woman standing with her sign saying "Hello from Marshall, Alaska" (00:27:52) or the family from California having travelled to the capital according to the father because: "We have taught our children that they can become anything they want" (01:17:00). These cases obviously enrol their performers differently when it comes to discursive and affective resources. Another group of ritual participants are all the foreigners who have travelled to Washington because this is a special occasion not to be missed. Danish artist Lars H.U.G legitimates his being on the Mall by reference to the inspirational power of the event for him as an artist and refers to it as a moment of history (00:29:30) (a very common phrase of the media event) while others more generally refer to the common feeling: "Today we are all Americans" (00:13:00).

In the Obama case all individual and private eventmaking strategies reflected in the material used for this paper point to the attempts to produce liminal and liminoid spaces and demarcations. Some of them are truly liminal and related to the discursive, ideological and legitimating formal aspects of the ritual involving some kind of relating to the central discourse and tradition of the event. Others are merely attempts to produce liminoid spaces, feelings and performances through a more subtle kind of intensified environment and affect. While ritualization is one core element in the

inauguration event and eventmaking strategies some very crucial aspects have to do with the empowerment, liveness and affective simultaneity. In the following we analyze these aspects.

Intensive environments and affect

In event-culture eventmaking strategies are characterized by their ability to increase energy and by their ability to enhance experiences. While Derrida pointed to *the impossible* as the significant feature of an event we now turn to the core ingredients in eventmaking. Eventmaking is about constructing intensive environments. They imply a cult of speed, innovation, creativity, but also of emotions and passions highlighting aestheticization and performative qualities (Løfgren and Willim 2005, p 2). Media events are one example of intensive media environments and in the following paragraphs we will examine more closely the intensive media environment using affect and liveness as important textual and visual strategies in order to consider emotional impact. In following this line of consideration we see ourselves pointing to a shift due that has resulted from globalization, in a similar manner to Lash & Lury who have written that, "Global culture industry operates in this space of the real. In the symbolic, signification works through structures to produce meaning. In the desert of the real, signification works through brute force and immediacy. Meaning is no longer hermeneutic; it is operational, as in computer games – that is, meaning is not interpretative; it is doing, it is impact" (Lash & Lury 2007, p 12). We believe that media events to a large extent have an impact by producing affective belonging.

Therefore we suggest a closer examination of the concept of affect in contemporary cultural theory to explore the intensive environments and their communities. Some of those who have written on this subject include Grossberg (1997), Massumi (2002), Brennan (2004) and Nigel Thrift: "Western cultures are becoming increasingly prone to brief moments of engagement tied to the affective texture of particular events shaped by a series of political inventions made in the last 40 years or so. Most of the time Western democratic cultures tend to be disengaged but they can be 'switched on' by particular issues with high affective resonance. Thus a growth in disengagement and detachment is paralleled by moments of high engagement and attachment" (Thrift 2008, p 240). This quotation shows how the ability of making intensive events and environments that engage people affectively has become the parameter of success in Western democracies, even the expression of politics itself. It is well known, for example, that news programs on Danish television to a large extent make use of affective strategies in order to communicate the feelings of the interviewed. Yet, this understanding was given new meaning when DR 1, the main Danish public service TV station focused on when and how the leaders of the most important parties would show up at the expense of concrete political content, during the parliamentary elections in 2007. This change in focus is a good example of an eventmaking strategy within politics in which expectations and affective communities are created around political issues and not about political issues.⁴

Grossberg (1997) used the term 'affect' when describing post modern (postnational) belonging. Grossberg points to the importance of feeling and investment in postmodernity: "What matters is how much you care ("I'd rather feel bad than not feel anything at all"), not how you care or about what you care". (Grossberg 1997, p 163). Normally Grossberg sticks to the term of affect, but sometimes he uses affects and feelings synonymously which is a discussion we will not enter into this paper. According to Grossberg affect is a particular attitude or mood by which people make zones of investment in contemporary culture. Grossberg

defines these zones as zones of empowerment: “However, the point is not merely to accede to the crisis but to articulate new forms of affective empowerment by which people are able to construct and invest in difference” (Grossberg 1997, p 164).

A key concept to be drawn from Grossberg is “empowerment”. Affect being the key to empower people. Massumi states equally. “Affect holds a key to rethinking postmodern power after ideology (Massumi 2002, p 42). In so writing Massumi refers to the thoughts of philosophers such as Leibnitz and Spinoza in stating that the body’s primary power is a power to affect and to be affected. A second fundamental feature of affect is that it is never simple but always doubled by “the feeling of having a feeling“ (13). The feeling of having a feeling is a form of postmodern meta-consciousness, but it does not primarily produce cognitive knowledge as we saw it in the early days of postmodernism, but feelings of being alive “the perception of one’s own vitality, one’s sense of aliveness, of changeability (often signified as “freedom”). (36). The sense of being alive seems to be a core feeling in the event-culture. Obviously it plays a vital role in extreme sport and tourism activities, but it plays an equal role in media events as intensive environments that can produce global communities in the here and now.

Thus affect is a double perception: namely a *perception of a self-perception*. Two distinctive and mingling results of affect show themselves to be obvious: the feeling of empowerment and the perception of aliveness. What both Grossberg and Massumi stress is the fact that affect (intensity, aliveness) seems to be the content and the end-goal of events. A certain amount of self-infliction and staging could be the case of the theories of Grossberg and Massumi, from fan community-making around body-genre-movies (Jerslev 1999) to body-involving leisure activities and body adventures in staged tourist destinations (Gyimóthy 2002, 2009). Media events that are not transmitting anything but only celebrating their own impact, which is the case in donation shows, are good examples of affective community making around the act of donation⁵.

An extended and slightly different perspective can be seen in Teresa Brennan’s book *The Transmission of Affect*. Both Brennan and Thrift focus on how affective investment spreads and what the impact can be of such affective investment. The point of departure for her is the conception of human beings as “receivers and interpreters of feelings, affects, attentive energy” (Brennan 2004, p 87). In line with posthuman theories such as ANT (Latour) and non-representational theory (Thrift 2008) we can say that not only is subjectivity understood as a relational and dynamic flow between me and other but it is also understood as an effect of spatial organizations, environments, atmospheres. Affect is to be understood in terms of energy: it can either enhance or deplete and the over all point is here that humans are not self-contained in terms of our energies. We rely on the affect of others, on our encounters, on the transmission of affect. The very notion of affect belongs to the individual and the environment, to the social and the biological. Thinking of affect in terms of transmission undermines the dichotomy between these spheres. According to Brennan affect is social in origin but biological and physical in effect. Our thoughts and mental apparatus to evaluate these affects are much more individualized historical conjunctions of words and experiences.

Using the term transmission is pointing to mediated forms of communication but also to the fact that affect is contagious and has effects beyond our cognitive apparatus. It is quite obvious that the realm of the affective invites all kinds of instrumental and engineered (and therefore politically dangerous) uses. History – and our knowledge of mass-psychology – has taught us that crowds can be aroused and

enhanced energetically to commit the most horrifying crimes. To give energy to individuals and to crowds is never in itself the goal, we need to have a cognitive-mental level in order to evaluate the aim and the effects of the energizing. But on the other hand, to underestimate, to overlook or to repress the affective realm – for example by calling it primitive – would be not only wrong but it would also miss the point of so many contemporary phenomena. One can take part in an event in order to feel the energy and get revitalized, yet at the same time not necessarily agree with or partake in the content dimensions of events. Being in the environment, feeling the feeling is the core immaterial value pursued here.

Thrift's aim is to understand affective contagion, how it spreads and multiplies. Thrift believes this is important not only on a personal level but also from a political perspective; in stead of the great political passions on the right and on the left, Thrift searches for another kind of politics that takes the affective level seriously in being multi-naturalist and in re-materializing democracy. Thrift tries to get closer to the phenomenon of the contamination of affects through a reading of three different lines of thought. From naturalist sociologist Gabriel Tarde he takes the idea that passions are transmitted through semi-conscious processes of mimesis and that these show how balling of mimetic desire forms the basis of social life (Thrift 2008, p 231-232). From Italian Marxists Lazzarato and Virno the idea that the others can be a trans individual resource escaping domination by focussing on sympathy and not just difference. (233) and from Sloterdijk the idea that being is a being-together in an environment (234).

Thrift characterizes affect using the following points: 1) a biological phenomenon, involving embodiment, bringing together hormonal flux, body language, shared rhythms, and other forms of entrainment to produce encounters between the body and a particular event 2) flows moving through the bodies of human beings 3) a physical and non-representational grasping of the other 4) motivation to bring feelings in correspondence with the feelings of others. 5) a kinetic empathy/a kinaesthetic awareness of the other bodies.

We all naturally recognise the football game, the live concert experience or the political assembly feeling, but the point here is that more and more phenomena in the cultural field have these characteristics, because more and more phenomena are subjected to eventmaking strategies in order to attract the attention of different groups and audiences. Media events are privileged expressions of social structure and the way they are orchestrated gives us good information on how affective communities are discursively and affectively framed and positioned. In the Obama case, 2 million people chose to take part in the event by being there amongst the crowd. Two things were stressed in the interviews: I want to be part of this with the others, and the cold weather was commented upon as the obstacle that people had surmounted in order to be there. Being one of the crowd, together with the crowd, forming an affective community beyond differences seems to have been the result.

We claim hereby that the enhancing of energy that event-strategies aim at, has to be understood in terms of affect. We characterize the realm of the affective by four qualities: it empowers participants, it gives people the feeling of having a feeling, it is contagious and it is able to produce understanding and empathy between bodies.

The significant feature of the inauguration as a media event is that it is both a major transformative referential event⁶ and a media event in which eventmaking strategies are used as markers of inscription. The empowerment that audiences feel at such occasions is both of a diffuse and general character (a nice state of mind and an extra-ordinary feeling that these events generate) and of a more specific kind due to

the content of Obama being black and the first of his kind. This characteristic feature not only enables all black Americans, but any minority to feel empowered.

In the event as a media event it is striking that all actors – the journalist-witnesses on the spot, the experts in the different studios, the members of the audiences in Washington or in Denmark (some representatives of black American immigrants in Denmark) – were asked what they expected to feel and to experience during the ceremony. One could call it a prescription of affect but one could also see it as a way of prolonging the enjoyment of the feeling.

The phenomenon is contagious and spreads: not only does everybody want to become part of the event, but the *strategies of imitation* (a clear interpretation of the affective contagion) are put in place by the media producers and already in use by different audiences. On the 21.00 evening news on DR1 we clearly see an example of a framing of a future imitation: the lunch menu that the president elect had been given, had just been prepared by a chef at the American Embassy in Denmark and as the anchor on DR1 noted the recipe was available on the DR website, so inviting imitation. Another example of imitation took place at Politikens Hus where political supporters celebrated Obama becoming president, as an obvious imitation of some of thousands and thousands of parties going on all night throughout the USA (Obama himself hosted nine parties in Washington during the evening). A last – very interesting – example is the fact the fishing town of Obama in central Japan took the opportunity of the common name to support Obama during his campaign, so connecting the city with the event and offering an opportunity for the intensity/energy to spread. It is a very important point here that we do not deal with strategies of identification (identifying with something demands a psychological apparatus), but on the contrary with strategies of imitation by which one becomes a part of the event, hoping the energy and symbolic power of the event shows itself to be inclusive.

Pointing to affect as the ‘thing’ that we share (opposed to political opinion, ethnic belonging, faith and nationhood) is of course making the event more inclusive, because it has to suspend or transcend all the possible differences between people who attend the global event. The empathy that we feel is an empathy with the minorities, the oppressed, the poor regions and people. One of the stories of charity told several times during the afternoon media event was that of a rich citizen donating 1 million dollars to people without means to celebrate at a well-known hotel in Washington. The 21.00 DR1 news showed images from a diner in Harlem, New York and from Ukulele, the native village in Kenya of Obamas father. The feeling of empowerment is crucial and transcends differences of colour and income in order to create kinetic sameness and empathy in the global community.

Media events and eventmaking

The global media are producers of intensifying moments during which communities larger than nations are created and integrated. We want here to consider television as the representative of the ‘old’ electronic media technology orchestrating events on a global scale. We have just shown how the media as intensive environments can become machines for producing affect. But what qualifies as a media event? We would – unlike Dayan & Katz – like to qualify both ceremonial (orchestrated) events and unprepared and often catastrophic media-events, such as terrorist attacks, as media events. The reason why terrorist attacks are interesting from an event perspective is that they can make us aware of the double status of the term of event in a media perspective. On the one hand we have the ceremonious events with everything pre-planned and the media playing the role of toastmaster. On the other

hand we have the improvised events, that just happen, the 'real' events which the media can only transmit (in a kind of 'innocent' immediacy). We claim that both kinds of events are important and play on our expectations of an event: it has to be ritually orchestrated and it has to be structured in such a way that improvised/surprising moments that break out of the pre-scripted matrices, can appear.

According to their legitimizing role, media events have been theorized as moments in which society celebrates itself as a coming-together that reflects a society, which normally has an invisible centre (Dayan & Katz 1992). On the other hand, Nick Couldry (2003) proposes a critical approach deconstructing the ideology of media power by actually looking upon the media as machines to produce and frame reality and not to represent it. The interesting aspect of media events is to Couldry the fact that the media use the events to legitimize their own everyday practice.

The interesting thing about the inauguration as an example of a media event is that it confirms the idea of a symbolic centre and because of its character as a transformative event invites less of a critical reading of the framings that the media produce. What we would like to add is an analysis of *how* the different media frame and construct the event-ness of the event, how they *attract* audiences and how different audiences *inscribe* themselves in the event. Parallel to the media's celebration of an existent myth, we also understand media events as staging, framing and setting platforms regarding the event.

Of the three modes that media events can be subdivided into, according to Dayan & Katz: Contests (sports and politics), Conquest (leaps for mankind) and Coronations (parades, funerals, weddings), the inauguration is of course a Coronation, but it is equally a Conquest bearing a transformative function that actually changes the world.

On a more general level we must turn to the two characteristics of the event in the media event: a carefully orchestrated framed and staged event from the perspective of the broadcasters – and therefore exposed to criticism from the critical point of view of Couldry – and something unforeseen happening and so evoking the possibility of transformation and change of already established patterns. In the first case Dayan & Katz propose the concept of subjunctive mood meaning that the event evoking images a better, more equal and fraternal world. This mode is a kind of fairy-tale or make-believe mode that underpins the ceremonious events. From this perspective ceremonious events *can* be transformative if the referential situation marks a new beginning. To take the second point of view on events, focusing on the unforeseen events or the non-scripted incidents within an orchestrated event, we can say that they have transformative potential regarding the matrices of events. They provide the viewer with a sense of liberty and unforeseen-ness inside a smooth and well-orchestrated machinery. In other words media events have syntactic, semantic and pragmatic dimensions.

The semantic dimension deals with the narrative matrices used in telling the event. In the inauguration case the basic narration is the fact that Obama is black. Staged along the lines of American civil religion and pointing to the central and basic mythological structures and elements of this, including the ritualizations, demarcations, rhetorics and symbols, this particular take on the inauguration American presidential produces a feeling of social coherence. This is, in a very strong sense, affirming basic civil religious elements by making true the American dream that all humans are equal in God's own country, ideas of the American soil as the

Land of the Brave, Home of the free, America as the nation of possibilities for all (Bellah & Hammond 1980).

The pragmatic dimension deals with the ways in which the event “enthrals very large audiences” (Dayan & Katz:12). At the same time, his being black is the spring board, it seems, for many of the very large number of derived eventmaking strategies that are communicated to us through the media event. To afro-Americans and all other none white Americans. If this black man can make it – they might be next. And, from a wider perspective, as a globalizable identification figure: If he can make it everyone of us can.

The syntactical level has to do with the grammar and all the textual characteristics of the broadcasted event. We will explore in further detail the role of live images in media events below, but this event is exemplary⁷ in its staging of space, time and rhythm. In Denmark we had a multi-stage setting (Bolin 2009: 43) there was the DR the studio space with the host, Kim Bildsøe Lassen, and around him several experts placed in other studios and guests invited into the studio commenting on the ongoing event. Also on the spot at the referential event – with a six hour time difference between Washington and Denmark – we had several iconic places represented by journalists witnessing the event from their perspective. The placements included one correspondent in front of Capitol Hill, the very place of the inauguration ceremony (Steffen Gram), and in front of the White House, the end of the journey for the President and his family (Lilian Gjerulf) and down at the Mall between the crowds (Claus Fahrendorff).⁸

The host in the studio plays the role of the conductor in the event. He orchestrates the distribution of timeslots to commentaries from the studio, from experts, from the journalists witnessing the event at different spots. The screen is often split, the live streaming images filling the screen, the studio host plus guests in inserted images with information appearing in as streaming text at the bottom of the screen-image. An image of high intensity. Significantly the time division changes when the inauguration ceremony approaches. The nearer we get to the moment of avowing the more the live images themselves constitute the event. The image becomes one, the text stops streaming and the talk falls silent.

Being there – (a)live

The investment in the event and the affective impact and contagion that it produces, that we have outlined above is due to some textual qualities of the transmission. Of its significant features, one of the most important features is the liveness of events. Television broadcasting makes use of three forms: the fully live (presentation), the as live (the staged presentation) and the recorded (the representation). Normally all three are in play but the fully live is the most rare of the forms, even if that particular feature to some is the ontological component of television (Mellencamp 1990). Others have stressed that live television is very seldom entirely live (Bolin 2009, p 41) and focuses on very useful codes of liveness (Bolin 2009, p 45). We claim that liveness is one of the most important features in media events in order to produce involvement, co-creation and affective belonging. We totally agree with Jerome Bourdon and Marriott claiming that liveness is the constant seduction and promise of television (Bourdon 2000, p 551, Marriott 2007). Television remains deeply influenced by the possibility of live broadcasting and this is seen, according to Bourdon, in the fact that live television likes unexpected events to occur. “The unexpected event demonstrates that not everything has been planned, that television, even though it might influence

the event by its presence (and might even organize it), is not the sole writer of the screenplay” (Bourdon 2000, p 537).

From the perspective of event and eventmaking this point becomes relevant because it shows that neither the transmission-character (Dayan & Katz) nor the constructive character (Couldry) of media-events are quite adequate to describe the seduction of the genre. “Accidents and scandals, always a delight for the media, are even better when we see them happening live. [...]. These accidents guarantee that television is still, at least at times, as live as it can get”. (Bourdon 2000: 537). We believe this description gets very close to the function of liveness in media events. Three examples illustrate this point. In the royal wedding between crown-prince Frederik of Denmark and Mary Donaldsson, it became the tears that the crown-prince shed in the church waiting for his bride to be, that became *the unexpected event* happening within the orchestrated event. These tears became the symbol of the event and served as matrices for similar events to come (his big brothers second wedding, the christenings of couple’s children etc.). In the inauguration ceremony, we saw two examples of unforeseen events. One example is something that the media could not foresee, namely the car drive from Capitol Hill down Pennsylvania Avenue towards the White House.... It was expected that Mr. President Obama would get out of the car, but where, when, how often was uncertain. We can call this a staged uncertainty pointing to the fact that not everything is scripted and that this uncertainty is an important feature in creating excitement. Another example of something strictly unforeseen that took us all by surprise: the future president made some mistakes in pronouncing his vows.

We claim that the production of intensity and the creation of affective belonging is quite dependent on the event being live.

The live event, by contrast, is in the process of being written even as one encounters it; it is coming into being in the world *right now*. To be in the presence of the live event is thus to be swept away into a moment which is transpiring simultaneously with the *now* of one’s engagement with it; it is to be *in the event* even as the event endures (Marriott 2007, p 72).

Marriott makes the distinction between two kinds of simultaneity. One called *instantaneity* referring to the simultaneity of transmission and reception and a second one called *immediacy* referring to the simultaneity of an event and its reception elsewhere. We focus here on immediacy not as a way to mislead the viewer into a sense of presence that only virtually is there (Bolter and Grusin 2002, p 22) but as a concrete realization of an enchanted moment in which presence is experienced. The experience of the event means to go into the discourse space characterized by the offer of a real-time connection between the ‘I’ of television and the ‘you’ of the viewer. This discourse space consists of a historical mode of addressing the viewer (a telling mode) and a more experiential mode (a showing mode) (Lukács 1936). The experiential mode being characterized by textual features of presence: use of present tense, different deictic markers, use of personal pronouns directly addressing the viewer as witnessing the event. But the most important feature of the core experience is the silencing of words and discourse framings and the live images taking full screen size. Only after this live immediacy experience of the inauguration ceremony begins the showing of the recorded images, albeit only ten minutes old. The unending repetitions of the moment of vowing can begin.

The media in the live immediacy plays the old role of transmitter of events out of their hands, like in the documentaries of the 1960s in which the media became the flies on the wall. In fact we can say that television still looks back to the old days of innocent transparent immediacy, but in a much more reflected context echoing adequately the dichotomy of the scripted and the non-scripted.

What is new when considering the characteristics of live television identified by Marriott is the fact that she stresses not only that the unexpected has to happen in order for live television to keep its promise and contract with the audiences, but also that the live codes are signs of *eventual change and transformation to come*. “Immediacy resides in the medium as a continual promise, for ever on the brink of emergence” (Marriott 2007: 58). We are not dealing with the illusion of presence here, we are dealing with the absolute concrete actualization of taking part in the heat and intensity of the event with others. Live broadcasted television produces the feeling of being there, sharing an intense moment of new beginnings and emergent futures. Media events are privileged arenas for the unexpected to happen. Media events orchestrate the scripted and the non-scripted and are thus formally both representations and presentations. Watching media events offers the chance to take part in the world in the making.

The difference between audiences following the event on the small screen and the audiences who are actually there, but watching the event on big screens, is getting smaller because of eventmaking strategies that include everyone in the heat of the event, and invite everybody to become part of the affective community so transcending differences.

Conclusion

We claim that eventmaking strategies are important socio-cultural strategies in contemporary culture. We have, in particular, focused on ritualization, liminality, liminoidity, intensive environment-building and liveness as constitutive elements of such a strategy. We demonstrate how eventmaking strategies inscribe social actors discursively and how they attract and maintain the actors affectively. Eventmaking is fundamentally about staging the scripted but also about keeping the promise of the non-scripted and the possibility of change alive. The case of the inauguration of Obama showed itself to be a transformative event (Change has come), a media event using the outlined eventmaking strategies and a platform for individual or group-wise imitation strategies. But not only is the Obama case a good case in order to demonstrate eventmaking strategies, it is also an event in the more philosophical sense of the word: the impossible happened. The relation between majority and minority (of all sorts, colours, scales) will never be the same again. A taste of future possible changes becomes with this event within reach for every single individual witnessing the event, a giddy and overwhelming perspective.

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¹ Our empirical material is Extra News DR 1 2009-01-20 at 16.00-19.30, Extra News on TV 2 2009-01-20 at 16.15-18.15, Evening News DR 1 2009-01-20 at 21.00-21.40.

² In fact, Humphrey & Laidlaw uses the term *non intentionality* that we find rather confusing. Instead we suggest the term *displaced intentionality* (Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994: 94)

³ Examples of mainly affective ritualizations are e.g. many audience communities around the European Song Contest or in relation to the royal wedding of Crownprince Frederik and Miss Mary Donaldson. They are almost non-discursive OR they reflect some kind of suspension of disbelief (Dayan & Katz 1992) whereas the ritualizations and eventmaking strategies on the inauguration day are of a discursive OR of a affective nature but never reflects suspension.

⁴ This is not to say that chances for political change are small. In our opinion it seems to be a question of media. New media such as mobile phones and the internet seem to be mobilizing (Castells 2001) while old media seem to be ceremonial and nostalgic (Missika 2006).

⁵ Fundraising campaigns such as Danmarksindsamlingen 2007, 2008, 2009 on DR 1.

⁶ In contrast to events such as the donation shows broadcasted in Danish television since the fifties. They are not transmitting anything, having as only goal to produce affect and intensity in order to make people donate money.

⁷ Also the wedding

⁸ This is based on Extra News DR 1 2009-01-20 at 16.00-19.30.