Journalistic Practices in Media Events Before Broadcasting: The Public Funeral of King Oscar II in Early Twentieth-Century Sweden

Ulrika Holgersson

Department of Communication and Media, Lund University, Lund, Sweden

ABSTRACT
According to Dayan and Katz, media events require live transmission, firmly dating their birth to the age of television. However, the application of such a media-centric criterion runs the risk of projecting an a-historical perspective to the phenomenon as such. By contrast, using the example of the public funeral of the Swedish King Oscar II in 1907, the purpose of this article is to scrutinize and categorize the different efforts on part of the journalists to create media events before broadcasting. Four types of journalistic practices are uncovered: (1) highlighting the attention of media in a broad sense in public space (such as church bells, flags, shop windows, etc.) as well as journalistic presence, to endow eventfulness to the occasion; (2) acting as witness ambassador to evoke the senses of the media audience; (3) mediating the witnessing public participating on location to emphasise the engagement of the whole society; (4) using different kinds of narrativization, such as cross-cutting, to bring a sense of immediacy to the reporting. In terms of theory, the ambition is to draw attention to the journalist’s role as a historical narrator, as well as to bring the historical perspective back to the discussion on media events.

KEYWORDS
Media events; eventfulness; journalistic practices; public funerals; Oscar II of Sweden; historical perspective

Introduction
Strictly speaking, in the tradition of the seminal work by Dayan and Katz (1992, 4), media events are defined by their ability to distribute and highlight historically significant events as they unfold in real time, connecting vast groups of people by engaging them as participating witnesses of a simultaneous experience. Thus, according to the Dayan–Katz tradition, media events require the technology of live transmission, firmly dating their birth to the age of television. However, the application of such a media-centric criterion runs the risk of neglecting earlier practices of journalism, thus projecting an a-historical perspective to the phenomenon of media events as such. By contrast, the purpose of this article is to explore the different journalistic practices in the creation of media events before broadcasting. Using the example of the public funeral of the Swedish King
Oscar II in December 1907, I scrutinize and categorize the early efforts on part of the journalists to bestow eventfulness, i.e., grant event-status to the occasion (Frosh and Pinchevski 2018, 136), to evoke the senses of the media audience, to emphasise the engagement of the society as a whole and to create a mutual awareness among the readers of facing the historically charged present. How was a sense promoted of taking part in a historically unique event? Which methods were used to engage the audience as (close to) simultaneously participating witnesses? By answering these questions my ambition is to draw attention to the journalist’s role as a historical narrator (Lavoinne 1994), as well as contribute to the efforts of bringing the historical perspective back into the discussion on media events.

**Historical Perspectives on Media Events**

Initially, it is important to state that instant live transmission is not an acquirement demanded by all researchers of media events. In parallel with Dayan and Katz, German researchers, for example, Bösch (2010), have embraced a significantly broader definition of media events, sometimes including long-durational occurrences reaching far back in history such as the Reformation or the French revolution. Calling for “a deepening of the historical dimension in conceiving of media events”, Ytreberg (2017, 1) opens up the floor for a discussion between this German-language tradition on the one part and the English-language tradition of Dayan and Katz on the other. To Ytreberg (2017, 309–313) then, the historical dimension is one of historizing media events, a task he undertakes by analysing their historical development in terms of their temporality, planning modes and internal balance of interpersonal and mediated communication. Undoubtedly, there is much need for investigating media events in relation to historical context and change. For reasons further explained below, I would like to argue, though, that it makes sense to stick to Dayan’s and Katz’ original understanding of media events as short-term occasions – uniting audiences in a simultaneous experience – rather than as longer historical processes. As Scannell (1995, 154) stressed already in his review essay on *Media Events* a key question is what “public occasions” were like “before radio and television”, because that kind of knowledge would provide the opportunity for a better understanding of modern media’s impact on “public life”. Surely, one might add, the features whereby the broadcast media created eventfulness didn’t appear out of the blue; quite the contrary the structures, scripts, roles etcetera were of a much earlier origin.

Yet, there is a piece missing within Dayan and Katz original work: a philosophically informed awareness of the concept of *history* itself. Ytreberg (2017, 311) approaches this topic when he, adding to the critique of lack of “historical depth” in the book (Scannell 1995, 152), concludes that, by defining media events as “proclaimed historic” (Dayan and Katz 1992, 8), the authors simply wanted to highlight their wider, extraordinary societal and historical importance. In a later short reflection on media events Ytreberg somewhat rectifies this conclusion, referring to Dayan’s and Katz’ consideration of transformative media ceremonies as capable of reorganising time and space, to stop “history in its tracks”, thereby offering the opportunity to reinvent the past and rearrange collective memory. “A more generous reading might argue”, he suggests, “that a sense of history in *Media Events* is to be found in its discussions of the temporalities of transformation” (Ytreberg 2018, 132–133; see also Dayan and Katz 1992, 161–165).
The question of how Dayan and Katz define history, demands a fair amount of exegetics. As a matter of fact, they never really make an explicit distinction between the two basic meanings of history as, on the one side, the past in its ever-intangible reality or, at the other, the narratives of this same reality, which really is the only level of knowledge historians can hope to grasp. As Carr has stated historical facts “cannot exist in a pure form: they are always refracted through the mind of the recorder”, i.e., the historian that wrote the historical work in question (Carr 1965, 21–22). However, from a historian’s perspective, I would contend, this is where the concept of media events becomes intriguing. More particularly, taken at face value, the subtitle of Dayan’s and Katz’ book, “The Live Broadcasting of History”, indicates that media events constitute the points of intersection between the historical development as such and the simultaneous narration of it. Hence, media events can be understood as performative acts of making history by mediating it – a task undertaken by the witness of the journalistic reporter. Consequently, the audience experiencing them will be embraced in an intensified sense of historical presence and transformation, facing the past as it is created, almost as if they were there participating themselves (cp. Frosh and Pinchevski 2018). In that respect, including long-duration historical processes in the definition, as is the case with the German-language media event tradition (Bösch 2010), becomes problematic, because, after all, such processes are often not guided by a clear sense of historical direction. Rather, they are constituted by dynamic relations of many occurrences, often unclear at the time to the people taking part in them.

Of course, to engage the audience in the experience of participating in history as it unfolds, the journalists need to employ methods that bring a sense of immediacy – or to use a word by Scannell (1996, 84), “presencing” – to the reporting. Yet, the very experience of the present needs to be historized. As Kern (2003/1983: 65–69, 314) shows in his study of the culture of time and space in the decades at the turn of the twentieth century, the new technologies of the wireless, telephone, high-speed rotary press and cinema profoundly influenced people’s conceptions and experiences of the present. With the new possibilities of spreading news at high speed, talking to people at distant places and experience parallel plots at the silver screen etcetera, “[t]he present was no longer limited”, he concludes, “to one event in one place, sandwiched tightly between past and future and limited to local surroundings”. Rather “‘now’ became an extended interval of time that could, indeed must, include events around the world” (Kern 2003/1983: 314). When examining early media events, it is this kind of extended, though still limited temporality, imbued both with anticipations and concluding reflections, that we can expect to find in journalistic depictions.

The Early Twentieth-Century Swedish Politics and Media System

Sweden at the turn of the twentieth century was a constitutional monarchy. The political system was built of a legislative two-chamber Parliament and an executive government. The King still held the right to appoint the Ministers as his personal advisors and, thus, the governments were normally heavily biased towards the interests of the conservative majority of the first chamber (Esaiasson 2010: 31, 34, 65). Measured by European standards, suffrage in Sweden at the beginning of the twentieth century was very restricted and inequality and class difference a flagrant fact (Bengtsson 2019: 124). Nevertheless, this was the time when the scene was set for the final big drama between right (conservatism) and left (liberalism/social-democracy), which ended with the latter’s victory when equal
and general suffrage was realized in 1921 (Holgersson 2018). Besides the issue of democratic reform, the budget of the defence and the state-union between Sweden and Norway were the political stumbling blocks of the early 1900s (Esaiasson 2010: 35). In this battle King Oscar II (born 1829, reign from 1872) was of the old stock, engaged in the struggle for preserving the influence of the monarchy at the expense of democratic development, although his, albeit reluctant, contribution to the peaceful dissolution of the union between Sweden and Norway in 1905 granted him some respect among the leftists (Weibull 1971: 71–81; Social-Demokraten, December 9, 1907: 1–2).

The deep divide between political parties and social classes was closely intertwined with the media system. In Stockholm, 11 daily newspapers of divergent political colours from left to right, separated the public into different circles of readers. Whereas only the social-democratic newspapers formed a regular party press, the commercial enterprises of their conservative and liberal competitors had rather obvious connections to the political scene, via their economic investors or editors (Lundström 2001, 27, 48–66).

Although, the absolutely dominant news agents in Sweden at the time were the daily newspapers, the media system was comprised of many other types of media (in the expanded sense of the word), often complementing and supplementing the press. When something unexpected and extraordinary happened, the newspapers had a hard time keeping up the pace. Hence, in the case of the death of King Oscar II, to get the latest news, people in Stockholm turned to the newspapers’ display windows, and the editors rapidly distributed the information via extra sheets to bridge the gap between the moment of death and the next opportunity for going to press (Social-Demokraten, December 9, 1907: 2). Furthermore, an even greater weakness of the newspapers was their acute shortage of images. Symptomatically, the sales of postcards of the late King, immediately became a thriving business (Svenska Dagbladet, December 10, 1907: 12).

And for a visual display of the funeral ceremony itself, the audience could turn to the popular press, which, although at a safe time distance, offered a generous range of photographs of good size and quality, from the procession at the streets as well as from the interior of the church (Hvar8Dag no. 13 1907).

However, in comparison, cinema was now emerging as a potential alternative. The burial of King Oscar II was the first Swedish public funeral of greater magnitude to appear at the silver screens of cinema theatres nationwide, extensively advertised in the newspapers. Although the shooting of the funeral didn’t run until the next day, another film of the lit-de-parade was run the same night, constantly from 5 to 11 pm (Dagens Nyheter, December 19, 1907: 4; Social-Demokraten, December 20, 1907). Still a young and fairly undeveloped medium, the filmmakers at King Oscar’s funeral exerted themselves to the utmost to develop the negatives to be able to distribute them to the theatres as soon as possible (Idestam-Almquist 1959: 225–227). Nevertheless, even if the moving images added an exciting flavour of authenticity to the media event, the technical confinements of the filming as such were still many.

**Uncovering Journalistic Practices**

This brief overview of the early twentieth-century Swedish media system indicates that there were complex relationships and dependencies between diverse media, both old and new (Gitelman 2006: 4–9). In the construction of the media event as a whole,
these different media worked together, complementing each other, although the daily press was the heart of the system. While there still were technological obstacles in terms of time lapses in the reporting of the funeral as such, the press played a pivotal part in framing it. Thus it was to the daily newspapers that the people who wanted to watch the procession on location had to turn for all kinds of practical information such as the general timetable of the event, the route and order of the cortège, rules of order, traffic regulations, etcetera (Dagens Nyheter, December 18, 1907: 2). Furthermore, the journalists did their job both to characterize the experience for those who decided to stay at home and to interpret and reconstruct the memory of the actual participants. In this sense, there were no clear boundaries between the real occurrence and its mediatized expressions.

Moreover, the degrees or journalistic development of the newspapers in Stockholm varied. Taking this into account, as well as their different readerships, I have selected three dailies for my survey. First, Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), officially “frisinnad” (literally, broad-minded/liberal) and “independent”, although with a strong support for the monarchy, a majority ownership by right-wing consortiums and a content that addressed the entrepreneurs and the highly educated. Second, Dagens Nyheter (DN), the leader of liberal opinion making, closely attached to liberal political agents, both economically and via personal relationships. And third, Social-Demokraten (SocD), the capital’s only social-democratic daily, an official organ for the party, although there were no detailed directions or rules that governed its content (Lundström 2001: 22, 27–28, 63; Andersson 1960: 188; Hadenius 2002: 60, 67–69; Hadenius, Seveborg, and Weibull 1968: 75–76, 87–88).

While none of my three objects of study were dominating the market in terms of circulation figures, Svenska Dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter had taken the lead towards journalistic modernization, inspired by the development of the American press. Their editing and layout were increasingly becoming clearer and the content richer and broader, including for instance news on business, social issues, police matters, cultural and political opinion making and women’s interests, and the work of their journalists more active as they to a greater extent were sent out on the field (Lundström 2001: 30–31; Andersson 1960: 128–134; Hadenius 2002: 60–65). As Örnebring and Karlsson (2020) contend, journalistic independence can be analyzed at both an institutional and individual level. In the case of early twentieth-century Sweden, within the frames of a rather politicized, although still partly commercially governed media system (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 67, 153–158), professionalization of the journalistic role was under way, and hence the competition between old-school publicists and up-coming self-dependent newsreporters increased (Jarlbrink 2009: 177–179). Thus, in theory, it is an open question to what extent the reporting on the funeral of King Oscar, at least in Svenska Dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter, was balanced and unbiased. At the same time, it might be important to keep in mind that the media events of the later broadcasting era, according to Dayan and Katz, were “presented with reverence and ceremony” by journalists who approached their subject with an exaggerated respect, to the extent that they put “their normally critical stance”, aside (Dayan and Katz 1992: 7).

Indeed, the attempt to historize and trace the roots of a media phenomenon originally defined in relation to a later historical period, must be made with careful consideration and an open eye to the differing historical contexts and media systems. As
Wilke (2010: 46, 52) argues, juxtaposing the examples of the Lisbon earthquake in 1755 and the Tsunami catastrophe in 2004, Dayan’s and Katz’ definition of media events needs to be expanded, for any historical comparison to be possible. Such a broadened perspective, taking into consideration the complex relationships between different media working together in the creation of media events, has paved the way for a new field of historical research (Gerbig-Fabel 2008; Schnürer 2008; Schlot, 2008; Ytreberg 2014). Still, it is important, though not to lose attention to the ways in which the journalist profession as such used these different kinds of media. Therefore, the purpose of this study is rather to identify the different means employed by journalists using the press as their medium, to achieve the affordances that live television later brought to the field, more specifically the ability to create a sense of immediacy and “presencing” in the reporting, thereby engaging the audience in the making of history as it unfolds.

To identify the means employed to achieve these ends, I have used classical hermeneutic close reading, with a focus on the content of the texts as well as the choice of words and style and structure of writing. Sometimes explicitly, but mostly between the lines, one can detect the journalistic work behind the stage, such as the collection of information from different stakeholders, or the need for several reporters to be sent out on the streets to cover the event together, although on different locations. Hence, the concept of journalistic practices includes both the work in the newsroom or out in the field, and the writing as such, although the final product of the newspaper text remains its only accessible source material for this time period.

Although, naturally, the reporting from the funeral itself is the most important, I have investigated all texts connected to the event published in the three dailies, from tiny news items to larger reports from the streets, from subjective chronicles to objective information about the planning of the event, from regular journalism to commercial adverts, all covering the period from the time of King Oscar’s death to the aftermath of his burial. Generally, in 1907, the layout in the Swedish press had only just begun to be modernized; frontpages were still dominated by adverts, texts were not consequently organized into different sections and headlines were generally modest (Hadenius 2002, 77–79; Andersson 1960, 73–75). However, in constructing the media event of King Oscar’s death, exceptions were made to the rule, when the whole frontpage was devoted to the news of the King’s death (DN, A ed., December 9, 1907; SvD, Stockholm ed. December 9, 1907) and burial (DN, B ed, December 20, 1907) respectively (Hadenius 2002, 78).

While my main focus is on the press, I have also analysed the limited film material preserved from the event, to capture the relationship between the press and the film medium, both predecessors to television. These are Konung Oscar II:s begravning den 19 december 1907 of unknown provenance and Pathé’s Kung Oscars begravning, both so called newsfilms, i.e., separately announced individual 5–7 min long film reports, to be distinguished from the regularly screened newsreels, consisting of an assemblage of shorter news stories (Chambers, Jönsson, and Winkel 2018, 2). Here, I have used classical film analysis, giving attention to, for instance, position and movement of the camera and duration of the shots (Bordwell and Thompson 2008).
The Funeral of King Oscar II as a Media Event

Highlighting Media Attention: Endowing Eventfulness

It is perhaps easy to forget that classical mass media are not the only media employed in the bestowing of event-status to a historically significant occasion. In case of the death of famous people, various expressions of grief, condolence and appreciation, by individuals as well as authorities, organizations, merchants and the like, can be detected in public space in the use of a range of artefacts and practices, all broadly defined as different media or forms of mediations. Naturally, in the pursuit of stressing the fact that something historically extraordinary had occurred, the reporting of this kind of behaviour was a standard feature in the daily press, primarily in relation to the royals. In the case of King Oscar's funeral, depictions of flags at half mast, church bells ringing, proclamations of the news at churches or schools, the silencing of music and ceasing of dancing at restaurants and cafés, the cancelling of parties or performances at theatres and cinemas, the redecoration of shop windows, the black mourning in public places, etcetera, not only in Stockholm but in the provinces and even Norway and Denmark, all contributed to the same effect (DN, A-B ed, December 9, 1907; DN, December 10, 1907; SvD, December 9, 1907; SocD, December 9–10, 1907).

Although highlighting media attention (in a broad sense), was a customary journalistic practice at the beginning of the twentieth century to endow eventfulness, there were considerable differences between the three newspapers. With a dignified tone the reporters of Svenska Dagbladet, detected the rapid change of dress code, the solemn commemoration in shop windows and the conversations among the vast crowds, conveying that the late King was loved by the broad mass of the people (SvD, December 9, 1907: 6–7). Adding even more to the creation of eventfulness, Dagens Nyheter chose to illustrate the eagerness and interest of the people in more vivid commentary. On the grey and hazy Sunday people instinctively wanted to get out in the streets to read the papers, to feel the press of the crowd, to be close to the place where something had happened. Already, early in the morning, the telephone exchanges of the capitol were overwhelmed by curious callers, seeking information about what was going on, which forced the offices to significantly increase their number of staff, Dagens Nyheter told their readers. And in the B-edition the same day, after conducting a survey of their own, the daily furthermore informed that several shop assistants in Stockholm had been busy unpacking and displaying black cloths and receiving orders, already the evening before King Oscar II had died, underlining that the high pressure on business would make it very hard to get a new black dress made in the following week, for the ones’ who hadn’t thought of already placing an order (DN, A-B ed., December 9, 1907).

The contrast to the coverage of Social-Demokraten was indeed striking. Even if the great masses in movement were recognized, it was acknowledged partly as a typical feature of Christmas time. Of course, there was no use in denying the flags on half mast, the extra-sheets of the newspapers, the cancelling of theatre performances and the like, but life was quite the same at the restaurants, only slightly more subdued and still many people wore colourful clothes, according to the newspaper. The sentiment of the crowd was in equal measure characterized by sympathetic gentleness and curiosity. Furthermore, the redecorations made by the shopkeepers were rather seen as a sign of
their attentiveness to good business and one journalist eventually made fun of the shop windows displaying black corsets and white female underwear (SocD, December 9, December 12, 1907).

Moreover, a particular way of highlighting attention was the habit of referencing to the press’ own reporting. Quite logically, a standard procedure in the coverage of the death of famous people was the thorough recapitulation of the obituaries of other newspapers, representing a broad range of political colours, foreign as well as domestic (SocD, December 10–11, 1907; DN, December 10, 1907; SvD, December 9, 1907). However, even more striking was the way that the journalistic work and the actual news flow as such were put at the centre of attention – an early example of what Couldry (2003) has described as the creation of the myth of the mediated centre. The day before the death of King Oscar Dagens Nyheter published a detailed article about the occurrences at the castle, where the journalists of the dailies had gathered in the King’s billiard hall, keeping watch to enable the immediate posting of the latest news of the monarch’s pining life spirits (DN, December 8, 1907: 2). Moreover, in accordance with the newspaper’s anti-royal sentiment, the reporter of Social-Demokraten commented acidly on the disorder at the King’s funeral in the church, where unauthorized individuals played the role of journalists, in the pursuit of getting a seat at the press section (SocD, December 20, 1907).

Furthermore, such stressing of media attention also included the presence of filmmakers. Thus, the reporter of Social-Demokraten spotted film cameras at several places on the day of the funeral, commenting that those who hadn’t taken the opportunity to watch the ceremony on location, could “make up for it on the movie theatres”, although the cameras hadn’t caught “many images of proletarians, because the workers were a vanishing minority among the numbers of spectators” (SocD, December 20, 1907). Moreover, another feature that spurred the feeling of eventfulness was the many advertisements in the dailies of funeral films by the cinema theatres, although they all appeared the day after the event. Nevertheless, a film of King Oscar on lit-de-parade was advertised as an extra express event on the actual day of the burial. In the preserved film material of the funeral (unknown provenance, Konung Oscar IIs begravning den 19 december 1907), a certain kind of self-reference can also be noticed, as a considerate part of the footage displays the cameramen, engaging with their heavy and cumbersome equipment, caught in the eye of a colleague on the opposite side of the route of the cortège. This was a kind of meta-reference that simultaneously highlighted the historical significance of the event as such and the key role of the filmmaker/journalist in its construction.

**Acting as Witness Ambassador: Evoking the Senses of the Media Audience**

However, this sense of self-confidence on part of the journalists had an interesting pre-history. In her study of the reporting of the public reception of two newly married royal couples in 1881 and 1905 respectively, Widestedt (2016: 58) distinguishes a “paradigm change in reportorial style”. In 1881, when the people of Stockholm greeted the later Queen Victoria, still then Princess of Baden, and Crown Prince Gustaf, no visual evidence of the event was published in the dailies. Hence, the task of the journalist was to keep the royal newlyweds in constant centre of attention, following them in their footsteps, narrating the occurrences around them chronically in order of appearance, only
commenting on the people of the crowd as they hastily passed them. Two decades later, this superior and distant reporter position, insensitive to the reactions of the people in the streets, and submissive to the monarchy, was no more. Now, when the mission of depicting the royal agents and grand scenery could be left to the press photographers with all the more credibility, the reporters were able to take a step down, to mingle with the crowds, to chair their experience of encountering the royals as they suddenly appeared and disappeared, close, but soon distanced (Widestedt 2016: 48, 50, 53, 56–57).

Accordingly, the development of press photography, was a prerequisite for the journalists to be able to record public participation at media events. Perhaps more importantly, at least in Sweden, it coincided with the overall economic growth of the newspapers, which lead to an increasing number of newsroom staff, making it possible for journalists to leave their former sedentary deskwork and become reporters in the true sense of the word (Jarlbrink 2015: 282–285). In this process, an epistemological shift took place, in which the business of newspapers was to reveal facts acceptable to a broad public, rather than opinions in the interest of the few. As Muhlmann (2008: 6–28) contends, the eye, instead of the voice, was the prime instrument of the new kind of rituals and practices that made it possible for the journalists do deliver the objective truth. Hence, the strong belief in the power of the visual, applied not only to photography, but to the written reports as well. In Muhlmann’s words, the journalists became witness-ambassadors, i.e., deputy observers on behalf of the readers, or “perfect incarnations of the average Joe Public”, lending their bodies to register what the non-present audience could not perceive. Thereby, the “I” of the journalists in their reports was blending into a collective, unifying “we” (Muhlmann 2008: 23).

At the funeral of King Oscar, this “sensualist positivism” or “naive empiricism” (Muhlmann 2008: 23), permeated part of the reporting. The writer most often used the third person singular, “one”, and sometimes even the second person plural, “we”, instead of the first person singular “I”, and various constructions of the verb “see”, as well as references to what could be seen, heard and felt, were frequent. This could be done in the most solemn conservative mode, as in Svenska Dagbladet at the burial of King Oscar: “When the hearse became visible in the cortège the military chain presented arms and the music intoned the funeral march of Karl XV. / … / Just before 12 o’clock one sees the têt of the procession approaching.” (SvD, December 20, 1907: 6, my italics) However, this practice of using visual notations didn’t need to be applied in a totally respectful manner; quite the opposite, a more satirical tone could be sensed, as in this report in the liberal Dagens Nyheter:

Several well-known Stockholmers had ended up at the police, but when we saw the not at all worried face of Mrs Lisa Ranft in a window, we presumed that no serious crime had attracted these people to 4, Myntgatan, but rather the acquaintance with Mr Stendahl. / … / It looked like a circus improvised in haste. The guardsmen kept warm by means of jumping and hitting. The whole of Skeppsbron looked as if people had practised a huge pantomime, and one saw lieutenants take up their stand in a way that would make a ballet-dancer envious. (DN, B ed., December 20, 1907: 1, my italics).

Still, the humorous tone of such writing, was not a sign of subjectivism. As Muhlmann argues (2008: 15), satire implies a position of superiority due to its detached and distant stance, and its power “seems to reside in this very capacity to transmute the voice – which
is singularizing – into a gaze – which is unifying”. The readership unified behind this kind of reporting did not, however, represent the whole community. Rather, in early twentieth-century Sweden, where the media system comprised a plethora of newspapers of divergent political colours, the public was divided into separate circles of readers (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 153–154). Each of these was demanding separate approaches to monarchy on the part of the journalists, signifying different understandings of what was objectively true. Nevertheless, the practice of using visual notations was only one of many tools employed by the journalists to guide their readers through the media events. Most commonly, they hid behind a more generalized or analytical style of reporting and they didn’t confine themselves to employing the perspective of the man on the ground. Though the saturated atmosphere of the historical moment was a constant target of their attention, their gazes were continuously changing between the near and the distant, like a camera zooming in and out on its object.

In relation to the newspapers, the news films probably played a supplementing role. In his discussion of the audience of early newsreels of the beginning of the twentieth century, McKernan (2018, 37) contends that the editing of such films was governed by the knowledge that the fast-producing dailies always would have the privilege of defining what was news. Thus, newsreels were usually designed as “visual confirmation” of newspaper content. All the same, McKernan concludes, the audience suddenly had the opportunity of choosing which kind of medium they preferred when consuming news. Yet, in the early days of film, even if the moving images added an exciting flavour of authenticity to the media event, the technical confinements were still many. Both the two preserved films of King Oscar’s funeral are compiled of a mix of, mostly rather long, shots taken by different photographers, standing close to the route of the cortège. With a few exceptions, the camera is still, keeping focus on the procession instead of the watching crowds, participants walking in and out of the frame. Only some years later, the shots in funeral films were taken from both close and distant angles, with a panning camera following the movement of different agents. Not until then, the participating public was included in the construction of the media event by the filmmakers.3

Mediating the Witnessing Public on Location: Emphasising the Engagement of the Whole Society

A most common feature in the newspapers’ reporting on media events was the depictions of the different citizens present at the funerals. Quite often they were described as larger bodies of people, such as people (folk), spectators (åskådare), masses of spectators (åskådarmassor), humans (människor), bands of people/humans (folkskaror/människoskaror), masses (folkmassor/människomassor), the stream of people (människoströmmen) or the public (allmänheten). Sometimes the appearance of smaller groups was mentioned, like schoolchildren or the old women, who had been waiting since early morning to get a glance of the royal splendour, risking their health in the cold winter climate. And occasionally, individuals were introduced, both those who were publicly known and the random representatives of the ordinary citizens (DN A-B ed., December 20, 1907; SocD, December 20, 1907; SvD, December 20, 1907; see also Widestedt 2016, 51–53). However, in whichever shape or constellation it was represented, the public – much
like the journalists – played the role as witness, and was thereby connected to the readers of the newspaper.

As Thompson (1995, 125–129) has established, the advent of print technology entailed a major change in the construction of the public. Until then, all experiences of performing or participating in public events were dependent on the sharing of physical space, a kind of witnessing that involved face-to-face interaction, richly imbued with sight and sound. With print media, the public co-present at such events was extended with what Thompson calls a reading public or “a public without a place”. Although these two kinds of publics could not engage in physical face-to-face interaction, they were still aware of each other’s presence, even though only the latter was able to experience the former, albeit via the imperfect mediations of image and text. In fact, says Thompson, the events as such “acquired a new kind of publicness which not only supplemented the publicness of co-presence, but which also gradually transformed it, in so far as individuals acting in contexts of co-presence increasingly oriented their behaviour towards others who were part of a reading public” (Thompson 1995, 127–128). As a result of this connection, no simple boundary existed between an active public present at a certain event, and a passive and powerless audience, observing them from a distance (Ekström et al. 2011, 3–8; Livingstone 2005).

Pursuing this line of thought, the journalistic practice of depicting the level of engagement of the people witnessing the funeral served the purpose of taking the temperature of the more general support of the deceased in the society as a whole and, thus, the wider commitment on part of those who were not able to attend the ceremonies in Stockholm themselves. Conversely, from the perspective of the newspaper readers, the act of witnessing their fellow citizens participating in the ceremonies in the capitol, contributed to their sense of being engaged in a wider public. As Coleman and Ross (2010, 20–21) assert, in the modern age, when so much of our encounters with other humans, as well as our experiences of the world, are made possible by the mass media “the ‘we’ who constitute the public is widely dispersed and dependent for self-knowledge upon mediated and indirect accounts of itself”. Consequently, it is by way of “technologies of mediated witnessing” that “publics emerge and come to know themselves”. At the same time, following the argument of Coleman and Ross (2010, 3, 5), there is no such thing as a public pre-existing its representation. Rather, the public is an empty space to fill, constantly politically contested.

Historically, one such field of contest concerning the construction of the public has been its sheer measurement. The strength and ability to gather huge congregations in public spaces indicates the support of a homogenous public, and thus, the imagination of strong public opinion, whatever the cause (Coleman and Ross 2010, 13). At King Oscar’s funeral, in a similar way, in the pursuit of highlighting eventfulness, the journalists were prone to visualize the inventiveness of which participants sought convenient spaces to get a glimpse of the occurrences, such as windows, balconies, rooftops, and the like, as well as to estimate the numbers of people present (DN B ed., December 20, 1907; SocD, December 20, 1907; SvD, December 20, 1907).

However, in this respect the differences between the three Swedish dailies were significant. While Svenska Dagbladet in the very first introductory paragraph of its feature article, stated that people, from north to south, started to flock to the castle already in the dark morning hours, Social-Demokraten, on the other hand, promptly assured their readers that
one could not say that the public support “was so colossal as in any way giving occasion to fear of major crowding at any place”. To the further support of the argument, the reporter directed the attention to the fact that an extra relief train with several carriages from a near-by city, had been strikingly empty, only bringing some twenty passengers to the ceremonies. Adhering to the newspaper’s distinctive socialist perspective, the journalist then delivered the complaint to the police that their barring of huge spaces around the area of the castle had caused the decision among “a great part of the general public” to stay at home, rather than “standing at long distances from the ceremony and not getting to see anything” (SvD, December 20, 1907; SocD, December 20, 1907).

Still, the social-democratic daily also gave voice to a specific type of working-class participant of the funeral as the reporter delivered a vox-pop-like interview with a girl in the local shop in the poor district of the city:

– Off to see the king’s funeral, of course?
– Well, yes, and the horse as well: the king’s horse, he will be shot tomorrow. Is that true?
– Well, rest assured, but just wait, then we can keep company, it isn’t that urgent, is it?
– Urgent! Of course, it is, it’s so late, it’s soon 9 and Anna in the coffee shop – who always can get away whenever she likes – she left over one and a half hour ago. (SocD, December 20, 1907)

As Myers (2000, 167) maintains in his study of the TV broadcasting on the death of Princess Diana, vox-pops can serve the function “of opening up a media event” so that the wider public feel engaged. In this, the presentation of “direct, unselfconscious outpourings, set apart from the detached observation” is a key ingredient. In the quote above, the reporter’s wish to walk along with a participant towards the city centre could be interpreted as a way of engaging the readers, bringing them on board in the search for the ceremonial happenings. Nevertheless, the seemingly straightforward and spontaneous comments of the local shopgirl concern the death of the horse, rather than the King, thereby paradoxically enforcing the reporter’s detached and critical attitude to the event. Moreover, the trope of the somewhat naïve and curious commoner seeking a spectacle instead of expressing sentiments of sincere grief undercuts the importance and centrality of the event, much in contrast to the use of vox-pops in the construction of later media events of the broadcast era (Dekavalla 2012). In a similar way, the reporter of Social-Demokraten later zooms in on single individuals of the crowd, as the members of the government, walking solemnly in the funeral cortège, were flaunting the regalia, noting the reactions of the people humorously asking if the apple was a potato (SocD, December 20, 1907).

In comparison with interviews made in the later media events of the television age, the voices quoted above were of course also anonymous. Not only their names were kept in secret; we never actually see them. The few illustrations in the reports on the funeral of King Oscar were sketches, except for a suite of close-up photographs of the procession in the C edition of Dagens Nyheter (December 20, 1907: 2). In this respect, the conclusion that the news films would appear as a very attractive complement to the reports of the dailies seems indeed unquestionable. Still, as aforementioned, in the films of King Oscar’s funeral the crowds are conspicuously absent. However, at the very end of the
four-minute sequence captured by Pathé, a few individuals in the lower part of the frame turn their faces somewhat curiously towards the camera, much like in the factory films of the company Michell and Kenyon, also from the beginning of the twentieth century, there by contributing to the recognition of the new medium (Bottomore 2004, 34).

**Using Different Kinds of Narrativization: Sensing the Present**

According to Dayan and Katz the “now” evoked in media events is an absolute immediate and simultaneous one, guaranteed by live television broadcasting at the ceremony in question. However, as Puijk (2009, 1–3, 9) claims, even in the heyday of television, many other media outlets contributed to the total experience of a media event. Using the case of Princess Diana, he argues that an analysis of the descriptions of the preceding death and its subsequent events in especially newspapers, is crucial to the understanding of the expectations and sentiments that formed the perception of the funeral broadcasted by television. Whereas Dayan and Katz reserve the term media event to the ceremonial proceedings, Puijk suggests that antecedent and ceremonial events should not be separated.

Especially regarding the media events of the initial decades of the twentieth century, which were largely constructed by the journalists of the daily newspapers, no clear boundary distinguished the coverage of the funeral from the reporting that preceded it. In the case of the death of King Oscar, the three dailies adhered to a similar pattern, commencing with a close coverage of the sickness of the soon to be dead, then followed by the mandatory obituaries, the extensive depiction of the reactions of the event, the information about the planning of the ceremonies, finally reaching the climax of the funeral, which in turn entailed an epilogue about its aftermath. As already been noticed, these elements could be charged with very different emotions and opinions, depending on the political view of the newspaper. Taken together, though perhaps leaving Social-Demokraten aside, the vertical greatness of this attention marked a sharp distinction from the ordinary, everyday news flow, inflicting the impression of a historically exceptional prolonged present.

As the last act of this drama, the reporting on the ceremonies on the day of the funeral followed its own fairly structured narrative pattern. A standard feature in all three dailies was to introduce the main report with a vivid characterization of the weather, making a connection to the sentiment of the day or the personality of the deceased. Whereas Dagens Nyheter acknowledged how “the snow had spread its white grave clothes” over the buildings and streets of Stockholm (DN B ed., December 20, 1907: 1), Svenska Dagbladet enhanced the drama by referring to a “biting snowstorm” that caused intense efforts by hundreds of workers and horses, to clear the public space during the early morning hours. According to the daily, after a while the storm came to rest and there were clear signs of promise of “royal weather” (SvD, December 20, 1907: 6). Typically, Social-Demokraten made an ironic twist of the same observation: “A brilliant Nordic winter day it was, when King Oscar, who generally was lucky with the weather, for the last time was to let his royal splendour shine before the Swedish people” (SocD, December 20, 1907).

According to the general script, the overall stage was further set by way of descriptions of the congregating of people, the blocking of certain public spaces, the diversion of traffic etcetera. The singular items of the programme were then reported in fairly
chronological order, frequently stating the time of occurrence. However, commonly, when introducing a new scene in a different part of the city, either outside or inside a church, time was reversed, and then, again, the previous preparations and congregation of people, the tedious waiting and so on, were registered by the journalists. There are close points of similarity between this journalistic practice and film editing, and although it cannot be proved, it is most likely that the reporting of big media events required several journalists, each responsible for covering a certain place or share of the ceremonies.

In any case, this method of cross-cutting was employed to create a sense of immediacy or “presencing” to the reporting. A particularly prominent example of this practice was the narrative’s juxtaposition in Dagens Nyheter of, on the one hand, the church ceremony at Riddarholmen, executed and attended by the high ranks of society, and on the other, the ordinary people, faithfully following them from their position at the royal castle. As the actual burial of the Swedish King Oscar II took place, the vast masses of people waiting patiently in the capital’s cold winter identified a seemingly insignificant, yet striking attraction, so the liberal daily tells us. Coinciding with the exact moment of the pounding salutes marking the closure of the act of burial, the flag of the castle, steadily pointing to the northeast, was flung by the fresh wind in almost the opposite direction. According to the newspaper, although perfectly natural in cause, the occurrence became the subject of much debate among the crowd: Had they been witnessing some kind of portent? (DN, December 20, 1907)

Although voiced in a somewhat ironic tone, the peculiar anecdote on the superstitious elements of the crowd, served the purpose of capturing their experience of witnessing a historic, climatic moment. It created the impression of a simultaneity between the ceremony and the experience of the crowd, and as the flag suddenly turned, a melting crescendo. Overall, by constantly keeping their eyes open to the behaviour of the crowd, as well as to individual subjects, the reporters inflicted a dramaturgy in their writing much related to the one Dayan and Katz have identified with the certain script that underpins the category of media events which they define as coronations, also including funeral ceremonies: “Will ritual succeed? Is principal deserving of these sacred symbols? Can reality be kept out?” (Dayan and Katz 1992, 34–37) It stands to reason that, in the beginning of the twentieth century, the only medium that truly could contribute to such an effect, if it was to be accomplished in great haste, was the written text of newspapers.

**Conclusion**

Although, in the Dayan and Katz tradition, the process of making history is part of the very core of the concept of media events, the discussions of what history means in this connection, have been conspicuously absent. Letting the German historical tradition aside, which partly deals with long-durational occurrences, my aim in this article has been to direct the attention to a very specific type of incidents. These are the ones when history is not written in the rear mirror of subsequent development, but rather at that transformative moment when the historical agents believe that they see it unfold in front of their eyes. In this sense media events are creations by journalists and filmmakers who strongly believe themselves to be first-hand witnesses of the extraordinary and,
compelled by this heightened awareness, partake in the construction of history by the very act of mediating it, thereby embracing the audience in a thickened present.

Although former research has acknowledged the intersection between present and historic time in media events, the appearance of the phenomenon has been claimed to be limited to the unique period of broadcasting (Frosh and Pinchevski 2018, 138). However, as indicated in this study, the conscious efforts of achieving a similar effect were there to be had much further back in media history, although it was rather a matter of many different journalistic practices working together and sometimes blending. Departing from the depictions in three dailies of differing political colours of the public funeral of the Swedish King Oscar II in 1907, I have distinguished the most important of these practices on part of the journalists. First, the endowing of eventfulness through highlighting a/ the attention of media in a broad sense in public space (such as church bells, flags, shop windows etcetera) and b/ the scope of the news flow in itself as well as journalistic presence and different kinds of behaviour. Second, the evoking of the senses of the media audience by the reporters by way of acting as witness ambassadors, using the third person singular, “one”, and the second person plural, “we”, when referring to what could be seen and felt when experiencing the event. Third, emphasising the engagement in society as a whole via mediations of the witnessing public participating on location, thus establishing relations and blurring the lines to the reading audience. And fourth, bringing a sense of immediacy or presencing to the reporting via different kinds of narrativization, such as cross-cutting.

Giving the rather different constructions of the event, from the royalist Svenska Dagbladet, via the more balanced liberal Dagens Nyheter, to the anti-royalist and socialist Social-Demokraten, media events at this earlier stage resembled their counterparts of our digital age of “situated, thickened, centering performances of mediated communication”, reaching across different media outlets and addressing very diverse groups of audiences (Couldry and Hepp 2010: 12). This is not only true in the sense that different forms of media were connected and complemented each other, but also because there was no all-encompassing hegemonic understanding of the basic meaning of the media event, uniting all journalists. From this angle, the highly hegemonic media events of the second half of the twentieth century, made possible by television, only constitute one phase in the history of journalism.

Notes
1. At the beginning of the twentieth century Svenska Dagbladet had an edition of 10–11,000, Dagens Nyheter 20,000 and Social-Demokraten 7,700. Stockholms-Tidningen, with its more national reach, had the highest circulation number, exceeding 100,000. The price was half of Dagens Nyheter’s and Svenska Dagbladet’s, but the content much less deep and developed (Lundström 2001: 27–28). At certain events, though, the circulation could reach new levels. Thus the two editions of Dagens Nyheter at the day of King Oscar’s death, according to the newspaper itself had together reached 84,000 (DN B ed., December 9, 1907: 3; Hadenius 2002: 74).
2. At the end of the nineteenth century, Svenska Dagbladet had begun to categorize the content and for a short while, before adverts started to become a more important source of income, it experimented with a clean front page. Still, it was Dagens Nyheter, that in 1909, took the next step in the improvement of layout and distribution of content (Andersson 1960, 72–75; Hadenius 2002, 77–79).
3. See for instance, the films of the funeral of former Prime Minister Karl Staaff from 1915. Svenska Biografteatern, *Karl Staaffs jordafärd*, 1915, The Royal Library, Stockholm; Pathé, *Karl Staaffs likbegängelse*, 1915, The Royal Library, Stockholm.

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**ORCID**

*Ulrika Holgersson* http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0672-6166

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