

PREFACE: THE GOODWILL NEWSLETTER

Global events are the most heart-warming goodwill newsletter of modern times. Periodically, they burst into social consciousness as part of an established cycle of global festivity (the Olympics, the FIFA World Cup, the Rio Carnival, the Sydney Mardi Gras) or in response to an international emergency or incident (Live Aid, Tsunami Relief, the Benefit Concert for Hurricane Katrina). For the duration we are conscious of being part of an international community in which pre-ordained divisions of race, class, religion, sexual orientation, politics and the vulture logic of capitalism appear to magically vanish. Instead, the urge to do good, which is an entirely human and proper sentiment, is hot wired into disinterestedly celebrating the athletic prowess of Olympians or world class professionals in sport; feeding the hungry in Africa; ending torture in Darfur; providing relief from the misery and want that follows an earthquake or *tsunami*; saving the planet from pollution and corporate greed; or more prosaically, conveniently reminding ourselves at the company meeting that we are truly serving the customer and doing good, rather than merely maximising profit. The point about disinterest is revealing, because event logic is built on highly personal displays of emotional energy. Participation in events has become a mark of responsible citizenship, with all of the subsidiary implications for judgements of self-worth, validity and ethically acceptable behaviour that this implies.

Events are designer-built packages to boost publicity, symbolise fraternity and heighten awareness. Increasingly, global events employ celebrities to transfer glamour from the entertainment sector onto charitable and business undertakings.

The organisers and front men and women that present them see themselves as providing positive pedagogy (teaching us about third world inequality and injustice), enhancing social networking and contributing to cultural literacy.

Success in entertainment is redefined as honing a strong humanitarian, global perspective. For example, in Sydney (2011), the Global Leadership Forum brought George Clooney and Martha Stewart together with Muhammad Yunus, Russell Simmons, Michael Fertik and Jeff Taylor and put them on the stage of the Sydney Convention Centre to 'unwrap the concepts, vision and motivation' behind 'authentic leadership' and provide 'challenging new ways of thinking, working

and living'.¹ Ordinary men and women are urged to learn how admired members of the powerful and influential draw on strong, cleansing emotions and apply them to higher business and humanitarian causes. In a world in which people are often triply estranged from government, the state and big business, global events are cheerful testaments to people power. The Forum celebrated the best practice of celebrity trend setters in humanitarian and business enterprise and conjured a spirit of presumed intimacy between strangers. For a moment we are *team-world*, and there is no obstacle of nature, faith, church, economy or polity that we cannot overcome.

The desire to do good is magically combined with the satisfaction of feeling good. Events contribute to a positive self-image. They possess therapeutic value. Their scale and importance has ascended in direct proportion to the expansion of social and cultural injunctions to get more in touch with our feelings and to emote frankly and without shame. Ernest Gellner (1994) once speculated that as human societies develop more efficient and dependable infrastructures of security, the struggle for survival is replaced with a struggle for approval and acceptance. If he is right, global events are the biggest human-made objects of approval and acceptance ever devised. The Olympics, the FIFA World Cup, Live Aid, Live Earth, Live 8 and their cognates are catalysts for deep emotional arousal and exchange. They issue licence to break out of our daily bubble of existence and allow us to express our no-holds barred common humanity. It is as if global events supply ordinary men and women with the intimation that the 7 billion people on the planet constitute the fundamental human entity, beyond the walls of nation, race, class and religion.

Yet events are neither spontaneous nor free expressions of people power. They are closely organised, schooled in the methods of exercising persuasion over human cognition by market research, rigorously planned and monitored in detail. Events are publicised as expressions of 'people power', but event ownership and management do not rest with the people. To be sure the entire category of the event audience is problematic. The mixtures of stadium crowds and network publics constitute an *illusory community*, in which unity and commitment are largely apparitions.

Many commentators increasingly point to the control functions of events. Events are portrayed as radiant, symbolic representations of civil society coming together. In reality, they apply principles of hierarchical authority and keep citizens at arm's length from 'mega-project decision making' (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003: 5).² Citizens are not directly involved in planning, commercialisation and securitisation. In cyclical events like the Olympics and FIFA World Cup, the use of CCTV (closed circuit

television) and UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) is a standard part of the security package. Global events are actually among the most controlled, regimented settings devised.

As Stephen Graham (2010, 2012) observes, the securitisation of the London Olympics (2012) involved the deployment of more troops than the war in Afghanistan. Anti-terrorism and crowd control measures involved the use of unmanned drones, surface-to-air missile systems, and a thousand armed US diplomatic and FBI agents policing an Olympic zone divided from the rest of the city by an 11-mile, £80 million 5000-volt electric fence. Investment in electronic surveillance included a new range of scanners, biometric ID cards, number plate and facial recognition CCTV systems, disease tracking surveillance and checkpoints.

Intensive risk assessment and adequate security and surveillance provision are now part of the global event planning process. It is subject to well-oiled lobbying interventions from the security and surveillance industry. Pressure from this quarter led to the investment of a \$300 million 'super panopticon' CCTV and information system for the Athens Olympics (2004) (Samatas, 2007). Graham (2012) estimates that the cost of providing security for each athlete in the Athens Games was £90,000. For the London Olympics he puts the cost at £59,000 per competitor.

Investment on this scale puts a huge strain on metropolitan and national finances. The Athens Games are widely regarded to have created a culture of easy borrowing which was a major factor in the collapse of the Greek economy after the 2008 financial crash. In the bidding process, the estimated cost of the London Games was £2.37 billion. By the opening ceremony, this was held to have climbed to £24 billion (Graham, 2012).

All of this is done in the name of protecting 'the people'. Yet citizens are not a genuine party to the decision-making processes. Post-event, the security and surveillance provision is transferred to providing 'more effective' community and city-wide policing. A version of Naomi Klein's (2007) famous 'shock doctrine' is at play here. Namely risk assessment of event anti-terrorist and crowd control security requirements underwrites colossal investment in security and surveillance systems which contribute to the more intensive policing of domestic populations in the post-event scenario.

Event concepts frame the event for the media and the public. The formation and application of the event concept is pivotal. Generally, it is simple, eye-catching and designed to appeal to the emotions, not the mind. 'Feed The World' was the event concept that defined Live Aid. Simultaneously, it demarcated solidarity and defied criticism. It is still rolled out today to combat academic and media accusations that post-event fund distribution squandered the Live Aid money earmarked for relief.³

As the event planning stage unfolds and moves into event proper and post-event relations, the event concept is a convenient short cut to

override jarring sentiments and conflicting meanings that individuals and groups bring to, and take from, the event process. The concept is the brand. In an age where self-advertising and impression management are automatically accepted as the key to gaining personal impact, branding is everything. Selling the cause to the public effectively means developing the right concept, in the right place and at the right time. Event concepts work best when individuals accept, without reflection, that universal issues and problems are on team-world radar and that they *must* act upon them *as one*.

Outwardly, events are ecumenical. Unconsciously, they exhibit many elements of religious evangelism and old style salvationism. For example, the event concept is presented as bringing the ordinary man and woman *into confidence*. The issue or problem is a *message* about which 'good' people should know. The Make Poverty History campaign, which the Live 8 (2005) event showcased, aimed to turn people of all nations into *disciples* in the march against hunger, disease and inequality.

Global events focus on problems of misery, want and collective improvement. But their internal hard drive, which gradually becomes more palpable as the event process unfolds, is to bring the message of *good news* to people. Needless to say, good news does not lie in the human wreckage that follows a natural or geopolitical disaster. Rather it is the image of the true and noble response of the people to get stuck in, sort things out and affirm a fellowship that is admirable and appealing. Although we habitually feel powerless and impotent in the face of the world's problems, events permit us to feel that we are *making a difference*. Our *conviction* and *energy* provides an infusion of hope to the wretched. When we see a gay rights float at the Sydney Mardi Gras or a costume parade featuring the *peessoas humilde* (humble people) at the Rio Carnival or the image of starving African infants broadcast on the video screen of a concert to relieve hunger, we become part of an irresistible wave of global unity.

All for One and One for All

The popularity of global events reveals important changes in the culture of charity and problem solving. It is not for nothing that Chris Hedges (2010: 200) observes:

The belief that we can make things happen through positive thoughts, by visualizing, by wanting them, by tapping into our inner strength, or by understanding that we are truly exceptional, is peddled to us by all aspects of culture.

The most seductive mouthpieces that entreat us to make these acts of virtue are celebrities. To name but a few, George Clooney, Angelina Jolie, Cameron Diaz, Bono, Bob Geldof, Mia Farrow, Michael Stipe, Jay Z and Madonna are celebrity advocates and diplomats who preach on global issues and problems. In doing so, they impart a reviving, *can do* attitude to the public. Events are out of the ordinary experience, so it is no surprise that they use people who are culturally defined as *extraordinary* to inspire ordinary people to act. Celebrities have become an adjunct of the event brand. They humanise event goals and provide event management with sparkle. By assuming a noble, imploring attitude to help, they place themselves on the same footing with those whom they address.

Events are portrayed as virtuous responses to international emergencies or commemoration of long-standing injustice (such as gay repression or racial exclusion) and business and government are cast in the part of clumsy, inefficient operators. Audiences receive not only the gratification of being invited to help, they also have the self-confirmation of being 'in the know', i.e. being conversant with real world issues that ordinary people are unaware of, in which George, Angelina, Cameron and Bono confide with us. Additionally, there is the rhetoric of direct action which contrasts sharply with the image of muddling through that is associated with so much of what business and government do. Thus, events are presented as belonging to people with 'modern' attitudes. By implication, those who do not attend to, or participate in, events are 'pre-modern' or 'traditional'.

But what do events really accomplish? To begin with, we should allow that it would be foolish to dismiss the reality and force of goodwill. Corporate events, for example, provide the workforce with an opportunity to revive and reinforce *esprit de corps*. Business and humanitarian events are no different in this respect. Businesses have long recognised the value of corporate events to improve camaraderie among the workforce and build the brand. Events switch resources to displays of corporate pride and unity. The strong emphasis upon 'speaking frankly' during the business event awayday provides a showcase for management to exhibit a caring, listening attitude. The professional event literature is vocal in claiming social integration and organisational image enhancement as standard event outcomes (Bowdin et al., 2011; Getz and Wicks, 1994).

Turning to humanitarian global events, there is no doubt that they bring people together and are fully capable of generating resources for the relief of misery and want. Events aspire to the condition of a people party. They provide the strong and winning image of people power. Nonetheless, questions are raised about both the longevity and concrete results of event people power. A number of studies suggest that event consciousness is finite (Collins, 2001; Elavsky, 2009). That is, popular

interest in event causes fades away after the stage is dismantled and the perimeter fence and portable toilets are packed away.

Moreover, event consciousness is largely communicated through votive behaviour. It lies in the *pledge* to donate money to relieve suffering and the *promissory* grace-note to convert ludic energy into a moral crusade to change the very system that blights the world with hunger, injustice, carbon fuel emissions, nuclear power and so on. The question is, how far is votive behaviour removed from meaningful action? Do we change the world by attending a pop concert for famine relief or are we subconsciously participating in a gaudy enterprise whose consequences are incapable of rising above leaving the scaffold of power that protects the engines of inequality, injustice and irresponsible enterprise intact? Some research into event participation claims to expose the shallowness in the crowd and network public of the promissory grace-note to change the world. Instead it presents event participation more prosaically as a break from the routine of work, the monotony of unemployment and the activation of undiluted escapism (Tickle, 2011).

Might it not be that global events are more accurately viewed as part of the latest consumerist move towards what some observers in the USA have called 'self-gifting' (Carroll, 2011)? That is, the therapeutic practice of periodically and ostentatiously giving presents to yourself in order to provide self-gratification and serve notice to others of personal worth.⁴ Dean MacCannell (2011: 24) speaks of the rise of a new world of consumer experience that is already among us, in which behaviour takes the form of 'staged authenticity', in which appearance is all. In these conditions, concludes MacCannell, 'raw ego' has replaced personality.

Certainly, given the scale of human resources required, the money and manpower raised by global single-issue events like Live Aid and Live Earth, or cyclical events like the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics, offer little more than pinpricks of relief. Further, while global events are estimable outpourings of personal compassion, they are in reality a distraction from the severe economic, political and social issues on the world agenda. What is required is a fundamental thorough-going revision of fiscal responsibilities to remove toxic debt burdens in the developing world and create secure fair trade frameworks (Easterly, 2007; Moyo, 2010; Sachs, 2010, 2011). Instead of fixating on incidents, emergencies and episodes, events should contribute to a popular understanding of the underlying structures of power and causal sequences that reproduce inequality, injustice and exclusion.

These criticisms suggest that it is dangerous to take events at face value. A more searching attitude to *who* defines events, *how* they are managed and *what* they achieve is required. These are substantive questions having to do with how power is generally distributed and operates. However, overwhelmingly, the professional event literature provides a

technocratic view of events. It focuses on the nuts and bolts in the machine and when and where to oil the parts. The crucial issues of who owns the machine, who controls it and what is its purpose are confined to the backwaters.

Event capitalisation is not merely a matter of economics. It encompasses the cultural capital and psychological energy that events generate. For too long a blind eye has been turned to the questions of how this capital relates to social ordering and the politics of self-gratification. What needs to happen is greater transparency about event aims and outcomes to ensure that events are understood clearly and the resources that they generate used appropriately.

In order to do this the relationship between events and emotional governance must be addressed. Events are important links in the chain of communication power that influential social networks deploy to regulate global populations. While the roots of causes generally lie in the work of activists, the media and associated power networks take them over and use their message for their own ends (Castells, 2009: 331–2). In gratifying individuals that they make a difference to world affairs and boosting social consciousness about global incidents and emergencies, events provide succour to all who suffer from pangs of guilt about colonialism and world inequality. They replace the logic of political economy with the romance of charity. They offer a sense of transcendence and the comforting feeling of personally providing something that is missing in the world. There is a child-like purity in putting your shoulder behind the wheel that feeds the world, ends poverty, halts pollution or celebrates brotherhood. However, the publicity radiance that precedes and accompanies a global event has the effect of making us brain-blind.

The scale of economic, humanitarian and environmental problems facing the world is bigger than the competence of any single event or amalgamation of events to solve. When we come together at a company meeting as one entity, the conflicts of interest that divide us, and the differences in authority and power that separate us from one another, melt away on stage, but stubbornly persist after the wine and canapes at the post-event party are consumed. In any case, a pragmatic focus on the ends of the event concept is the wrong place to concentrate energies. This is hard to articulate candidly, because events are so securely positioned on the moral high ground in our culture; but to the extent that events deflect efforts from strategic issues of power and inequality which are not merely divisive, but antagonistic, they are a red herring.

This book is written in the conviction that events *do* provide something that is missing: pinning the tail to the donkey. They stir up a global media *mazurka* that unintentionally obscures the structural transformations that are necessary to make the world (or the corporation) a better place. They perpetuate a homespun philosophy that ordinary men and

women have hearts of gold, who think of their neighbours first. They make us feel like heroes, just for one day. But who is driving the donkey and to what end?

Notes

- 1 Clooney was advertised as ‘an actor, activist and co-founder’ of the charity Not On Our Watch; Martha Stewart as one of ‘the world’s greatest entrepreneurs’; Muhammad Yunus as CEO of Grameen Bank and Nobel Peace Prize Winner; Russell Simmons – founder of Def Jam Records and Phat Farm clothing and author of *Do You! Twelve Laws to Access the Power in You to Achieve Happiness and Success* – as one of the ‘most influential people in the past 25 years’; Michael Fertik as ‘founder of reputation.com’; and Jeff Taylor, as ‘founder of Monster.com and Eons.com’. Planned and managed by the Growth Faculty, an Australian education and public relations organisation, the event billed itself as being about ‘unwrapping genius’. Reserved tickets were advertised at \$A595; Premium Reserve at \$A880; VIP Reserve at \$A1100; and the VIP Cocktail Pack, providing seating at the VIP front section, access to VIP catering and networking and a ticket of entry to the VIP Cocktail Party in which all speakers, except George Clooney, ‘will attend’.
- 2 Events are typically presented in terms of a partnership – between event organisers, audiences and network publics, between chief executives and the workforce. In reality, the professionalisation and commercialisation of global events has created a monopoly over security and cost control in the event management team.
- 3 The strong self-image of global events as providing worthwhile pedagogy, contributing to cultural literacy and fundraising goes hand in hand with an exceptionally defensive attitude to criticism. When BBC reports alleged that Live Aid money had been appropriated to buy munitions and arms for the war in Ethiopia, Bob Geldof responded with the furious indignation that we associate with an Old Testament prophet. As we shall see later, there is a good deal of evidence to show that Live Aid funds *were* used to purchase munitions and arms that prolonged the war in Ethiopia (pp. 127–35). But because this evidence conflicts with Live Aid rectitude it is denigrated and pulverised by event planners and managers.
- 4 Even votive behaviour (to make a financial pledge) carries strong positive associations in event participation.

