

The Man in the Gallery with the Writing on His Face: Depictions of the Audience at the Diana Inquest

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Abstract

Press and media interest in the apparently peripheral social elements at the Diana Inquest often centred on lack of public interest in the daily proceedings and on the activities of the small band of members of the public who were regular attendees. The focus in much press commentary on the 'oddity' and isolation of this group tended to identify them as the misguided spectators of a charade, and their small number became an index of the pointlessness of the proceedings. Using elements of performance analysis derived from theatre and performance studies, this essay argues that such media focus on these figures and their behaviour highlights the interpretation of social performance as a significant component in the narration of legal proceedings. Media commentators tended to cast their own journalistic readings of the social interactions and performances they witnessed around the courtroom as authoritative and objective while deriding private spectators' own readings of such encounters as delusional. This article considers how such interpretation of social performance in the courtroom is employed in the range of conspiratorial narratives circulating around the Inquest – both those propounded by members of the public audience (which, for them, expose deep-lying manipulations by the powerful) and those examined by media commentators, (decrying such theories as the product of a group of deluded and inadequate fantasists).

Introduction

The Inquests into the 1997 deaths in a car crash in a Parisian underpass of Diana, Princess of Wales, and Dodi Al-Fayed, held at the Royal Courts of Justice in The Strand, London during 2007/8 were in part intended, in the words of the Coroner, to “allay public concerns and dispel groundless suspicion and speculation if, in truth, there is nothing to it” [Baker]. The Coroner noted that, in the 10 years since the deaths, the circumstances surrounding the crash had been the subject of enormous speculation; “Books on the subject fill shelves in public libraries, television programmes have abounded and newspapers have frequently carried reports and articles, some almost to the point of obsession” [Baker, p. 18].

As a result of this apparent public interest, the Courtroom in which the Inquest was held was supplemented by a large temporary annexe in the courtyard of the rambling Victorian law courts in which the public audience, alongside the representatives of press and television (in excess of the 20 or so who could be seated inside the court), might be accommodated, watching live relays of evidence being given and of documents being scrutinised. The annexe provided seats for 150 and entrance both to the courtroom and the annexe was controlled on a first-come, first-served handout of tickets early each morning before the court opened. In addition, transcripts of proceedings and evidence were posted daily on the Inquest’s website. The clear expectation was that the scale of public response to the death of Diana, along with the interest in the conspiratorial narratives which had proliferated since the accident, would ensure that the proceedings received massive public attention. In fact, the Inquest was rarely attended by large numbers of people, and was for the most part watched by only a handful, comfortably accommodated in the Courtroom itself.

Subsequently, in the press and electronic media, narratives developed in which this non-attendance by large numbers of the public became proof of the overanxious indulgence of the authorities in allowing the Inquest to proceed - after a series of appeals by Dodi Al-Fayed’s father, businessman and Harrods’ department store owner Mohammed Al-Fayed, alleging a conspiracy to cause the accident involving members of the British Establishment and the Security Services. Despite the courtroom exchange of accusations and confidences receiving a consistently high level of media attention in the

UK, this general tone of condemnation remained widespread. Commentaries also tended to focus on the appearance of a group of regular attendees at the Inquest whose committed engagement with the trial was read as further evidence that it was a wasteful exercise - their perceived eccentricity being the proof of this particular pudding. This essay will examine the characterisation of this audience body, employing models of analysis arising from performance and theatre studies to examine their persistent presence as a mode of social performance and to account for the meanings attached to it in media commentary.

Developments in performance studies and theatre semiotics, through Richard Schechner's definition of performance as 'restored behaviours' [Schechner, p. 22], Victor Turner's concept of the 'social drama' [Turner], Erving Goffmann's explorations of staging and scripting, of 'back region' and 'front region' spaces in social interactions equating to theatre's backstage and frontstage [Goffman], and Keir Elam's, Patrice Pavis' and Elaine Aston and George Savona's (building on Charles S Pierce) contributions to semiotic analysis [Elam] [Pavis, pp. 208-212] [Aston] [Peirce], have established the complex reading of social performance, of societal ritual and of the staging of events of public significance, and of the narratives which emerge from these events. Such analyses focus on the performative address of language and action in the social event, the qualities of enactment, presence and representation at play in such instances and, through semiotic analysis of the performance, the symbolic encoding and decoding of the event's meanings. Applied to the analysis of legal proceedings, theatre and performance studies models suggest the possibility of a performance analysis of the 'live' events of the courtroom and the representational practices at work both within it and in its subsequent replaying and mediation in the wider social world. They provide a theoretical basis for consideration both of the commonplaces of the 'theatrical metaphor' as they are habitually applied to the forms of staging and address present in the courtroom - focusing on costuming, the performed rhetoric of advocacy, the roles of jury and gallery as audience to this 'playing' - and to the reading of performance as a thread of representational process which weaves through all social interaction but which is particularly intensified within the heightened formality of the courtroom.

Pavis's famous questionnaire [Pavis, pp. 230-231] sought to establish a system of analysis for the theatrical event, developing the precise evaluation of the meaning of its

constituent parts, including dramaturgical and theatrical elements but moving beyond these into questioning the social environment and context of the performance. The questionnaire itemises elements of the 'onstage' proceedings, such as costume, stage properties and scenography, for discussion and analysis to consider how "the event's components separately" generate "part of the overall meaning". However, it also asks the observer of the performance to consider elements not part of the aesthetic object of the stage, such as the "relationship between acting and audience space". Asking "where does [the] performance take place" and "how did [the] audience react", the questionnaire suggests that both the audience and the observer of the audience may be active elements in the creation of the performance's meaning. A production of *Macbeth* performed in the darkened proscenium arch setting of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford Upon Avon is thus seen to have a very different context and significance to the same play performed in a promenade production in a disused school, as in the case of the influential PunchDrunk company's performance, *Sleep No More*, in Kennington, South London in 2003, in which audience members witnessed different elements of the production in different spaces and in an order decided by audience choice within the constraints of the production's overall shape.

When theatrical practices move further, to break down the separation between the aesthetic object of performance and its social surroundings, the role of the audience can become the core of the event's significance. The participatory performances engaged in the late Brazilian director Augusto Boal's models of Forum or Invisible theatre (in the former the audience is actively requested to intervene and debate and decide how the drama should unfold, in the latter the audience is at first unaware that they are participating in a performance) raise questions concerning the possible, appropriate or relevant reading of any 'staged' component to the events. The implication of Boal's practice is that the audience is a potentially destabilising element in the theatre's transmission of meaning, even when the context of the performance is apparently highly managed and controlled – as might be seen to be the case in the social performance of the courtroom [Boal 1979, 1995]. The significance of social performance and its representation in the case of the Diana Inquest may be to depict the audience to the Inquest and the social performances which its members engaged in as part of a contestation of authority over the dominant meanings of the events being examined.

Notwithstanding David Miller and Greg Philo's warning that the reading of the subversive potential of audience 'resistance' to the authoritarian role of the media is increasingly fetishised, as "the activities which are said to be resistant are often trivial" [Philo & Miller, p. 56], the social performance of the audience and the subsequent representation of that performance at the Diana Inquest is an example of an intriguing interweaving between public concern and the affairs of state. Indeed, the question of whether or not the social performance of the public audience in the courtroom provides a participatory form of resistance to authority, or merely a rather pathetic misreading of the true nature of social relations is central to media reportage and discussion of the Diana Inquest.

The Courtroom as a Performance Environment

In print, electronic and online coverage of the Inquest, its meanings were seen to reside not only in legal judgements on evidence delivered but also in the 'live' social performance of the courtroom. A performance analysis of the proceedings might focus on those elements of 'offstage' activity in this space which Pavis suggests. The Inquest was held in what appeared to be a converted office space. The Coroner sat on a raised dais with court officials before him and a Royal crest behind. To his right a further dais held the jury, to his left was the witness stand. In the well of the court sat counsel. To their right were seats reserved for family and friends of the interested parties. At the rear of the court, in raised tiers, were rows of plastic seats, on one side reserved for press, on the other for the public. Video screens relayed medium close shots of courtroom participants, or replayed video materials or evidence relays from Paris. Alongside these screens others carried the LiveNote transcription of proceedings, producing an instant written record of verbal exchanges. These materials were also carried on the screens in the Annexe, so that fixed viewpoints of counsel and of witnesses (but not of Jury, or, at least directly, of public or family) were available to the Annexe audience. Significant elements to be considered in an analysis of the performative elements of this setting and of the proceedings played out in it would be; the proximity of parties in this live encounter; the reading and negotiation of relationships of status and social function in this setting which are created by the relative lack of architectural 'authority' in the dividing of the separated spaces for the various groups in the courtroom; the interaction between the formal and the informal in this environment and the associated and perhaps inadvertent foregrounding in the

courtroom of its position as a site for the negotiation of a web of contrasting and contradictory narratives. In this particular instance, the latter might include the personal stories, representations and mediations of the members of the public present in the room as well as the more serious, complex and resonant stories which the courtroom explored in the lives and attitudes of those on the stand.

The particular mix of the formal, legal environment and the informality introduced both in the daily setting-up of this environment and in the frequent breaks in proceedings drew attention to the significance of 'offstage' social interactions – a feature registered in previous theatrical modellings of Tribunals and legal processes such as those staged at the Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn, London, in the past ten years, [Norton-Taylor] where the replaying of such interaction as part of the verisimilitude of the production has been a prominent feature. However, one of the most striking elements of such 'offstage' interaction in the social environment of the court, and one which has not generally been a part of the Tricycle's re-staging of such events, were the attitudes and behaviours of the figures populating the public gallery. On my own first visit, the gallery was peopled by a range of visitors, including an elderly couple who had brought along a tourist map of Paris to follow evidence, various individuals who discussed the trial, as long standing colleagues, with mutual friends in the gallery, as well as a number of people who appeared to be watching with a professional or scholarly interest. A man in the third row of the gallery was dressed in a suit, dapper, well-presented, albeit with DIANA and DODI written across his face in blue pan-stick. Outside the courtroom a heated conversation went on between a young man with a mass of curly hair and an older man with a bag full of papers about the reasons for a piece of evidence not being given on the stand. In the breaks between sittings the formal boundaries between communities in the court dissolved further. Here it was possible to witness a member of the public audience debate the interpretation of evidence with a journalist, to watch another discuss their apparent fame with newcomers in the gallery, or to follow the same individual approvingly patting the back of a discomfited ex-security chief after a day's hard work in the witness box. To queue for a public gallery ticket was to briefly become part this group, a community who were often looked at with amusement or bemusement by legal professionals on their way to work in the surrounding streets, or with a degree of scorn by the members of the public walking past the accusatory placard held by one figure outside the front entrance of the

building each day.

Media Coverage

The presence of this community was also quickly noticed by journalists and commentators and, as the much anticipated Inquest began to drag on with relatively little sensation and increasingly strained efforts to pursue conspiracy theories by some of the legal representatives, a significant degree of attention started to be paid to the social environment of the court. Repeatedly, commentary picked up on the architecture of the site, on the layout of the courtroom and its meanings, on the demeanour of witnesses, of family and friends, of jury and press and, frequently, of the public who attended. Writing in the *Daily Mail*, Jane Fryer gave a detailed account of the space and the participants, including an atmospheric description of the “slightly musty smell of too many people cooped up in one room for too long” [Fryer], and made a series of comments on the “small band of Diana devotees” and their actions in the Courtroom. For Stephen Bates, writing in *The Guardian*, the demeanour of those in court was read as a significant index of attitudes to the Inquest; “The legal teams have been beadily watched most days from a few feet away by Fayed himself, surrounded by his smirking phalanx of acolytes and employees” [Bates]. In *The Spectator*, Martin Gregory’s account of being called a “bastard” and flicked a V-sign outside the courtroom by Al-Fayed was followed by a further description of witness interaction which drew attention to the behaviours around the court (as did sections of his Sky News documentary which followed the conclusion of the Inquest). Commenting on evidence given by a witness who had made accusations concerning another, Gregory wrote; “On oath, MacNamara withdrew his claim, but claimed that he had not been able to apologise to Rees-Jones, as he had not seen him since he made it. I was surprised by this, as I had witnessed the two men acknowledge each other in the High Court on 29th January, while Rees-Jones prepared to give his evidence” [Martyn].

As the Inquest proceeded, reportage increasingly began to focus on the significance of the empty 150 seats of the courtroom Annexe, reading them as a signifier of the failings of the hearings as an exercise in public openness [Verkiak]. Such reports poured scorn on the proceedings and their cost, or on the suggestibility of authorities prepared to bow to the Al-Fayed camp’s legal team’s persistence. Some articles interviewed those present in

the annexe, ranging across the attendants who stood desultory guard, the students, day-trippers and legally interested parties who dropped in, and seeking comments on public apathy [Winterman]. Others, throughout the Inquest, fixed on those particular individuals – the nine or so “dishevelled” [Bates, 2008i] people who occupied the public gallery virtually throughout and could be overheard discussing the performance of various witnesses and counsel during the breaks; “a small band of Diana devotees – neat, tidy, grey-haired and armed with noisy carrier bags and clingfilmed sandwiches – [who] mutter, rustle, exchange knowing glances and take important-looking notes” [Fryer].

The BBC spoke to three such regulars during the final week of the Inquest. These were John Howsam, a convinced conspiracy theorist who regularly forsook a seat in the gallery to brandish a placard outside the court; Annabelle Drummond-Reece, a retired doctor who, the BBC article implies, attended partly to escape the awkwardness of her own immersion in a court case; and John Loughrey, a figure who is central to the narrative of absurdity which surrounds the audience to the Inquest. Loughrey, the man in the gallery with the writing on his face, is a chef who gave up his job and rented out his flat – moving in with his sister – in order to attend the Inquest. He was variously described in a range of publications as a Diana fan, a devotee, at times as an obsessive [ii]. A variety of blogs comment on Loughrey’s obsessive behaviour, and generally with a more abusive tone than mainstream press commentary. [Lady Di Blogs]

His behaviour was registered, in all cases, as at the very least delusional, with the BBC’s headline – “I’m going down in history for this” – suggesting that this was a figure who had lost all sense of proportion. That at the end of the Inquest the Coroner made reference to Loughrey in the courtroom as the only person outside of the Jury to have heard every minute of the evidence, further supported this characterisation, and my own brief encounters with Loughrey – who pounced on me with a “not seen you here before” on my second day in court – made it apparent that he was a figure who had found some form of self-definition through participation in the event. This flamboyant courting of minor celebrity was registered through some ostentatious elements of performance – the facepaint, the daily early arrivals to queue for tickets, the round of media interviews and photographs in which he presented himself as a committed Royalist. In each case media commentary drew him into the circulation of meanings surrounding the Inquest in which they began to serve a variety of semiotic functions, operating as indexes of the wider

British population's engagement with the Diana myth. Here, John Loughrey represented the perfect summation of the wilder shores of public Diana grief, with Ros Wynne-Jones commenting in *The Guardian* that "John is as much a part of proceedings inside Court 73 as anyone, representing as he does the more troubling aspects of the public's relationship with Diana" [Fryer].

Figures such as John Howsam provided indexical accounts of another form of distortion, seemingly in contradiction with the above. Howsam appeared as a conspiracy theorist extraordinaire, an individual who had stepped too far into the hall of mirrors which was the 'conspiracy' and who operated as a tragi-comic avatar for the wider tragi-comedy of Al-Fayed's own theorising. Press suggestions that the misguided nature of Al-Fayed's accusations was proven by his own legal team's unwillingness to pursue any but a handful of them in court were provided with an official stamp of authenticity by the Coroner's final conclusion that there was "not a shred of evidence" [Baker] to suggest a conspiracy on the part of any group or individual. In such a context, Howsam's self-presentation was read as being as clearly delusional as Loughrey's and, by implication, Al-Fayed's. Loughrey, Howsam and their fellow gallery-hangers became encoded as indexes of those national attitudes – from emotive immersion to distanced scorn – which have characterised the reading of Diana and her many meanings, but their presence also opened a set of questions about the purpose of the Inquest, with the self-conscious playing of their participation being read as an indication of the degree to which this event had become a wasteful circus [Wynne-Jones]. They also stood in for a wider body of conspiracy theorists, those for whom the full bookshelves of the Coroner's opening remarks were stocked. And these conspiracy theorists become themselves part of a conspiracy – a conspiracy by the irrationally involved to maintain a critique of the authorities beyond the bounds of any plausible justification [Rifkind].

Outside of these narratives of audience identity and engagement, media coverage tended to focus on those elements of evidence which seemed significant in providing substance to either side of the case - perhaps in bringing forth the weakness of the most extreme conspiracy theories - or which themselves foregrounded elements of revelatory social performance, representing some form of hostile, sensational or salacious airing of private or secret relationships and behaviours. As well as the evidence which went to the central mystery of the case – what caused the crash in the tunnel - revelations of the

private relationship between Diana, her lover, Dodi and her father-in-law, Prince Philip became the leading news items, along with insights into the management of her life and affairs through the negotiation of private space by her staff, friends and public figures who had come to know her. Unexpected glimpses of the relationships between the public and the establishment were relished in the left-liberal press, such as the tense exchanges between Michael Mansfield and former defence minister Nicholas Soames who was accused in court of attempting to intimidate Diana over her pursuit of a campaign against landmines which ran contrary to government policy [Bates]. Insights into the relationships between various areas of the security services, their agents and minders - most vividly captured in the day's evidence given by Sir Richard Dearlove, former head of MI6, the British government's overseas security and espionage agency - were also prominent. Given that evidence from exchanges such as this latter often proved to be of relatively little consequence in the case, it is perhaps unsurprising that press accounts often seemed to focus on the performative elements of the courtroom exchanges concerning these matters rather than on the material such exchanges provided to either or any of the legally interested parties. In these accounts, the chief spook was read as an individual with a persona which seems to embody all of the perceived clichés surrounding such figures. For example, the Ex-MI6 Chief admits agents do have a licence to kill but denies executing Diana [English, R].

Social Performance and its Interpretation

On footage of Diana and Dodi at the Ritz hotel shortly before the crash, it was said that "she laughed and smiled like the old Diana, and for a moment it was difficult to believe that she had been dead for ten years. Dodi's body language was solicitous and attentive, slipping an arm round her waist and looking like the cat that got the cream" [Hamilton, A].

Ironically, this interest in social performance both as presented in evidence in the case *and* as enacted behaviour in the courtroom created a reckoning between the higher symbolism of the Inquest and the proliferation of localised, fragmented narrative viewpoints which are a frequent feature of commentaries on figures such as Howsam and Loughrey. Indeed, much media commentary on the Inquest relied on foregrounding forms of social performance in partial and subjective readings, despite such ways of

reading being condemned when presented by other observers – the Loughreys, the Howsams, etc . On the one hand media accounts of the ‘backstage’ significance of private lives and the intimate details of the Princess’s personal relationships attested to the revelation of truths in the proceedings; yet on the other media condemnation – or at least, not so gentle ridicule - of those members of the public audience who saw themselves as personally invested in the case emphasised their mis-reading of their own status. Such a contradiction highlights the significance of the *interpretation* of social performance in both spaces.

At one point in the proceedings, Mohammed Al-Fayed’s spokesperson, Katherine Witty, was reprimanded by the Coroner for disrespectful behaviour after the Jury complained of her laughter in the courtroom, apparently in mocking condemnation of the evidence of the police officer who was on the stand at the time. This reprimand symbolised for certain commentators the chief corrupting drive behind the whole Inquest, a bare-faced attempt by Al-Fayed to make the facts bend to his analysis. This became the dominant reading of Witty’s laugh in subsequent media coverage, as characterised in Andrew Pierce’s *Daily Telegraph* column which attacked Witty for her activities as Al-Fayed’s PR, describing how she was “publicly rebuked by Lord Justice Scott Baker, the Coroner for “inappropriate behaviour” as she smirked during Michael Mansfield’s cross-examination of a witness. Nice”. Pierce also asked and answered his own question “just how much money does it take to make you speak the unspeakable?” [Pierce] My own reading of this incident, from a seat in the public gallery, was that Witty had responded to a member of one of the legal teams who had sneezed in an accidentally comical manner. Witty’s helpless fit of giggles at this was of the order of a kid in a school assembly who knows they should be quiet and desperately wants to but who cannot - inappropriate, yes, disrespectful, perhaps, but certainly not aimed at mocking the evidence of the witness on the stand.

However, for me to present a reading of such social performance as substantive evidence of meaning and as contradicting the claims made both for it and for the typicality of the Al-Fayed camp’s attitude is, perhaps, to enter the realms of delusion which Loughrey et al are accused of. The informality of my presence in the Courtroom means that I am only able to register and to offer a local, fragmented and partial version of the

events. Yet, if such a localised reading of an incident as contrary to the official interpretation of the significance, or of the wider mediated symbolic narrative into which it is interpolated, speaks of anything substantial, it is surely of the existence of a host of unmediated interpretations of events which resonate outside of the courtroom, establishing fragmentary and 'minor' narratives beyond the grand narrative of truth or conspiracy. And, indeed, media concern with the public audience at the Diana Inquest clearly foregrounds anxieties about this narrative proliferation, focusing on the unreliability of such public interest in the events as evidenced by the unreliability – the eccentricity – of the regular attendees.

The Courtroom and the Conspiracy

However, if the reading of social performance can be seen as offering a significant degree of insight into the play of power emerging from the narration of legal proceedings, we must also acknowledge that those conspiracy theories which seem to proliferate around Diana and Dodi's death tend themselves to take social performance as foundational, and perhaps to value it above even indisputable evidence, fact and testimony. In his 1988 outlining of a model of conspiracy theorising, Frederic Jameson suggested that 'Conspiracy is the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system, whose failure is marked by its slippage into sheer theme and content' [Jameson, p. 355]. More recently, for Peter Knight, 'Narratives of conspiracy now capture a sense of uncertainty about how historical events unfold, about who gets to tell the official version of events, and even about whether a causally coherent account is still possible.

They speak to current doubts about who or what is to blame for complex and interconnected events' [Knight, pp. 3-4]]. Such analysis suggests that conspiracy theories build on postmodern doubt concerning the ability to gain purchase on complex and dislocating actions. "The culture of conspiracy surrounding the Kennedy assassination is, for Knight, so enduring, not because it provides a compensatory sense of closure and coherence, nor even because it led to a loss of innocence, but because it is very much in tune with a postmodern distrust of final narrative solutions" [Knight, pp. 3-4]. In the case

of Diana such distrust led originally to a series of scattershot theories regarding her demise, theories which, given the centrality of the Royal Family to the British state, had a powerful semiotic resonance. The idea that Diana may have been assassinated by secret service agents due to being impregnated by a Muslim lover who she intended to marry certainly captures a range of iconic fears and anxieties surrounding the circumstances of public affairs. Equally, the sense of an overlap between surveillance and publicity, that perhaps paparazzi might be as close to security services as to newspapers, was compellingly dramatic. In such versions of the purposes of the Inquest, not only was the extreme popularity of the Princess read as a reason for this courtroom to become an equally popular location for the public, but the complex of theories became a further reason for making this a compelling show – those theories were to be put, tested and contested in a live discursive space.

In fact, for many media commentators, public attendance at the Inquest was only seen as indicative of one of two attitudes – a Diana fixation which was a sublimation of unexplored psychological deviance, or a conspiracy theory obsession which was similarly illustrative of some kind of disturbance. In this case, audience members witnessing the events to an unhealthy degree become conspiracy theorists seeking Knight's 'compensation' in their own reading of impossibly remote events, and also as figures whose appearance to publicly claim such a status was an unhealthy parody of the dignified but intense public grief surrounding Diana's death. Writing in the *New Statesman*, Ros Wynne-Jones characterises this deriding of the regulars alongside a general 'anti-inquest' attitude amongst opinion formers in public and private life, as a form of defensive apology for the very un-British display of national grief after the death. "It is as if the collective shame of that very un-British episode [the large-scale mourning] is being played out in an anti-inquest sentiment, as the proceedings are vilified by talkshow hosts and belittled by opinion-formers from cab-drivers to Question Time panellists"[Wynne-Jones]. The public whose grief appeared to be so widespread as to disarm cynicism in the immediate aftermath of the accident was not represented in this reading of the figures present. Rather, this wider, more dignified, absent, body was seen as being engaged in a double refusal – firstly to take an interest in an Inquest which should be allowing the dead lovers and their driver to rest in peace and secondly to take an interest in the absurd conspiracy narratives surrounding the event. The reading of the

social performances in the environment of the courtroom provided, in Loughrey's face-paint, in Howsam's placard, in Witty's giggles, evidence that the real 'conspiracy' was the creation and maintenance of a context in which such delusional behaviour might flourish, a conspiracy of conspiracy theorists, obsessive, socially maladroit and seeking to waste the time, energy and money of the state through the connivance of irresponsible legal business. The social performance surrounding the courtroom became confirmation of the correctness of this particular conspiracy theory – that the only figures who might become caught up in such events were those whose lives are empty – an insight which echoed with the general media characterisation of Mohammed Al-Fayed himself.

Conclusion - Performance in the Royal Courts

My own sense of the reading of the events before Court 73 is that a series of elements of social performance appeared to provide resonant insights into the collision of facts and representations in this case. In a few days attendance at the Inquest I would place in this category the mis-reading of Witty's laugh; the revelation of a bathetic series of issues in the life of James Andanson, the paparazzi photographer held by conspiracy theorists to be the owner of the white Fiat said to have collided with the Mercedes in which the victims were travelling, which seemed to knock that particular conspiracy theory firmly on the head; the strange mixture of formality and joviality in the interplay between QCs; the inscrutability of a certain class of British judicial representative; the self-presentation in the case of French witnesses called to give evidence by video, as if bemused by this glimpse into overdressed British legal process; the particularity of the employed personalities surrounding Al-Fayed; the banality of British security service internal procedures and the extraordinary and tragic emptiness of the images of the crashed vehicle, underlit as they largely were, capturing a stationary car with its doors closed, traffic still passing in the next lane, then surrounded by men whose approach seems neither urgent nor connected, as though looking at a vehicle which is about to be towed away, not – and it took me some time to register this – a vehicle in which people were dead or dying. All of these elements registered a particularly affective power and seemed to me to be revelatory of aspects of the case which are, as meanings and significances, worthy of analysis and comment alongside formal reportage. These elements suggest that the meanings of an Inquest held on the grounds which the Coroner originally outlined –

to allay public fears and suspicions - resides in part in the preparedness of members of the public exactly to read its significances in their own paranoid, delusional or conspiratorial way – and that, in evaluating social performance for themselves, such figures may be contributing to the building of a body of meaning from the events in the Courtroom which is as revelatory of instances of ‘truth’ as the supposedly informed, authoritative journalistic perspectives offered by commentators. Performance in the legal environment creates a supplementary text to that with which law is apparently interested, one which is mined and examined both at the moment of its enactment and in the subsequent ascription of meaning to it by commentary and media reportage.

Beyond the Coroner’s verdict, perhaps the most resonant element of the Diana and Dodi Inquest, was the reading of Al-Fayed’s own appearance in the witness box, during a day of cross-examination in which the significance of this figure in relation to the British Establishment was thoroughly explored, examined and judged. Journalistic coverage of this stage of the event looked closely at the absurdity of the claims advanced, rendering, with a tone of reserved sympathy for this grieving father, the collapse of theories of conspiracy in the scattershot impossibility of the variety of guilty figures which Al-Fayed claimed were involved. In doing so it positioned Al-Fayed as one of the *dramatis personae* who was in an equivalent space to Loughrey or Howsam, trapped by monomania into a lack of sufficient self-knowledge and insight to allow him to break free of his delusional state and to objectively assess the nature of the obsessions gripping him. Such media commentary asserted that this whole process was an unnecessary mis-reading of the facts behind the deaths of these figures, that a combination of accidental factors had created the circumstance and that the proliferation of narratives in its aftermath was a performative smokescreen. In this analysis, to penetrate that screen required merely a commonsensical calling to account of those parties foolish enough to have allowed it to rise, whether these were the authorities who were complicit in its ascent, or the lawyers, always the fat-cat focus of scepticism and condemnation, who had let it mushroom. Social performance – including Al-Fayed’s loss of control as he swore at a reporter outside the court [Gregory ii, 2008] [McClatchey], became an index of the Inquest’s many truths and, strangely perhaps, an unpredicted confirmation both of the importance of its costly and lengthy process and of the significance of the proliferation in social performance of the readings, perspectives and interpretations which surround the establishing of a judicial

grand narrative.

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ⁱ Levinas, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', op. cit., pp. 63-71.