TV Sport and Rhetoric

The Mediated Event

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Most television programmes are not easily categorised into one or another television genre. The borderlines between programme formats are often fluid, and categories tend to overlap. For this reason, many articles and treatises on television start out with a definition of the kind of programme or genre to be discussed. The subject of the present article is televised sport. A good share of the texts on this subject do not address the question of what precisely television sport is, or how this particular kind of television programme or genre differs from other kinds of programmes and genres. Perhaps because what television sport is seems as obvious as the question is banal. For, even if one may often be in doubt as to the genre a given programme belongs to, few if any have trouble deciding whether or not they are watching sport. In fact, characteristic of televised sport is the fact that what passes across the screen seems to proceed so "naturally", is so self-evident, that it seldom raises any major questions. Whereas analysts and critics of the medium (and to a lesser extent those who write reviews) frequently discuss the formal language or "grammar" of fictional programmes, the forms of expression of sports programmes are only discussed when something has gone wrong, when something has interfered with the "natural" representation of the event at hand.

The literature on televised sport is not totally devoid of definitions and delimitations, but the vast majority concentrate on the content of the programmes rather than the form of expression. Thus, the area is characterized in terms of content rather than format inasmuch as definitions depart from "sports", and anything and everything on television that deals with sports is tossed into the same bag. In other words: sport programmes are television sport because they are about sport, and not because they have the appearance of sport and have the format of television sport.

We do not mean to reject this traditional definition, but we do intend to proffer an alternative to the genre problematics of television sport with a view to gaining a better understanding of television sport as a phenomenon.

Here we propose a generic delimitation of television sport which takes its prime point of departure in what might be called the nature of (televised) sport as an event (Dayan & Katz 1992). That is to say, a delimitation that relates to sport, both as an object of media intervention, and, secondly, as a media event and television text. Our point of departure is Dayan and Katz' theory of media events: it is in connection with live transmissions of sporting events that one finds the most characteristic features of TV sport, while such transmissions also elicit the greatest degree of fascination – both on the level of reception and in purely aesthetic terms. Ratings around the world are unanimous: live transmissions of sporting events attract by far the largest audiences. They are mainly international contests, e.g., the Olympics, World Cups and European Championships. On the aesthetic level, too, it is these same events which set the standard which other sports programmes emulate, and which national channels' sports departments are judged by.

In extension of the delimitation of sport as a field, we shall also examine the aura of "naturalness" which seems to surround television sport. Or, more precisely: we shall examine the seemingly extreme degree of codification in the semiotic structures of television sport, and the extent to which this codification can be said to involve a specific "rhetoric of TV sport", and what such a rhetoric might consist of.

Efforts to situate television sport in relation to other, more thoroughly described television genres often point out that television sport contains elements from many other television genres and thus occupies a position "somewhere in between". (These exercises may well be a kind of apology for having shown interest in such a low-status subject as sport in many respects still is.) In his book, *Fields of Vision*, Gary Whannel proposes a triangular model of television genres, the points of which are labelled drama, journalism and light entertainment (Whannel 1992:61). He then argues that television sport occupies a position somewhere in the centre of the triangle. That is to say, it contains elements of all three. This, Whannel proposes, is the reason television sport is so popular.

Margaret Morse expresses a similar point of view in her article, "Sport on Television", one of the few decidedly aesthetic approaches to the subject. Among other things, Morse discusses what happens to an American football match when it is televised. Before getting into the process of mediation, she tries to pin down the source of the fascination sport-on-televison exerts. Sport, Morse argues, is special because it occupies a position between news and entertainment:

> Sport thus enjoys some of the privileges of instant-breaking major news stories as well as some of the authenticity of the news. Indeed, sports do make the news shows, after the political reports and before the weather. Thus the position of sport in the television flow raises it, like the news, above genres which specialize in mere entertainment. The aura of scientificity of sport, its news-value, and its perceived realism protect its extraordinary status. (Morse 1983:60)

Despite an aesthetic interest, which is developed in extenso in the rest of the article, Morse's approach to the problem of genre and television sport is largely content-based. Programme format is de-fined in terms of the subject treated and is found to be interesting because it occupies a special position – in relation to news and the weather.[1] This observation is most valid in relation to sports magazines, however.

In her doctoral dissertation on sports journalism, Danish media researcher Kirsten Frandsen (1996) differentiates between two main formats in televised sport: the magazine and "live" transmission. The former category includes sports news, interviews, reportage, and documentary journalism – in short, everything that is not a live transmission. Whether this distinction adequately covers television output of today – with show-like programmes such as the British Gladiators, programmes offering bookmaking odds and advice in "tipping" soccer scores, and, finally, what might tentatively be called "activating" sport programmes, viz., workout programmes, tai chi, etc., where the intent is to get the viewer to participate in one or another form of physical exercise – is open to question. Nonetheless, the distinction between magazines and the live transmission is a handy tool, affording a means by which to sort all the derivative forms away, leaving the central and original form of television sport, which is also the form which has the most well-articulated aesthetic and rhetoric, namely, the live transmission.[2]

In an attempt to develop a new conception of television sport in relation to other genres, we shall try to avoid regarding TV sport as something chiefly defined by its content, where format is treated in the same terms as are commonly applied to newscasts and magazines. Instead, we shall try to specify the aesthetics of television sport and take that aesthetics as our point of departure in defining "television sport". Aside from a latter-day tradition of festive studio decor and more or less glamorous studio hosts and hostesses, accompanied by brassy musical and graphic vignettes, etc., etc., it is essentially an aesthetics of the live transmission. Consider the model below.

Figure 1.

News	Sports news	Other news
Events	Sporting events	Other events

Figure 1 shows the rationale behind a content-based definition of the genre. The most salient distinction is that between sport and non-sport, indicated on the vertical axis. It is, however, the horizontal distinction which interests us here: a distinction in which the definitive criteria are a specific form and aesthetics of production: the live transmission. In this sense, the "horizontal" genre definition takes its starting point in the characteristic features of the programme; it is media-specific and operates in terms of the aesthetics of the medium. The point is this: even if the live sports transmission might easily be defined in terms of its content and lined up along other representations of TV sport, on an aesthetic level it bears greater resemblance to other live transmissions that do not necessarily have anything to do with sport.

The live transmission is the form of television that is most characteristic of the medium, mainly because it capitalizes on what the other major visual medium, film, cannot: simultaneity. In his book, The Open Work, Umberto Eco discusses the possibility of defining a televison-specific aesthetics – or poetics, as he puts it. In Eco's view, the starting point for such a discussion should be the live transmission:

> The aspect that would seem most interesting and fruitful to our research is also its most characteristic, unique to the medium: namely, live broadcasts. (Eco 1989:107)

Transmissions of sporting events are generally simultaneous with the represented events themselves. And, as everyone knows, a central aspect of televised sporting events is the suspense of not knowing the outcome of the contest; here the coincidence in time between the event and the media event is crucial.[3] The reason simultaneity is so important is that televised sport, more than anything else, is a representation of a sporting event. In the following we shall examine the transformation (Whannel 1992) which takes place in the mediation of events. Our point of departure, however, is that in relation to media events television primarily (but not exclusively) serves as the "channel" – in Jakobson's sense of the term – which makes communication possible. The event takes place first outside the medium, then in the medium – a circumstance which to a considerable degree dictates how the medium forms the event. Eco:

> ... a TV narrative represents autonomous events which, though they can be approached from dif-ferent angles, have a logic of their own that demands to be respected. (Eco 1989:110)

> ...a kind of narration which, despite an appearance of causality and coherence, relies primarily on the mere sequence of events, and in which the narrative, even though it might have a thread, is constantly spilling beyond its margins, into the inessential, the tangential, the gloss, where for a long time nothing may happen, and the camera remains focused on the curve of a road waiting for the sudden appearance of the first runner, or, weary, wanders to the façades of the surrounding houses or the expectant faces of the spectators, for no other reason than that this is the way things go, and there is nothing else to do but wait. (Eco 1989:116)

Thus, television is dependent on the event that it transmits. The medium is not in control; rather, the event lives a life of its own, largely independent of the medium's intervention. Given the importance of live sports transmissions in relation to other sport programmes on television, one would expect the form to have been the subject of frequent analysis. Surprisingly, this is not the case. One reason for the relative lack of such studies is the degree of "naturalness" or "self-evidence" associated with sports transmissioons: What is there to analyze? TV only shows what is going on. It is primarily a question of representation, and no amount of camera effects and graphic design can change the basic factors which make up the focus of interest: Who will be the winner? If nothing happens, there is nothing to show.

> What cameras can never do, of course, is legislate for drama that is not there. If a match is tedious, or a race is all but won with fifteen laps to go, even the most sophisticated camera work cannot install drama where none exists. (Barnett 1990:156)

We shall return to some of the factors which distinguish the mediated sporting event from the actual event, for, even if television is dependent on the chain of events as they develop, it would be naive to assume that television has no alternative but to "wait and see". The event and the media event do not coincide totally, they are not identical. But first, let us consider the points of similarity between the two, which are regarded as the distinguishing characteristic of live sports transmissions as a genre. It is this similarity which is indicated on the horizontal axis in Figure 1, and in the following, we shall

base our discussion on Dayan and Katz' definition and discussion of media events.

The Media Event

> If festive viewing is to ordinary viewing what holidays are to everyday, these events are the high holidays of mass communication. (Dayan & Katz 1992:1)

In Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History, Dayan and Katz (1992) specify the definition of a media event in terms of a series of criteria regarding conditions that must be present in the event itself. In the first place, a media event is never routine; it breaks the routine and "preempts" the ordinary programme tableau; the biggest media events are those which occupy all channels simultaneously. By appropriating the programme tableau, the medium accords the event importance and underlines its character of event. Secondly, the event is transmitted "live" and takes place in remote locations (Dayan & Katz 1992:5); the event occurs, furthermore, independent of the media organization. Finally, in contrast to a news event, the media event is planned in advance. It is this combination of live and distant and exceptional but planned which Dayan and Katz consider the prime features of the media event as an independent genre.

In the early days of television the entire programme schedule (brief as it was) was a media event – an event about the medium itself. Programme scheduling was fluid; there was no formal tableau to be changed or preempted, only a series of programmes.[4] There has to be a fixed programme tableau for there to be any meaning in the concept of media event. The weekly British soccer match Saturday afternoons on Danish television has been a feature of the programme tableau for the past 25 years; it is not a media event. On the contrary, it is part of the programme tableau which can be preempted by an event.[5] *Tips-Lørdag* the Danish equivalent of the British Grandstand, is a 4- to 5-hour sport programme, typically with a soccer match or the like as its main feature. In November 1995, it was preempted by a live transmission of HRH Prince Joachim's wedding.

It is, of course, not always easy to determine when a programme is part of the programme tableau. Over the past few years, it has become a tradition for Danish TV2 (corresponding to British ITV) and many other European television channels to carry long transmissions from the Tour de France bicycle race three weeks in July, and we know already that we will be seeing a 14-day transmission from Sydney in the late summer of the year 2000. The typical event must therefore be singular or unique, a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence. The degree of an event's "event-ness" will decline in direct proportion to the frequency of its occurrence. The borderline between event and non-event is not precise, but the circumstance that an event, unexpectedly delayed for some reason, will preempt programmes later in the schedule constitutes a sure criterion. If delayed, say, one hour, the tipping report would not be transmitted, whereas a national team soccer contest would be, no matter when it finally got under way.[6]

That the event is planned in advance is another characteristic feature. "Planning" should be understood as being known in advance to occur at a given time and place, not as being regularly scheduled. This, too, is a definitive criterion that excludes a number of similar types of programmes. "Special bulletins" and coverage of major accidents, etc., which break into the normal flow of programmes, concern events which were not planned in advance or foreseen. They are generally news-related.[7] As in the case of preemption, there is no firm definition of the degree of planning and how far in advance the event must be known.

A media event is always "live", and it is this directness which gives it the quality of something happening "here and now", plus a sense that "anything can happen". Thus, directness lends the situation an element of suspense. This feature is the media event's most palpable characteristic, and indeed, it is hard to find examples of media events which are not transmitted live.[8] In the case of deliberately delayed transmissions, the programme will not fulfill the preemption criterion. In such cases we have an event which is not considered important enough to break the programme tableau for.

Finally, there is the criterion of "remote location". In Dayan and Katz' simplified model, a programme can originate in one of two places: in a studio or outside one. The medium has to go to the event, which takes place elsewhere – otherwise, it is not a media event. This criiterion is closely related to the secondary differentiaton into three levels of events, which Dayan and Katz operate with.

They distinguish three levels of actors: organizers, broadcasters, and spectators. The organizer is responsible for the event in reality, that is, whether it receives media coverage or not. The broadcaster (producer) is the actor who arranges the transmission of the event, which occurs apart from the transmission. In the terminology of traditional com-

munication theory this actor corresponds to the sender or media sender. Audiences (viewers, spectators) are the actors who receive the transmission, in whose eyes it is an event. On this level it is important to conceive of the three actors as being distinctly separate or independent, and as interacting via a "process of negotiation" (Dayan & Katz 1992:55).[9] Cases where the organizer is also the producer are, by definition, not media events.

In many respects, this trichotomy corresponds to the trichotomy, reality, text and reception. As in all textual relationships, a transformation occurs between reality and the text, viz., encoding, and another occurs between the text and reception, viz., decoding. In the present article primarily the former transformation will be examined, with a view to gaining text-based insights into the process of decoding. In other words, our focus rests on how the real-world sports event is interpreted by the producer and then presented as a textual representation to the viewer.

Before considering the level of the producer, let us first briefly orient ourselves concerning the levels of the organizers and the viewers, respectively.

The Level of the Organizer

Before looking at the media sports event in greater detail, we should consider certain aspects of the (real) sports event, i.e., the sport itself. Every sport has its own set of rules; these may be said to provide the script for the event in question. The rules say which person(s) will play, where the event will take place (locus), and when, or in what time frame, it shall take place (time). Thus, the rules provide a synopsis or storyboard which is then filled with concrete spatio-temporal phenomena and actors. The storyboard is the framework in which the event takes place; it is a temporally and/or spatially inviolable framework: the locus of the sport is artificially, but definitely limited. Any transgression of the rules which apply within this framework is penalized. If, for example, a soccer player takes the ball over the sideline, he or she forfeits control of the ball.

Needless to say, a match involves any number of scripts. Some derive from cultural myths; others derive from the manifold character of the sport itself. Here we have no ambition to characterize various sports; let it suffice to say that a three-week bicycle race differs considerably from the execution of a five-minute figure skating programme. This "phenomenology of sports" frequently figures in discussions of what sports make "good television"

and what sports do not lend themselves to the medium.

Meanwhile, there is also a sociological aspect. Various organizations, committees, leagues, etc., organize the sport and arrange the events. Tournaments and cup contests are the archetypical forms on this level. On the one hand we have forms in which the various events are essentially of equal status (e.g., golf tournaments, league matches); on the other, structures in which the events form definite hierarchies, culminating in a championship or "cup final" (e.g., elimination tournaments like Wimbledon or the World Cup).

Thus, already on the phenomenological plane we find a range of semi-textual and narrative entities, which on this level in the concrete execution supplies the sporting event with a discursive determination of the actors in the context of a spatio-temporal framework.

The Level of the Viewer

On the level of the viewer we have the viewer, obviously, but also some to extent the spectator, as well. In a study of television aesthetics it is only natural that the viewers be in focus, but the presence of a spectator role on the phenomenological level makes it necessary to examine the two roles more closely. The viewer role is often filled by an individual with knowledge and experience of the spectator role. As a spectator, one can find oneself missing the slow-motion instant replay; as a viewer one can miss the spectator's control of his gaze.[10]

In the process of defining the event in terms of organizational structures we touched on the sociability of sport and that the observer which this quality implies is primarily the spectator, and only secondly the TV viewer. It is not particularly productive to rank-order the two categories like this inasmuch as the number of viewers nearly always outnumbers the number of spectators attending the event. It is commonly assumed that the spectator's access to the event is more authentic than the viewer's, and it is also typical that the idea of having "been there" is a hallowed emblem of the sports audience.

The Level of the Producer
– the Rhetoric of the Sporting Event

As we have seen in the foregoing, using Dayan and Katz' typologi of the media event one can conceive of it as consisting of three levels: the organizer, the producer/sender and the viewer. This trichotomy

corresponds in a number of ways with a conventional model of verbal utterances, viz. Someone$_1$ tells Something to Someone$_2$. The producer (someone$_1$) relates an event (something) to the viewer (someone$_2$). At the same time, it is quite clear that the event-as-told is not identical with the event-as-it-happens. We are dealing with two levels or perspectives here, a textual level and a referent level. The latter casts light on how what is told relates to the occurrence related; the former how the message related is related to the other person.

Figure 2 shows the processes of transformation that take place in connection with a media event, where communicative and cultural levels are differentiated. The model is general, covering all kinds of textual contexts, including those which in concrete textual contexts are to be regarded as derivative forms. Within the fictional register, the sender level will also prevail over the actor level in the event; fictional reality is totally steered by the sender, who creates the text. In the case of non-fiction, sender and actor operate on different levels; indeed, this dual relationship to the factual register is constitutive of non-fiction.

Meanwhile, there is also a metacommunicative level: the various actors know how other actors, as well as the relationships between the various actors, normally work. These relationships are non-textual, but they are cultural. This means, first of all, that the different levels can act on this knowledge and plan their actions accordingly. Actors on the level of the event can either ensure lack of coverage or increase the likelihood of coverage, i.e., textualization of the event by using what they know about the sender and the receiver and their behaviour and preferences. A striking example was the "invasion" of Somalia by U.S. military for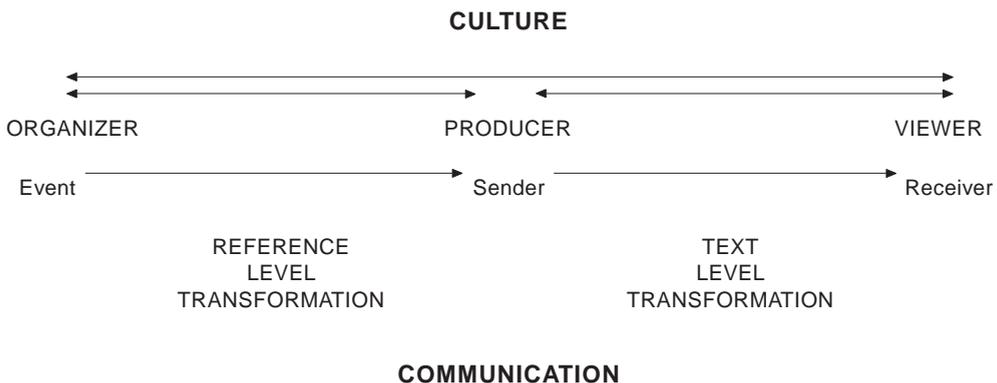ces in 1992. The sender level was commissioned to cover the event "live", and the invasion was scheduled to suit "prime time" on the Atlantic coast of the USA: Within the world of sport there is a recurrent discussion of when matches should be scheduled in order to reach the maximum number of viewers.

Viewers, meanwhile, generally know enough about the circumstances of the event so that they can, if they wish, wait until the climax the last quarter, for example – before tuning in to see the most exciting part. Any number of examples of this metacommunicative or contextual knowledge present themselves, and the implications such knowledge has for the textual level are quite fundamental. However, on the textual level they are, and remain, contextual and in many respects secondary as something which exists, but only materializes in the textual representation. The text is also the focus of our attention here.

The transition from the realm of opportunities associated with the event to the text is simultaneously a transition into the level of discourse; a text is always uttered from a utterance position (the sender) and in this sense becomes the perspective on the open phenomenological event which, through objectifying it, closes the event.

> A TV-transmitted soccer match is such a narrative: It is a discourse, because it – in contrast to the match itself – can be attributed to an utterance subject, to a narrating party (the producer, the collective behind the audiovisual production itself). It is this utterance subject, who creates the match. The discourse is closed, inasmuch as every televised soccer match has a beginning and an end (and a middle, I am tempted to add – hommage à Artistotle). (Schantz Lauridsen 1986:27, author's translation)

Figure 2.

CULTURE

ORGANIZER	PRODUCER	VIEWER
Event	Sender	Receiver

REFERENCE LEVEL TRANSFORMATION   TEXT LEVEL TRANSFORMATION

COMMUNICATION

The text specifies the discursive entities, I-HERE-NOW, or, more generally, a perspective, a place, a time, which together organize the closure of the event, which defines a textual process in a finite space. Every textual presentation is subject to this discursive logic, this verbal Origo[11], and, through its textualization, sets out a set of entities. At the same time, the discursive utterance positions the receiver in relation to the event. We must therefore operate with three sets of Origo entities:

Thus, the text – quite in keeping with the model, Someone says Something to Someone – sets out three discursive levels, each of which consists of three logical relationships. The figure shows one of many possible configurations of them; the time is constant here, but could as well be a variable.

Returning for a moment to Dayan and Katz' definition of the media event and the four definitive criteria: planned, preemptive, distant and "live", we find that these two pairs of relationships correspond well with the two levels indicated in Figure 2. The qualities of being planned and preemptive have to do with the overall contextual relationships, where the three actor-levels know about the event in advance and are familiar with normal scheduling, which can be set aside. The qualities "live" and distant, on the other hand, have to do with the textual representation.

The media event represents a concrete case of there-here-there and now-now-now. In the following we shall take a closer look at how these relationships are concretely expressed in the transmissions, but first we should consider another important communicative element.

As we see in Figure 3, the actual perspective is situated as a distinction between different perspectives. We may assume that the sporting event is ever trying to offer opportunities for identification on this level, and, furthermore, that sport is a very suitable framework for sympathies and antipathies, which on the textual level means that there is a constant rhetorical effort to link perspectives of the three levels together through the utterance of a transcendent "WE". It is this level which means that events are related through a fundamentally actantial identification of villains and heroes, winners and losers. And it is on this level, too, that the producer stands between an essentially communicative inhibition and a narrative necessity. It is these narrative scenarios which are in focus in the following.

Four Levels of Meaning in the TV Sport Text

The television sport text may be divided into two main categories: picture and sound. Each of these in turn may be divided into two levels: in the case of picture, photographic image and graphics, and in the case of sound, wild sound and commentary. An early treatment is Edward Buscombe's now classic mongraph, *Football on Television* (Buscombe 1975), which consists of structuralistic essays on various aspects of BBCs and ITVs coverage of the Soccer World Cup in West Germany in 1974. The Danish literature offers scattered analyses, particularly of the visual aspect of televised sports, all of which are indebted to Buscombe. Among these contributions, Palle Schantz Lauridsen's "A Football Narrative", an analysis of DR TVs coverage of the World Cup contests of 1986, is seminal.[12] In the article, Schantz Lauridsen describes how a soccer match is narrativized through ritualized sequences of shots, which are repeated in certain situations throughout the match, thereby forging the contest into a narrative whole. The article focuses exclu-

Figure 3.

	Perspective	Space	Time
Event	they	there	now
Sender	I	here	now
Receiver	you	there	now
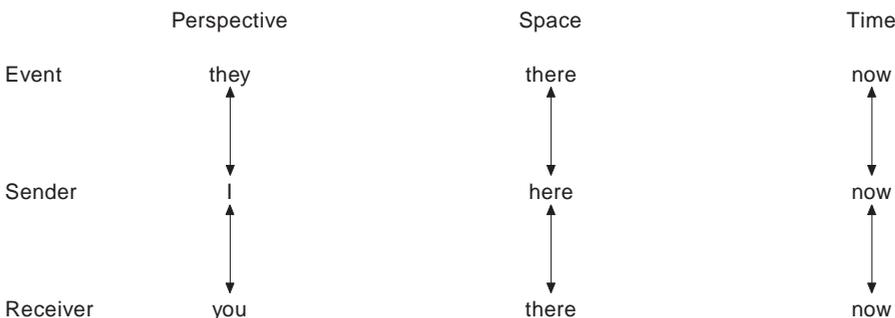
sively on the sequence of shots that occurs when teams score, but the author also notes that similar "rituals" may accompany throws-in and corners (Schantz Lauridsen 1986:49). Analyses of individual transmissions will not be considered here; instead, we shall treat the subject more generally, describing the four levels of meaning in the texts of televised sport in relation to the factors specified in Figure 3; perspective, space and time.

The Image and Perspective

A television transmission requires one or more cameras. Even if modern television transmissions nearly always use more than one camera, the viewer can orient him/herself in the space of the sporting event thanks to the fact that the primary camera maintains (what has become) a codified position which does not alter during the event. This position, which may be regarded as the primary position of the sports transmission, is the point of view which becomes established as the viewer's point of view, and it is returned to time and again throughout the transmission. It is the normal position, the point of departure or the basic point of view. According to the conventions of the genre, the primary position coincides with the best seats in the stadium.[13] This rule is especially applicable to most televised sport in Europe and other countries outside the USA.[14] Thus, a firm point of view is established at the start, but it is a point of view from which one departs and then returns. One of the most common observations regarding perspective and televised sports versus non-mediated sports is that the many cameras in the former case provide a broader and more comprehensive perspective than is available to the real-life spectator. This is partly true, but the opposite may be argued, as well. For even if the many cameras from many angles, plus their ability to zoom in and zoom out, to be very close and very distant and all points in between, give the viewer an omnipotence which is specific to the media sports event, it is nonetheless a chosen position, one of many possible at any given moment.

> The live spectator will be free to move, to turn the head, to absorb many different pictures, sounds and smells simultaneously, and will therefore stay master of his or her own interpretation. (Barnett 1990:155)

The placement of the cameras and, thus, the chosen perspectives define and delimit the space of the tele-vised sports event. Whereas the use of zoom-lens close-ups gives the viewer an illusion of "here" (cf. Figure 3), the at once comprehensive and delimited overall images of the transmission are a deixist reference to "there", i.e., to the locus of the sporting event. A place which the cameras have made accessible to the viewer.

Television transmissions of soccer matches have evolved considerably since 1986 and 1974 when Schants Lauridsen and Buscombe, respectively, described them. On the visual front, the greatest change is due to a tremendous increase in the number of cameras used to cover matches. When German ZDF transmitted the World Cup tournament in 1974, they used five cameras per match (Buscombe 1975:50). Twelve years later, in Mexico, eleven cameras were used in the most important contests. Today, eleven cameras is standard procedure, and if a match is of extraordinary importance, up to twenty cameras may be used. RAI used 16 to 18 cameras per match from the quarter-finals on in the World Cup tournament in Italy in 1990 (Seifart 1990:86).

The Tense of Visual Images

The time frame is the same in all three levels in Figure 3. But time is also a dimension on which direct sports transmissions differ from other direct transmissions, such as openings of Parliament, royal weddings and jubilees. Running time and real time coincide in all live transmissions; in the cases mentioned there is a 1:1 relationship between telling time and told time. Live transmissions of sporting events differ in that the running time is regularly interrupted with brief pockets of suspended time. Most such pockets are filled with play-backs ("action replays") or slow-motion repeats of the play just completed, etc. Episodes which the producer deems more or less crucial.

In his article, "Chance and Plot", Umberto Eco (1989) likens what happens in the producer's televised text to jazz improvisations; he conceives of the production of the televised text as an instantaneous piecing together of information within the framework of knowledge of previous texts of the same kind, television texts which make use of the same code. The amount of raw information in a soccer transmission is tremendous: images from as many as twenty cameras, wild sound from from about ten microphones, the words of the commentators (one or two in most cases), and various kinds of graphics at the producer's disposal.

Filming, editing, and broadcasting, three phases that in cinema remain perfectly separate and distinct, are here fused into one – a fact which certainly warrants the identification of real time with televisual time, since no form of narration can condense the autonomous duration of the represented event. (Eco 1989:107)

In addition to giving the producer a "second chance" in case he/she has missed something important in the running account, the "pockets of time" have the more significant function of punctuating the account, preserving and embellishing crucial junctures. These unpredictable moments, their preservation through the "instant replay", and the almost erotic – at once intimate and analytical – aesthetics which characterizes them make up one of the prime characteristics of the live sports transmission. It is an aesthetics which reflects a desire to make the most of the highlights, the most exciting moments of the match. The aesthetics of sports journalism is an "aesthetics of the instant", and the endless repetition of the most exciting moments is a visual celebration of both the aesthetics and the moment.[15]

Graphics

The increasing use of computers in modern television production has had a palpable influence on live sport transmissions, particularly on the graphics used in them. Graphics are primarily used for two purposes: to package and present the transmission, and to provide various kinds of information during the course of the event being covered. Here, we shall concern ourselves with the latter.

Computers are mainly used to collect, store and process data and information, and they give broadcasters access to much more information than they might have otherwise. It is both information that producers may have had access to earlier, albeit less readily – the names of players, officials, coaches and managers, playing time, and the score – and information that is available thanks to the computer alone. This is information which, typically, is of a more analytical nature and which is the result of "collaboration" between camera and computer. It is, for example, information about the distance between the ball and, say, a defensive "wall". The computer analyzes the data registered by the camera and, on the basis of that data, calculates the distance and a graphic representation of the play at hand. Other examples include graphic representations of the configuration of players over the field

and the use of paintbox (to analyze key plays in retrospect).

Other computer-aided information includes the age, weight and "track record" of individual players, the number of warnings (yellow cards) received, and so forth. It is all presented visually and not, as earlier, by the commentator. Characteristically, information once provided by the commentator now originates with the producer – superimposed over the picture of the field, the ball and the players. As the source – or sender of the concrete graphical image – increasingly often is the producer or other person on a higher level of utterance than the commentator, the authoritativeness of the information provided in the graphics is greater than that of what the commentator says. (More on this point in the section on the commentator, below.) This leads to situations in which the commentator speaks on the basis of the graphics, i.e., orients himself to them, rather than having the graphics illustrate what he says. There are quite practical reasons for this: major international events involve far more commentators than there are producers, and each covers the event in his own language to his respective audience. In most cases, the pictures (and thereby the production) are supplied by a team from a broadcasting company in the country where the event takes place. (Consequently, it occurs that viewers can hear a commentator complain that the producer has not supplied the "right" pictures, but hardly ever when producer and commentator come from the same country (read: broadcasting organization.)

In addition to descriptive and analytical information relating to the event, graphics may also be used to identify the station producing the pictures, i.e., the station which owns the rights to transmit the event. Here we have the logotype of the company, commonly placed in a corner of the screen, but in the case of televised sport also different kinds of station identification worked into the informational graphics; the station and (often) the manufacturer of the computer program, the time-taking device, etc., used in the production may be integrated into the presentation of the commentators, information about players entering and leaving the contest, the remaining minutes of play, match statistics, and so forth. Or in the graphics which more and more frequently accompany the instant replay: the blinking "R" of yesteryear is increasingly replaced by three-dimensional, framed images, where the station's name and logotype and identifying typography is included in the frame. This visual effect, which represents a new, compu-

ter-animated intermediate form between graphics and picture has a corresponding hybrid on the sound front, as well: a whistling or "swooshing" sound that accompanies the "photo-graphics". The sound mimics the movement of the framed picture as it sweeps onto the screen and signals a jump (back) in time.

"Wild Sound"

Television productions normally involve three kinds of sound: "wild sound", speech and music. In the present context, we may largely ignore the latter category, inasmuch as the only music present in televised sporting events occurs as wild sound, music as heard in the arena or room of the event. In the case of soccer matches, for example, music is most prominent in the case of contests between national teams (albeit an increasing number of clubs have anthems of their own, which are played when the players take the field and perhaps after the match when the "home team" has won). In sports like gymnastics, where rhythmic music plays a key role, significantly, the music viewers hear in their loudspeakers is nearly always acoustic sound from the venue of the event, i.e., wild sound, rather than background or "mood" music.[16]

"Music as heard in the room of the event" has an ambient, spatial quality which signals that it has been "collected" by a microphone on the scene. One might say that in addition to the music, we hear the room itself – consider, for example, the characteristic acoustics of a handball court or gymnastics hall. In this sense, wild sound is the sound of the event itself; it is not a parallel tape or CD recording of "The Moonlight Sonata" or whatever the gymnast may have chosen to perform to. That the output, in purely technical terms, may be (and usually is) the result of mixing the uptake of several microphones in the room is irrelevant; the point is that the sound viewers hear sounds like the sound which spectators who are physically present in the room are experiencing (even though it in fact is a mix of sounds from different sources in the room). Wild sound includes the voices, breathing, puffing and groans of the players; they, too, are experienced by viewer and spectator alike.

It is important that we hear sounds from the venue of the event; it is, we will recall, a definitive characteristic of the media event. The ambient, spatial and, in some senses, less-than-perfect wild sound is a sign that the sender/producer level does not control the actor level. Consequently, viewers

experience the televised event as an event that has a life of its own, above and beyond the intervention of the medium. One might say that wild sound is the fingerprint of the event on the media event, or a stamp of authenticity. The distinction between the sender and the actor which the sound of the television text marks thus forms a part in the aesthetics of realism in which television wraps the event.

Commentary – Speaking to the Picture

Of the four levels of meaning, the picture is paramount; the primary information is carried in the picture. Be that as it may, the commentator's speech is a prime characteristic of televised sport, and sport commentary is one of the most-studied features of televised sport in the rather scanty literature on the subject. The analyses to date have mainly concentrated on the commentary divorced from the pictures; interest has mostly revolved around what is said without any particular relation to the accompanying visuals, let alone how words and pictures might interact.

(Not infrequently, the purpose of the analysis is to reveal one or another kind of "chauvinism": considering the sparseness of the literature, one finds surprisingly many examples of commentators talking about "exotic foreigners", "good-looking handball-lasses", and so on.) Here, however, we are interested in the interaction between the commentary and other levels.

The role of commentary in the case of televised sport is special inasmuch as the interaction of sound and picture in sports transmissions is quite different from that in newscasts, for example. In the latter case, the greater share of the information is imparted via the speaker, and the visuals serve as illustrations.[17] The newscaster/reporter is a speaker – one who speaks – and not a commentator, i.e., someone who talks about something which we, too, can see. The TV sports commentator mainly plays a verifying, clarifying and corroborating role. He speaks to the pictures and generally speaks about something we can see. Consequently, the role differs from that of the news anchor, who talks about things we do not know, what is more, things that often either have not been or cannot be visualized.

The function of the commentator is four-fold; he/she speaks about

a) things viewers can see: "...Number Ten, Michael Laudrup enters the field..."

b) things they may not necessarily be able to see: "...all three substitutes are now warming up..."

c) things they may or may not know: "...Thirty-year-old Peter Schmeichel, who hails from..."

d) things they cannot know: "Michael Laudrup warmed up before the match, but is not in the starting line-up."

It is in the first case, a), that the commentary has the most corroborating function. In the second case, b), the commentary may be corroborating, or it may be diverting. If the commentary arises out of something the commentator alone can see, thanks to his physical presence at the scene, in the room of the event, it is diverting; if, on the other hand, it refers to something visible on the screen, something viewers, too, can see, it is corroborating. Thus, the nature of the function depends on whether the commentary has its origin in the event or the media event. In the third case, the commentary is diverting since we cannot see on the screen that Peter Schmeichel is thirty years old, or what club he hails from. Even here, however, the commentary bears a fairly close relation to the picture inasmuch as such comments usually are made when the player in question is on camera. This may also be true in the fourth case, d), but such information is more likely to be offered when the referent is not on camera (the example above might be elicited by a reflection on what Laudrup might have done in the situation at hand, had he been in the game). The comment contains an implicit desire to change the referent's absence into presence. Commentary of the fourth kind may, for that matter, be entirely explicit since it need not bear any relation to the game or what appears on the screen: e.g., comments on the behaviour of the crowd before the match, or "insider" gossip about purchases, sales and firings.

As we proceed from a) to d), we note a gradual tendency away from the corroborating function. At the same time, we experience an increasing freedom from the requirement of simultaneity between picture and commentary. This has to do with the nature of the game itself. The primary object is the ball. The commentary follows the ball, not the players, because the commentary follows the camera (the picture is paramount), and the camera follows the ball. The symbiosis between ball and camera remains unbroken as long as the ball is in play. As soon as the whistle sounds and a pause ensues, the focus can shift, and the focus of the commentary generally shifts from the ball to the players.[18]

In addition to the corroborating and diverting functions, sports commentary is also instrumental in channeling and conveying symapthies and antipathies. Commentators are supposed to be non-partisan, but they seldom are. In transmissions from domestic (national) matches, where two athletes or teams from the same country oppose one another, a commentator's impartiality/fairness to both can be a source of considerable irritation to viewers. The opposite holds, however, in international contests or if one of the teams has the same nationality as the commentator and his audience. When players in one way or another are the extended or vicarious agents of a national audience, that is, their actions and feats are metonyms for an ideal or sense of community, the commentator's role will essentially be to mediate a transcendental "we" (Fig. 3). His very use of the word, "we", reduces the distance between the viewer and himself and, by virtue of his position on the sidelines of the field, to the players. The players, who were originally the objects of the viewers' sympathy are rendered, so to speak, identical with the viewers, so that sympathy no longer flows only from the viewer or commentator toward the players, but from the commentator toward the viewers, as well.

The Partner

Whereas it once was uncommon for a match to be covered by more than one commentator, today it is rather the rule than the exception. Naturally, the two commentators do not talk about the same things. The commentator is the one who corroborates, who reinforces the events; his role is to impart the sense of immediacy, simultaneity, and he has the right to speak in the present tense the very moment events transpire. The co-commentator or "partner", on the other hand, has to wait until there is a pause or a lull in the match. Just as the studio host or hostess gives the floor to the commentator, the commentator gives the floor to his partner, either by asking him his opinion or simply by stopping to give him a chance to speak. Should, however, something unexpected or exciting happen, the commentator has both the right and a duty to break in and take over, since both cannot speak at once. The here and now is the province of the commentator.[19] Thus, the commentator is the one who corroborates the events in real time, whereas the partner mostly does this in connection with replays, whereby he also contributes to an auditive embellishment of the moments which have been deemed

worth repeating. The partner may, however, contribute diverting comments at will, but only when the commentator has given him the floor. Nor is the partner allowed to let himself get carried away.

The partner is (nearly) always a retired star player. This lends him credibility, especially when he talks about behind-the-scenes happenings. Since his function is primarily diverting, he needs to know things we (and the commentator) do not know. The information can be of many different kinds, but basically falls into one of two categories: tactical information and insider information. The tactical information is analytical in relation to the match at hand, yet diverting: it does not relate to what is shown in the picture, but to the background. Insider information does not necessarily relate to what is on the screen or to the background. It may consist of gossip which the partner has picked up thanks to his privileged status as ex-star; belonging to the inner circle, he is privy to information. But the partner may also contribute simple fillers - anecdotes and references to his own career, which besides helping to maintain the aura and mythology that surrounds the sport, serves a vital function: filling the time in lulls in the game.

The partner is an important figure in that he, regardless of what takes place on the field, can always contribute something of interest to the televised event. And this something is totally independent of the real event. Thus, the partner helps differentiate the media event from the event itself in that he is part of the system which means that a dull sporting event need not necessarily be a dull media event.

The Commentator's Perspective

The commentator is located not in the "there" of the event, but in his capacity of on-the-scene reporter, he establishes his own "here", which coincides with the "here" of the event, but different from the "here" of the sender.[20] The "here" of the sender is the studio or the medium, from which the commentator heas ventured to cover the event.[21]

The producer and the camera crews have been sent to the scene, as well, but they lack significance in this context; in fact, an effort is made to ignore their presence and to reduce the results of their efforts to a "given", to something "natural". The commentator is "our man on the spot" par excellence, and typically we only hear mention of the producer and crew when something goes wrong and prevents us (and the commentator) from seeing what we want to see. Often, all these co-workers are reduced to "the hardware" which underlines that it is the privilege of the viewer and his ally, the commentator, to interpret the event – not the cameraman, engineers, etc., whose job it is merely to bring the pictures to us.

One of the purposes of the rhetoric of the transmission is, to the extent possible, to make the "here" of the event and the "here" of the viewer coincide. At the same time, it should be clear that the sender/ station's normal "here" is not the place where he, for the sake of the event, is stationed. This last point is of importance in establishing the autonomy of the event, that it would have taken place (in the same way) regardless of whether television had shown an interest or not. Interestingly, however, in relation to Dayan and Katz' criterion, that the event generally take place outside the studio in remote locations (Dayan & Katz 1992:5), the sporting event establishes an intermediate position inasmuch as not infrequently, not only does the commentator, but the entire studio, with studio hosts/hostesses, guests, and so forth, move out to the venue of the event.

Concluding Remarks

In this article we have proposed a genre approach to televised sport with a focus on form, rather than content. We have found televised sport to share certain characteristics with other kinds of television which – applying Dayan and Katz' definition – may be called media events. The concept of the media event represents a point of departure for the study of how television sport on an aesthetic level transforms the sporting event from an event into a media event.

We have shown that the sports transmission is the result of a transformation which takes place in both sound and picture components. The aesthetics of televised sporting events draws to some extent on the aesthetics of the sporting event, an aesthetics of realism, so that the sports transmission has an aura of "naturalness". But the aesthetics of the televised sporting event is equally an aesthetics of the instant, and a characteristic feature of that aesthetics is a tendency to try to preserve and embellish the decisive moments in the event. This is done on multiple levels: in the narrative, through repetition of the moments in question; visually, for example, through the graphic framing and enactment of the repetition and the graphically designed analysis of the moments; auditively (and narratively), through a doubling of the commentator function with the addition of a co-commentator or "partner".

The commentator function is, furthermore, crucial to the striving of the media event to establish a transcendental "we", which is a key to understanding the rhetoric of major national televised sporting events. This "we" comes into play in establishing/ imparting the antipathies and sympathies which arise in connection with international contests, while it also shortens the distance between the viewer, the mediator (here: the commentator), and the actors. It may be conceived of as a verbal analogy to the camera's intimate study of the event and its actors – particularly in the most intense moments, but it also extends beyond these individual moments, and even events, to be a model for the entire medium in its approach to major national sporting events.

Notes

1. Much of Morse's article is devoted to identifying certain aesthetic characteristics of television sport, and in the course of that pursuit she does indeed move beyond the content-related approach signalled in her more general introduction.

2. This article, parts of which were presented in a working group at the 13th conference of the Nordic Association of Mass Communication Research in Jyväskylä, Finland, in August 1997, is written with mainly soccer in mind. The more general observations in the beginning of the article apply to all kinds of sports, and even the more concrete examples in the latter part of the article may be more or less readily transposed to other kinds of sports (see further note 14).
   The first "live" images of a soccer match – England vs. Scotland – were transmitted 9 April 1938. Thus, the tradition of live transmissions is virtually as old as the medium itself.

3. Thus, in a sense, the simultaneity of the representation points toward the future, which is unknown to everyone – the producer, the players, as well as the spectators – an uncertainty which applies to both the event and the media event. Not knowing the outcome is the key to the programmes' fascination, an important aspect in the phenomenology of sport as well as of the aesthetics of televised sport. Nonetheless, the aesthetic expression of delayed transmissions is often identical with the truly "live" transmission – perhaps in order to maintain the illusion of simultaneity. Only in the case of sport news and "wrap-ups" is the aesthetic expression remarkably different.

4. Paddy Scannell (1995) describes fixed programme scheduling as a key to why television is perceived to have the character of "routine" or "everyday". Viewers have to know when and what they can expect to see on television so they can get excited about it! Media events require, quite dialectically, the everyday, the routine in order to be the "holiday" Dayan and Katz conceive them to be.

5. Even though the weekly soccer match in itself is not a media event, in an attempt to resemble a "real" event as much as possible, it borrows much of the aesthetic praxis of major TV sports events. Thus, on a purely aesthetic level most of the characteristics of television events are transferred over to weekly/daily non-events. The aesthetics is applied on the rhetorical plane so as to convince the viewer that this weekly event – on the rhetorical plane at least – is equivalent to an exclusive media event.

6. It is common knowledge that channels are commonly besieged by irate viewers when events unexpectedly preempt other programmes. Viewers are angry, for example, when a sports transmission is broken off in the middle of a key play, and parents are angry because a women's handball match has preempted a children's programme.

7. Dayan and Katz offer an illustrative example of the distinction: "Thus, we are interested in the Kennedy funeral – a great ceremonial event – and not the Kennedy assassination – a great news event" (Dayan & Katz 1992:9)

8. When we say "live" or "direct" here, we ignore the physical delay inherent in the transmission itself. The moon landing was a direct transmission, even if it took six minutes for the signal to reach Earth; similarly, live interviews are direct, even if we hear a slight delay in the voice transmission.

9. In the real world (of sport) they are not actually distinctly separate. Due to the sums of money involved, particularly money deriving from the sale of distribution rights, the sender (broadcaster) has more and more say in the organization of the event itself, i.e., more influence over the organizer.

10. In addition to experience of being a spectator, many viewers also have experience of being players. This is particularly true with respect to the most popular sports, ball sports, cycling, etc., and may contribute to the great popularity these sports enjoy.

11. The concept of the linguistic Origo originates with Karl Bühler (1934/1965). Bühler's linguistic model is most widely known through Jakobson's (1967, (1960)) model of the text, in which Jakobson's three fundamental functions reproduce the Origo concept.

12. Other Danish contributions include Henrik Jagd and Benny Warning's "TV Soccer and Nationalism" ("Tv-fodbold og nationalisme") and Mogens Schmidt's "The Armchair Stadium" ("Et stadion i stuen?"),

which, besides being first, is also the treatise which contains the deepest reflections on the role of the commentator. Nearly all the Danish literature on mediated sports concerns soccer, and it is characteristic that a peak in the interest in televised soccer may be noted around 1986, when the Danish national soccer team attracted (Danes') attention – to them, and to sports in general. Since then, academic interest in soccer (and other sports) has gradually subsided, and not even the Danish European Championship in 1992 could revive interest among the research community - perhaps because analysts failed to find much of interest on the aesthetic level in the 1992 coverage. Be that as it may, one of the more recent analytic works on sport and television, Kirsten Frandsen's dissertation, *Sports-journalistik* [Sports journalism], is not about men's soccer, but about women's handball. References to "the real world" seem in many ways unavoidable when it comes to sport.

13. As mentioned earlier, soccer is the focal sport in this article. Most observations are applicable to other stadium sports, i.e., sports which take place in a confined space and which involve one or more objects or players operating in a well-defined arena. Such sports include most ball games, boxing, swimming and so forth. Other conditions apply in the case of sports which are less spatially confined: bicycle races, cross-country races, etc. In order to achieve satisfactory coverage of such events, the camera must be mobile in order to follow the object, and several cameras will be necessary inasmuch as several objects are of interest, and the objects are often relatively far apart. Cf. the individual starting points in Tour de France.

14. Writing with reference to Edward Buscombe's *Football on Television*, Margaret Morse (1983) makes this observation in a comparison of English and American football. English coverage, she notes, expresses a basic agenda-setting desire to report, to represent the event at hand, whereas American coverage evidences a desire to entertain.

15. We borrow the concept, "aesthetics of the instant" from Jørgen Stigel, who, in *The Aesthetics of Television, the Quality of Television*, deems it to be one of the most characteristic features and qualitites of the medium (Stigel 1997:7).

16. In the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, non-ambient music was added to slow-motion reviews of episodes from cross-country skiing races. This was – and remains – an exception, however.

17. For more on newscasts, see Peter Larsen's *Analyse af TV-avisen* [Analysis of the evening TV news], 1974.

18. This is the backcloth to the Monty Python sketch depicting a soccer match between teams of Greek and German philosophers: The camera follows the various "players" who absent-mindedly wander about on the field, when suddenly a ball comes bouncing into the picture, and the commentator exclaims, "... Oh, and there's the ball!"

19. The first and most famous commentator in Denmark, Gunnar "Now!" Hansen, is a case in point. His nick-name "Now!" is a veritable ode to the medium which makes simultaneity possible (first radio, then television) and a fairly exact expression of the fascination of the aesthetics of the instant.

20. Cf. Peter Larsen's (1974) remarks on the hierarchy of utterances, which is largely applicable to televised sport.

21. This is one of the features of transmissions which has changed in recent years. Although the transmission of the match itself is largely the same, activities which previously took place in the studio have been moved out to the "here" of the event in order to achieve coincidence between the "here" of the sender and the "here" of the event. The absence of the "here" of the studio from the textual level in no way damages the sense of "event-ness". On the contrary, it tells us that this event is so important that even the manager of the Sports Department himself has gone out into the cold for its sake. In a metaphorical sense this is a step back toward the days of the rosy-nosed, bundled-up reporter who, pencil in hand, braved sleet and hail to fill us in on the latest scores.

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