

Dancing with Diana

A Study in Hauntology¹

Diana Taylor

We sat on the sofa—my young daughter, Marina, on my lap—lamenting the death of a woman we didn't know. As the coffin slowly made its way towards Westminster Abbey, the commentators reverentially droned on about the silence, the mood, the dramatic demonstration of public emotion. But there were so many publics, it seemed, participating in what looked like one and the same theatre of mourning. The exclusive, well-behaved public of dignitaries and movie stars inside the Abbey, the charged "popular" audience on the meadows outside, the two billion people watching each other watching around the world. Everywhere the camera rested, people were sobbing silently. The emotion was contagious—the pity for Diana and her boys, the terror of sudden death, the rage at the unloving queen, the contempt for the unloving husband. As in theatre, emotion gave way to applause. It irrupted outside the Abbey following the Earl of Spencer's eulogy and pushed its way inside, back to front, uninvited, disrupting the solemnity and reminding the high-and-mighty that this was, after all, the public's command performance. Then, as the hearse carrying the remains made its way out of London, the public threw its last bouquets at the departing diva. The incessant "repeats" of the coverage assured us we were watching "live." What does "live" mean, I wondered out loud, watching from across the Atlantic? "It means we're live and she's dead," Marina explained. Then, "You won't die, will you Mummy?" punctuated by crying. "No, darling, no, I promise," suddenly crying too, but embarrassed. Our tears were of a different kind—hers about pity and fear; mine complicated by my determination to resist this kind of identification which I found coercive and humiliating.

What's Diana to me, that I should weep for her? This was an odd mirroring effect—one Diana crying for another.

Once again, I was that awkward, chubby child in Parral, Chihuahua—my hair pulled back in pigtales so tight that my eyes wouldn't shut, my skirt pinned together because I'd popped my button, wearing my cowgirl boots, my fringed suede jacket and my beloved little gold scissors earrings that opened and closed. My Anglo-Canadian grandmother said I looked like a savage. Princess Anne, she reminded me, didn't wear suede jackets, to say nothing of the scissors earrings. I certainly was not her "little princess" and I would never grow up and marry the prince if I didn't shape up and act like a good girl. Every holiday brought a new corrective for my savage condition—a royal calendar, a commemorative teacup. Now, there she was, the other Diana, the one who had been tall and blonde and beautiful, the one who would never be caught dead with-

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out a button, the one who would sooner have died than be chubby; the one who had married the prince. And look what happened to her. Here, once more, I was caught in a drama that had unexpectedly become my own. I felt a shudder, sensed the ghost.

Whose fantasy was this, I kept wondering during the weeks following the death and funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales? Or, rather, how did so many disparate fantasies come to converge on this rather ordinary human being? The disparity between the accident-as-incident and the spectacularity of the worldwide reaction demanded reflection. Diana's ghost, I suspected, had more to tell us about international relations than Madeleine Albright. What was the basis of such seemingly widespread identification? Were we watching a hodge-podge of funerary traditions or was this really a case of multicultural mourning styles coalescing before our eyes? What were the politics of such memorializing energy and the mimetic performances of grief being enacted simultaneously in various parts of the world, the synchronized moments of silence, the condolence-book signings, the floral shrines? In Argentina, a

1-3. Murals by Chico on East Houston Street in New York City: Diana, Elisa, Selena. (Photos by Diana Taylor)



magazine ran a drawing of Santa Evita and Santa Diana sitting side by side in heaven. There she was, "the most beloved lady of our time," gracing the stamps of the Togolaise Republic. The Trinidadian carnival featured a band entitled "Paparazzi Is Hell" as a "Tribute to the Queen of Hearts." And there again, on the memorial walls on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, painted by U.S. artists of color. One mural, by Chico, places her next to other female victims, both Latina: Selena and Elisa, murdered by people close to them (plates 1, 2, 3). Was this a conspiracy mural? On another wall, Diana is a savior, along with Mother Teresa, in "Royalty and Holiness" (plate 4). And in an admonishing mural by A. Charles that covers a synagogue on Houston Street (plate 5), Diana's death is depicted as media overkill (plate 6) and she's placed next to fallen African American icons: Tupac Shakur and Mike Tyson—"Live by the Gun, Die by the Gun" (plate 7). The walls made visible the versions of the saint, victim, and media object circulating in the public sphere. Why

would minority populations care about her, when their own icons—from Evita to Selena to Tupac—had fared so poorly in the media? By what mechanism did Diana’s popularity get construed as “the popular”? The world willingly suspended its disbelief as this most aristocratic of women, married to a prince and future king, the mother of princes and future kings, who socialized with billionaires and celebrities, was transformed before our eyes into the “people’s princess” and “queen of people’s hearts.”

Diana’s life, death, funeral, and afterlife as quasi-sacred relic on display illuminates the way that multiple, intersecting social dramas encapsulate many of the tensions of our time. All sorts of issues—ranging from eating disorders, to unhappy marriages, to AIDS, to the workings of the media, to neocolonialism, to globalism—seem magically incarnated in her image. The tragic emplotment of the events surrounding Diana, and the theatricality of the staging, transmitted internationally, create the illusion of a cohesive, “universal” audience. But is this not perhaps an international spectacle, in the Debordian sense, that “presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society and



as an instrument of unification” as it “concentrates all gazing and all consciousness” (Debord 1983:3)? There is a difference between playing to a global audience and claiming that the drama has a universal appeal. By looking at the nature and staging of these social dramas, I’d like to explore how globalism gets cast as universality.

If we follow Victor Turner’s model of the “social drama” for a minute, a model he claims to be universally valid (1974), we can easily recognize the four phases he identifies: the breach (or social rupture and flouting of the norm); crisis (in which the breach widens and escalates); redressive action

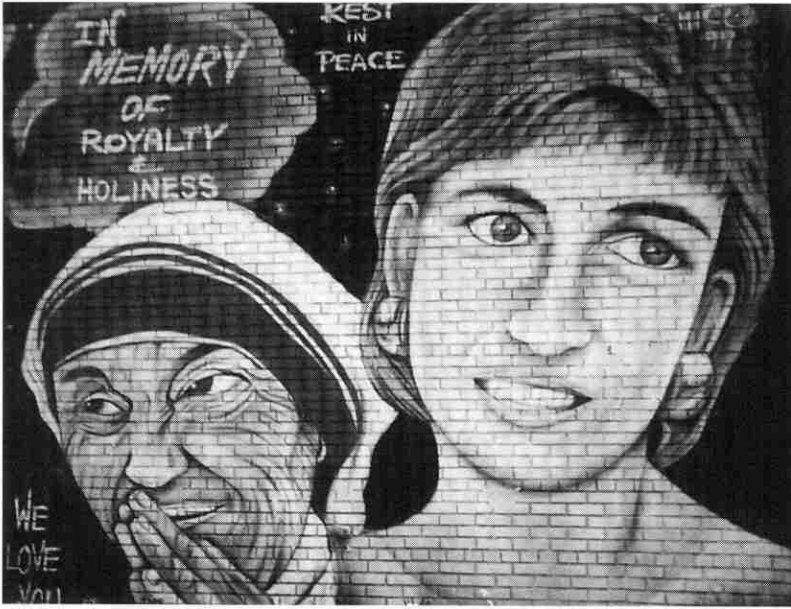
(which seeks to contain the spread of the crisis); and reintegration (the reordering of social norms) (1974:37–42). Each of the four stages unfolds in a different dramatic mode, each rivaling the last in pushing the limits of theatricality.

The breach—her divorce from Charles and her estrangement from the Royal Family—was pure melodrama. Played in the shrill key of interrogatives, declaratives, and denunciations, the drama unfolded in explosive, sporadic cries and whispers. Almost everyone could (and apparently did) tune in to the latest episodes featuring the insensitive husband, the other woman, the disapproving mother-in-law. The boundaries of the “appropriate” were repeatedly emphasized and transgressed. This private drama, so publicly enacted, situated protagonists and spectators alike on, and often over, the very brink of the admissible. I, like millions of others, lived the traumas of the infidelities and the self-destructive behaviors, eavesdropped on conversations, and shared the thrill of revelations and denials. When she wasn’t struggling to hold back the tears, the captions pointed at the evidence of vulnerability. Her pain became the spectacle, played out in a hide-and-seek mode of strategic self-exposure on her part and the unrepentant voyeurism on mine. What made it all so thrilling, of course, was not its originality but its predictability: her story, played out so glamorously in the here and now, was basically the same old story. I, like many, many others had lived it or seen it all before.

Her death—the crisis—was tragic drama. The fateful crash, which I (like those before me) will replay at length later, moved Diana out of the “same-old” and cast her as the “one.” We’re alive and she’s dead; she’d left the anonymity of the “we” to inhabit the singularity of the “she.” She crystallized into the original, quintessential tragic lover, beautiful princess, angel of mercy, and doting mother. Her sudden uniqueness, her tragic magnitude, allowed us to forget for a moment that she was also very much the product of a long history of collective imaginings that have normalized heterosexuality, glorified maternity, fetishized youth and femininity, glamorized whiteness, eroticized imperialism, and promoted a discourse of volunteerism. Live? Or one more “repeat” of the “live”?

The redressive action—the funeral—was a theatrical performance. Following in the tradition of other state funerals, this event was one more repetition, only the latest, but never the first or the last of such spectacles. Eleanor of Castile, apparently, had a sumptuous send-off in 1290. Evita’s funeral in 1952 was a magnificent spectacle—as massive, magnificent, and stately as Diana’s. It was a performance, orchestrated with a beginning, middle, and end. The theatricality emanated from the careful choreographing of color, movement, sound, space, and regalia. Theatricality, commonly thought to be an attribute of theatre, clearly precedes and extends beyond it. Communities without “theatre” (such as non-Western cultures like the Mexica) understood, and were ruled by, theatricality. And issues concerning theatricality lay at the center of many of the tensions between the Queen and the British population. How much or how little theatricality should the country demand in honoring the passing of their Princess?

The theatricality of the event as state spectacle claimed visual power through layering—the addition and augmentation of traditional and nontraditional elements. Diana’s funeral, weighed down in splendor, outdid those that had come before. But repetition was not simply a mimetic return to former displays of pomp and circumstance. Rather, it placed the pomp associated with the past in the service of monumentalizing the present. Each *re-incarnation* gains power through accumulation. Citationality, thus, was put to the service of originality, enhancing the “new,” nontraditional touches, such as Elton John singing his pop hit, “Candle in the Wind”—in itself recalling an earlier death. Yet, the prescribed, twice-behaved nature of funerals also has another, ritual, function. The formal handling of painful or dangerous transi-



4. Chico's mural, "In Memory of Royalty and Holiness" on 11th Street and Avenue A, New York. (Photo by Diana Taylor)

tions, or passings, helps regulate the expenditure of emotion. Funerals have long served to channel and control grief. But this televised funeral, with its insistence on participation, seemed to provoke the very emotions it was designed to channel. The spectators, as much as the casket and the visible Royals, became the spectacle for a global audience brought together, perhaps by grief, but most certainly by television, newspapers, journals, and the web. Unlike these earlier events, the media and communications systems performed the identification they claimed to report, assuring us that the loss, like the Princess, was "ours."

The phase of reintegration, the period of re-ordering social norms, is playing itself out in multiple, less cohesive, less centralized dramas. After the initial phase of virtual participation through frantic memorialization, Diana's ghost has become a site of intense re-negotiating among various communities. Will the status quo ruptured by the breach be restored? Will the monarchy be re-invigorated, or permanently outmoded? Is Diana the new face of Tony Blair's kinder, gentler, more modern England? Does the burial site constructed by her brother emblemize England's "image in the world [as] a low tech 'theme park of royal pageantry'" (Churchill 1998:A17)? Or has she been transformed into a thoroughly non-British relic in a pay-per-view shrine out of Disney? Are the ruptures and divides made visible by her death overcome in this moment of reintegration, or are the divides more starkly visible than before?

Various modalities of expressive culture are made visible through the social drama paradigm outlined by Turner. And he is probably correct in affirming that this four-stage model illuminates all types of social conflict, ranging from office disputes to national conflicts. However, I am less convinced that these dramas play internationally and cross-culturally in any clear-cut way. The "drama" of Diana's death and the "theatricality" of her funeral elide, rather than clarify, the "trauma" of border crossings as specters traverse ethnic or national boundaries. What counts as a "drama" in one context gets demoted to a mere "incident" elsewhere. The Diana specter becomes visible and meaningful as it dances within various scopic, political, and economic repertoires—and vice versa. England's rose occludes Norma Jean as the new candle dancing in the wind. The dance performs more plays of substitution or, in Joseph

Roach's term, surrogation (1996:2)—England's rose crowds out Selena, the Rose of Texas; her funeral outdoes Evita's as the most over-produced funeral of the century for a woman. The specter, the spectacle, and the spectator are all dancing at this funeral. Maybe because it's so hard to get a handle on *specere* (to see) that phantoms, fantasy, and performance have traditionally been placed on the opposite side of the "real" and "historical." The fantasies in play may be linked to so-called universal and eternal anxieties about a glorious life, an unexpected death, and the fall of the great. The iterative and highly stylized nature of this stately display should not suggest that it is not, at the same time, deeply political and historically specific. What conditions allow these fantasies to become visibly incarnated in a woman no one cares much about? Though the specter may come in and out of time, and though performances make visible the conflicts which otherwise remain diffuse, both specters and performances are very "live." "Haunting," Derrida notes, "is historical [...] but not dated" (1994:4). The fantasies converging around the figure of Diana, I'll suggest here, require certain conditions of visibility, and bring various histories, ontologies, and hauntologies of performance into focus.

In *Unmarked*, Peggy Phelan outlines the "ontology of performance," stressing the liveness of the performative event, the *now* in which that performance takes place: "performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representation" (1993:146). An event such as Diana's death and funeral, however, also begs us to look at the flip side of performance's "ontology"—at what Derrida has called its "hauntology." Many cultures are grounded on the notion of a second coming—the Mexica, the Christian, the Jewish, the Marxist, to name a few. The ghost is by definition a repetition, Derrida's *revenant*. This is the moment of post-disappearance, rather than the moment preceding it that Phelan points to. The sumptuousness of the ceremony performs the sacralization of the *remains*—theoretically antithetical to performance. The remains, in this spectacle, take on a life of their own—so much so that one tabloid photo montage has Di looking on at her own funeral from the corner with a bittersweet smile, one more witness to an event that has overtaken her.

The body that we assume lies in the coffin is all that we have to assure us that Diana was "real." It provides the authenticating materiality that sustains the performance of resuscitation. In spirit, she was present at her funeral (as perhaps, inversely, we could argue that she was absent from her life). The shrine housing her remains will continue to guarantee the materiality of the global phenomenon that is "Diana," the massive re-appearance of the *revenant*. Politically and symbolically, we haven't seen the end of her. The caption of a recent photograph of a London newsstand states that "one might be forgiven for imagining that Diana never died last August. The Princess of Wales still keeps the presses roaring" (Hoge 1998:A4). A recent cover of *People Weekly* depicts Diana as active in death as she was in life: "In death as in life, she has raised millions for charity" (1998).

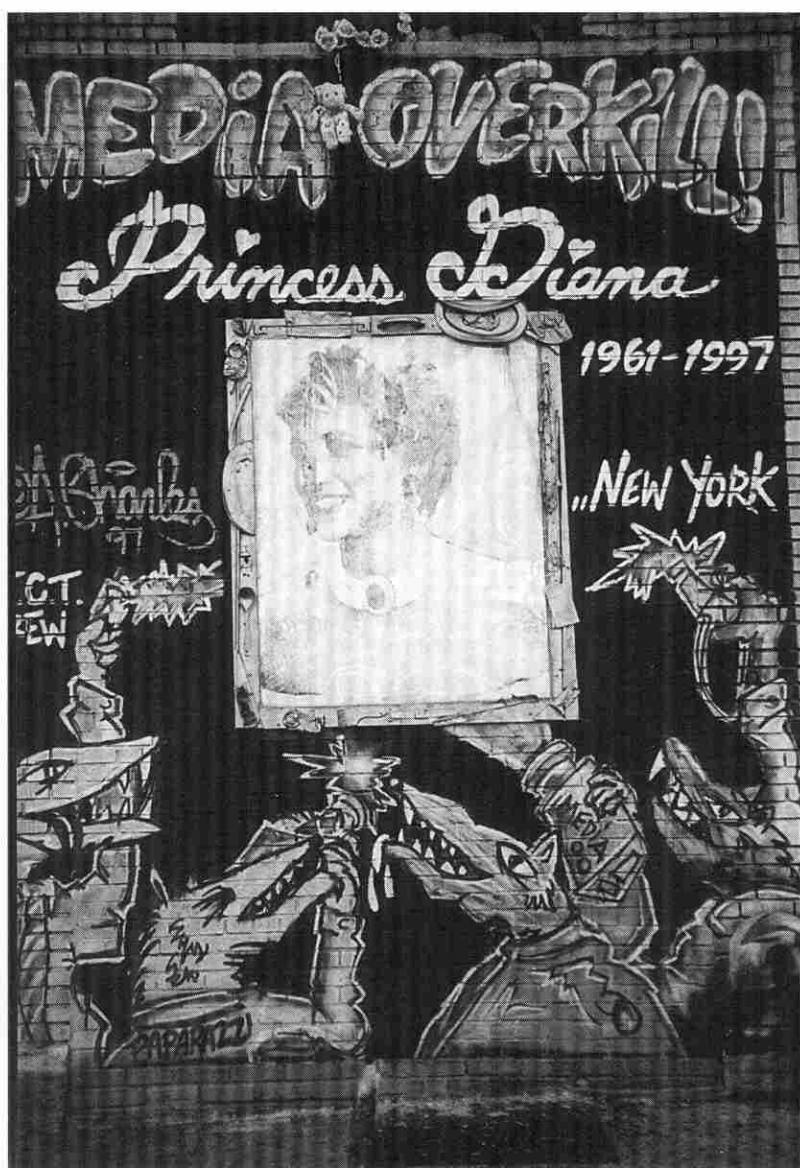
My view of performance rests on the notion of ghosting—that visualization which continues to act politically even as it exceeds the "live." Like Phelan's definition, it hinges on the relationship between visibility and invisibility, or appearance and disappearance, but comes at it from a different angle. For Phelan, the defining feature of performance—that which separates it from all other phenomenon—is that it is "live" and "disappears" without a trace. The way I see it, performance makes visible (for an instant, "live," "now") that which is always already there—the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life. These specters, made manifest through performance, alter future phantoms, future fantasies. Diana may have been the



5-7. Murals on Houston Street and First Avenue. (NYC) by A. Charles: Overkill, Diana, Tupac Shakur. (Photos by Diana Taylor)

product of one way of envisioning royalty, but she has changed the look, style, and scope in which royalty will be performed—and desired—in the future. Her enactment left a trace, as did Evita's. Every woman running for political office in Argentina today wears the obligatory dyed-blond bun and Dior suit. In one sense, of course, the "live" performance eludes the "economy of reproduction," as Phelan puts it (1993:146). But I would argue that its efficacy, whether as art or as politics, stems from the way performances tap into public fantasies and leave a trace, reproducing, and at times, altering cultural repertoires. Performance, then, involves more than an object, more than an accomplishment or a carrying through. It constitutes a (quasi-magical) invocational practice. It provokes emotions it claims only to represent, evokes memories and grief that belong to some other body. It conjures up and makes visible not just the "live" but the powerful army of the always already living. The power of seeing through performance is the recognition that we've seen it all before—the fantasies that shape our sense of self, of community, that organize our scenarios of interaction, conflict, and resolution.

What conditions of visibility are needed to conjure up the ghost? Of all the many potential specters, why do certain ones gain such power? Why Diana and not somebody else? Why, as Michael Taussig asks in *Mimesis and Alterity*, does the spirit (and I would add, the ghost) need embodiment at all (1993:10)? Evita, the most politically powerful woman in the world in the early 1950s, has the world's most expensive corpse. It cost \$200,000 in the early '50s to embalm her, and three wax copies were produced to trick all the would-be body snatchers (plate 8). The copies were so authentic that Dr. Ara removed the tip of her little finger to distinguish her "real" body from them. The original, here as elsewhere, is never as whole as its representation. Her body became the most politically charged fetish of the 20th century (plate 9). The body anchors the "other Eva," the more powerful one, the one whose ghost contin-



ues to dominate Argentine politics (plate 10). Spec-ere, to see, is possible only through a history of spectacles and ghosts. Performance, be it artistic or political, accomplishes a moment of re-visualization. It disappears only to hover; it promises or threatens to re-appear, albeit in another shape or form.

Performance becomes visible, meaningful, within the context of a phantasmagoric repertoire of “repeats.” But there is a double mechanism at work. On the one hand, we see only what we have been conditioned to see—that which we have seen before. So part of the grief we feel surrounding Diana’s death is that she is so familiar to us. She represents the most general, undifferentiated version of the death of the beautiful woman—a trope so powerful, so naturalized, that it underwrites the Western imaginary and seems always to have been there. On the other, the spectacle presents itself as a universal and unifying event. But spectacle, to conjure up Debord for a minute, “is not a

collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images” (1983:4). The spectacle, then, is that which we do *not* see, the invisible that “appears” only through mediation. Diana’s specter unites the spectators in the fantasy of loving and losing a woman no one really knows, even as it hides the social relations among the very people who, theoretically, participate in the fantasy. Diana’s death looks more like one more repetition of the same. Her death (singular and sudden) represents both the instant of her passing (“real,” not-performative) *and* the reappearance of another death: Evita, Selena, Marilyn Monroe, Mother Teresa. As Elisabeth Bronfen argues:

[T]he death of a beautiful woman emerges as a requirement for a preservation of existing cultural norms and values [...] Over her dead body, cultural norms are reconfigured or secured, whether because the sacrifice of the virtuous, innocent woman serves a social critique and transformation or because a sacrifice of the dangerous woman reestablishes an order that was momentarily suspended due to her presence. (1992:181)

This seemingly universal trope elides the politics of cultural transmission. What we don’t see, as the world mourns Diana, is that these women (judged innocent or dangerous, and usually both), form part of profoundly different imaginaries, and the borders of these imaginaries are policed. The specter hides the spectacle. The mourning rituals may be similar; they may even encourage fantasies that they are communicable to different populations. But the politics are untranslatable.

Chicanas and Chicanos, as well as other Latinos, mourned Selena en masse, covered her coffin with thousands of roses, gathered tens of thousands of signatures in commemorative books, declared an official Selena Day, and attempted to inscribe her name and face on everything from websites to memorial walls to Coca-Cola bottles. The similarity of the rituals highlight the lack of empathetic reciprocity; theatricality blinds even as it makes visible. The redressive moment of one social drama (Selena’s funeral) signals the moment of breach in another. A few hours before her funeral, Howard Stern had already shipped her back to Mexico:



Selena? Her music is awful. I don't know what Mexicans are into. If you're going to sing about what's going on in Mexico, what can you say?... You can't grow crops, you got a cardboard house, your 11-year-old daughter is a prostitute [...]. This is music to perform abortions to! (in Arraras 1997:24)

According to Stern, this death proves too lowly to constitute a drama. It's reduced to an incident. No drama, no breach. These non-dramas don't travel. How, then, do some ghosts dance over cultural boundaries while others are stopped, strip searched, and denied entry?

The specter is as visible and powerful as the cultural narratives surrounding them. Stern's "what can you say" relegates Selena to the ignominy of particularism: poverty, deviance, genocide. Stern sets himself up as the "migra" of the imaginary, the border police that ensure that certain identifications don't sneak into dominant culture. There are no fictions of the reciprocity that Walter Benjamin ascribes to translation here, no lip service to communication (1955:72), no invitation to make meaning in this puzzling affair: We don't understand you; What are Mexicans into? Punto. The performance of explicit noncaring performs the breach even as it denies the drama. By refusing to acknowledge a loss, it forecloses the possibility of redressive action and reintegration. Contempt of the mourning rite denies the ghost its afterlife—this is about aborting.

Diana, on the other hand, is invoked in hushed, reverential terms. She is assured an afterlife either as saint, as mother of the future king, or as a fundraiser for charities. Guaranteed a visa, her face crosses borders on stamps, calendars, magazines. Her image serves as the occasion for bringing artists together in the service of disenfranchised communities—even as members of those communities are denied the stage. Yet everyone, it seems, is invited to participate and conjecture—to participate by conjecturing. The staging of her death ricochets between twin poles of singularity and universality—Diana's life and death, though utterly unique and one of a kind, nonetheless sheds light on misery, suffering, and stoicism everywhere. The coverage relished each detail. We know when she had sex last and what she ate for dinner on

8. *Dr. Ara and Evita*.
(Photo from Pagina 12, 22
September 1996; courtesy of
Diana Taylor)



that fateful night! Yet, it shunned particularism, stressing that this death was also about everything and everyone. Immediately, the death was aestheticized as drama and cast in the most powerful and universalizing paradigm available to meaning-making culture: tragedy.

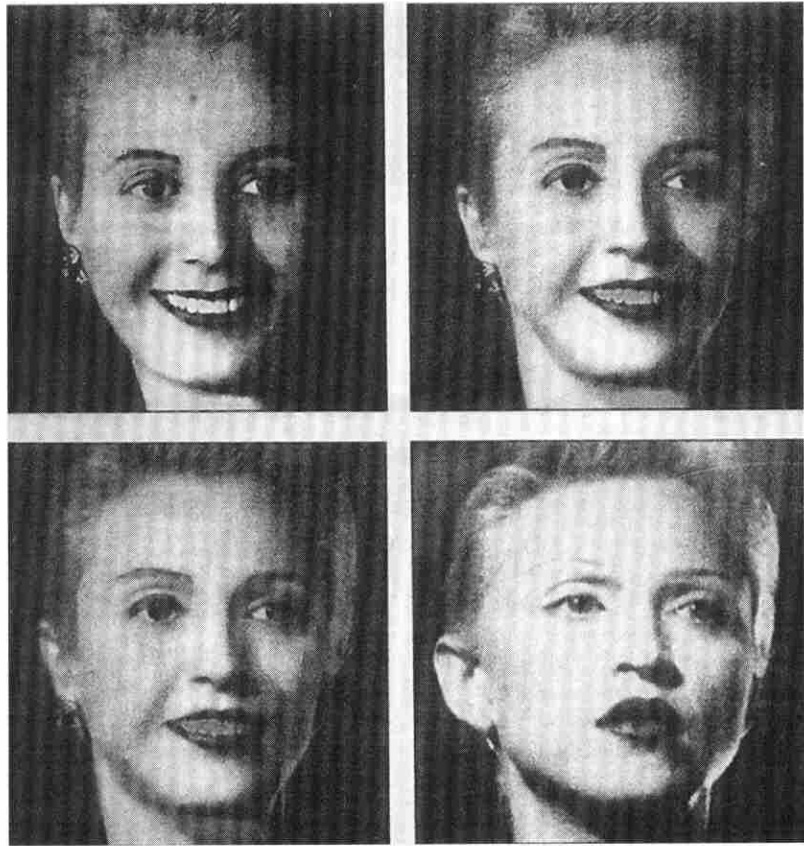
Diana's death and funeral is the clearest example I have ever witnessed of an Aristotelian tragedy of international magnitude, "made sensuously attractive [...and] enacted by the persons themselves" (1973:25), provoking pity and fear in millions of spectators. True, Aristotle insists that tragedy is the "imitation" of an action, rather than the "real" action itself (1973:25). And in a sense, of course, the distinction between "art" and "life" is a vital one. But there is also a way in which life imitates, or is constructed through art, and not the other way around, that allows us to think of life as "performative" in the early Butlerian usage of the term as "a stylized repetition of acts" (1990:270). The "Diana" we knew was a performative construct, the product of stylized acts—royal protocol, fairy tales, designer styles, and Hollywood fantasy—a "real" princess, a royal model as well as a new model for royalty. Her wedding provided the role and inserted her into script shaped by tradition. She temporarily fit the bill (a young, aristocratic, malleable, good-looking virgin) the way an actor might be typecast for a role. What, one wonders, is "real" about this "live" performance?

Diana's death seemed similarly scripted, not by royal protocol this time but by "fate" and the media. Everything about it was "impossibly tragic." It was significant and of Aristotelean "magnitude" due to the nobility and beauty (heroic stature) of the woman, the struggle to shape her own destiny, the tricks to ward off fate (the "real" driver leaving the Ritz as decoy). Diana's *hamartia* (tragic flaw) was so simple, so human according to the media/chorus: she merely wanted to be happy. The *peripeteia*, or reversal of fortune, was abrupt. The inevitability of the *catastrophe* was almost a given, considering the persistent mad chase by the paparazzi and the equally mad attempts at flight. The identification, as always in tragedy, was written into the performance. We don't have to know these great figures in order to weep for them.

And the timing couldn't be more tragically ironic. Just as she was starting her new life, which she had attained against all odds, she died on the very night he gave her "the ring." Not only that, she died with her lover—the latest version of the "star-crossed lovers" as one tabloid called them. Even the names played into the tragedy as "Dodi," meaning "my beloved," and "Di" raced off to their "destiny" (as the accident is repeatedly alluded to by the tabloids). It was already written—not just in Aristotle but in the Song of Songs: "Dodi li va-aní lo" (my beloved is mine and I am his). Others find her death already coded in Genesis. The spectacle of the death elicits the specters of the already there. We're moved because we already know the story—the dark tunnel, the frantic chase, Diana the huntress hunted down. The paparazzi, who dedicated their lives to "doing Di," to banging, blitzing, hosing, ripping, smudging, and whacking her—all words, we learn, for taking pictures rapidly (Lyll 1997:A1)—finally got their prey. The pace of the drama was fast, the tunnel tomblike in its dark enclosure; the plot revolved around sex and love; the reversal from supreme happiness to sudden death was precipitous; the end



9. "La Otra Evita"—cover of Pagina 12's Radar section, 22 September 1996. (Courtesy of Diana Taylor)



10. *Evita fades into Madonna on the cover of La Maga, 31 January 1996.* (Photo courtesy of Diana Taylor)

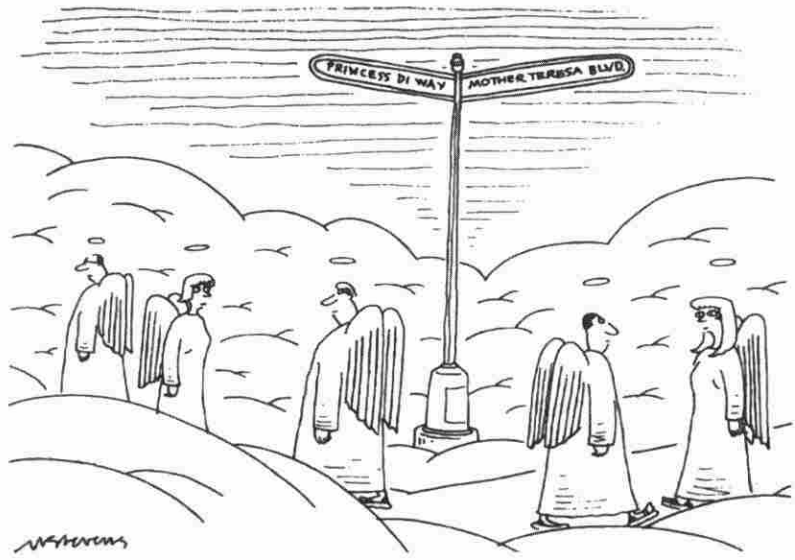
unexpected, shocking. And there was even a whiff of conspiracy about this end to a life that was otherwise so transparent, so devoid of mystery. Was the thought of Diana marrying an Egyptian playboy with a purportedly mafioso background too much for the Royal Family? The innocent woman had little by little become the dangerous woman—the woman whose bulimia, suicide attempts, and infidelities threatened the image of the royal body, and now, its ethnic purity and exclusivity. Or was her accident contrived by the Royal Family to elicit popular support for itself? Project INTERFLORA, too, has seen it all before and warns its audience, “REMEMBER! Awaken!!!!” It reads the “Di thing” as a way of assuring the “continuance of the Monarchy” (1997). The floral tributes are an example of “Flower Power [...] an MI5 mind control program aimed at mass manipulation of the hearts and minds of the people of Britain. [...] These floral tributes are NOT spontaneous!” (1997). Even Aristotle could not have envisioned a more perfectly crafted plot. While one tabloid headline screams out “She didn’t have to die!” (*Globe* 1997a: cover), the way that the media “made sense” of her death stressed the tragic inevitability of “the love she died for” (*Globe* 1997b:22). Anyone who has grown up with *Romeo and Juliet* or *West Side Story*—not to mention Agatha Christie and the Old Testament—might find something to relate to in this drama.

Diana’s death precipitated a process of transformation and resolution on multiple levels. Diana, the dangerous and transgressive woman, “died a lover” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1997). However, she was buried a mother, an innocent victim, a model of humanitarianism, a quasi-saintly do-gooder, and a member of the Royal Family. Once again, her image was transposed from one

economy to another: the fairy-tale princess in the heavy gown of the wedding photos and the formally attired, motherly wife of the early years had already given way to the casual, lightly clad, jet-setting image of her final ones. Her death weighed her down again with the heavy brocade of the Royal colors. She was back in the fold, center stage in the State's (polyvalent) self-imaging. After her wedding to Dodi, a sumptuous state funeral would have been unthinkable. Even as it was, the Queen initially demanded that "Diana's body should not be placed in any of the royal palaces and should be taken to a private mortuary" (Ahmed 1997:1). The body, now saturated with the sacred/abject power of the transgressor, had to be kept away from the "royal." It was "private" now, exiled to the mundane sphere of the ordinary. But the non-Royals wouldn't have it, not for "their" princess. It was the Queen's turn to undergo public shaming. The "people" forced her to perform her emotions, whether she felt them or not. "Show Us You Care," demanded *The Express*; "Your People Are Suffering: SPEAK TO US MA'AM," *The Mirror* shouted from the stands. "Where Is Our Queen? Where Is Her Flag?" *The Sun* wanted to know. "Let the Flag Fly at Half Mast," the *Daily Mail* insisted, giving the Queen her own little lesson in protocol.³

The funeral was equally dramatic, though in a different way. This was imperial "theatre," theoretically brokered by the "people" and elaborately negotiated by all parties. The behind-the-scenes bickering of how much or how little (whether in terms of spectacle, emotion, viewers) was suspended by the splendor of the affair. The lavishness of the funeral was visible evidence that the feuding, like the body, could be laid to rest; now that Diana was dead, rivalries and contentions could be forgotten. The country was once more "united" in tragedy, and the overwhelming sensual experience (the smell of the flowers, the echoing sound of the horse hooves, the trembling bodies of sobbing spectators) rekindled the erotic, though ambivalent, attraction to the State. So the funeral was an act of national conflict and resolution, an act of remembering one Diana by forgetting the others, of celebrating a life and transcending (obscuring) it with claims to a higher purpose and sanctity it never had. The transgressive, casual Diana was now thoroughly snuffed out, in part, by the very people who claimed to love her.

The funeral, as imperial theatre, was the opposite of the death, as drama. As in theatre, a word that refers both to the physical, institutional frame and the intentional action that takes place within its limits, the theatricality of the funeral elided issues of Diana's relationship to the monarchy by normalizing the rite of passage within the demarcations of historical tradition. Tensions disappeared behind the sensuousness, the ceremony of it all. The route, the lines of spectators, the choreography of the funeral party: this was a deliberate staging of the restoration of order, carefully modeled on previous, orderly funerals. It was about the "again," "now," and the "as always" of royal self-representation. It disappears only to reappear. The achingly slow procession signaled the seemingly eternal and stable quality of a royal order now so openly up for grabs. The monarchy on show was very different from the one that waved at the world during the wedding. But the physical staging was also an act of restoration: it bracketed and emplotted the event, the first and last act of the Princess of Wales. After the abrupt crisis caused by the crash, the funeral provided aesthetic closure and emotional resolution. As in ritual, this final stage promised to be deeply conservative. The restitution of the social order, disrupted but probably not profoundly altered by the crisis, meant that Diana once more returned to the official body she tried so hard to elude. As Charles, the two young Princes, Prince Philip, and Earl Spenser followed the coffin on foot, it was clear that the procession was as much about possession and control as about emotion and empathy.



11. © 1998 The New Yorker collection, Frank Cotham from cartoonbank.com. All rights reserved.

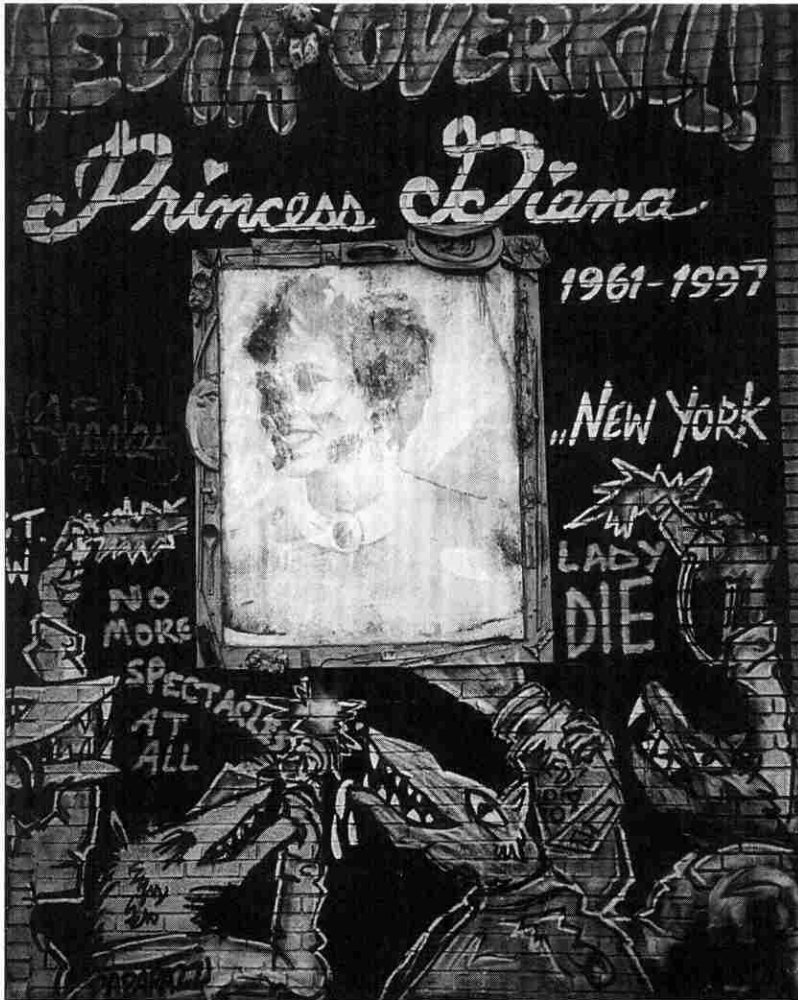
What do “the people” have to do with this imperial theatre, with the struggles between the Queen and the Prince, the Windsors and the Spensers, the Tories and Tony Blair’s Labour Party? *Que vela tenemos nosotros en este entierro?* How do “the people” get constructed? The “staging of the popular,” as Néstor García Canclini argues in *Hybrid Cultures*, “has been a mix of participation and simulacrum” (1995:191). Newspapers around the world ran the same article, extending the reach of the “we” as it extended its audience. The same picture of Diana would appear, often with the same text, reporting on “our” reaction to the devastating turn of events. One website instructed the user to “send your feelings, condolences, or memorial regarding Princess Diana by *dicking here*.” The “Princess Diana fax poll” (set up by the *Post*), asked people to define what she meant to them (*New York Post* 1997:5).

In England, the event was interpreted as a “revolution” (of sorts) because it showed “the people” their new power. The *New York Times* reports the “remarkable confrontation between the British people and Buckingham Palace and [...] an even more remarkable royal retreat” (Hoge 1997:A1). “The people” won their showdown with the Queen. They had demanded the pomp and ceremony of empire self-fashioning. The ritual, traditional to the extreme, could be read as a subversive reversal, for it was the public, not the crown, who ordered it. Now, Tony Blair would have us believe, the old aristocratic ways vanished in one more act of surrogation: The Queen is dead; long live Diana, the Queen of the people’s hearts. Diana was the new face of the new England—stylish, youthful, and compassionate. Hegemony now enjoyed a more casual, photogenic look. Diana, like England, was coming out of a depression. She would be the goodwill ambassador, the kinder, gentler, post-Thatcher face of England. Instead of politics, style. Instead of bitter ideological division, consensus and national unity. “The people” were featured as actors, rather than spectators, in the national drama.

The drama, then, is not just about Diana’s tragic death, her regal funeral, or the current political situation in England. The event, commentators insist, is performative—it is about changing structures of feeling. It changed the way the English performed their emotions—OUT with stiff upper lips and mean-

spirited politics; IN with touching, smiling, and generous public displays of spontaneity. Diana touching AIDS patients, or dying children, signaled a new mode of being (British).

Loss. A ghost is about loss, loss made manifest, the vision of that which is no longer there. But what, I wonder, has been lost? Diana's candles, like Evita's and Mother Teresa's, provided the thousand points of light that corporate governments no longer feel compelled to provide. Lost, too, were both a working-class and feminist agenda. Unlike Evita, who came from a working-class background and wielded unprecedented political power in Argentina, Diana and Mother Teresa had no political aspirations. Evita's popularity, channeled into a formidable populism, exceeded her death to the point that her ghost is still the most politically powerful player in Argentine politics. This world is not ready for another Evita. The female powerhouse of the 1940s becomes the apolitical, unthreatening sophisticate of the 1990s. Evita too is denied a visa. When she was resuscitated in the movie *Evita*, Madonna was a style, a "look." The passionate public of political actors who maintained Evita's power melted into teary-eyed spectators and consumers. Evita's proph-



12. "No More Spectacles"—graffiti-altered mural by A. Charles on Houston Street and First Ave., New York. (Photo by Diana Taylor)

ecy of her *revenge*, “I will return, and I will be millions,” seemed ironically fulfilled. For here she was, incarnated by Madonna of all people. Even the walls in Buenos Aires cried out in protest: “Out Madonna, Evita lives.” Evita lives, but only in Argentina. In the U.S., she is a lipstick, a fascist, a whore, and an oddity. What next, Frank Rich asks? Maybe “Barbie-like Evita dolls laid out in little clear plastic caskets” (1996:A27). The conjuring act accomplishes one more disappearance by repetition—one face for another, one name for another, Evita dissolves in Madonna, while Madonna gains visibility through Evita (plate 10).

So the choices were not, and never could be, between Diana and Evita, but about Diana and Mother Teresa (plate 15). The way of the Empire and the way of the Church each take their ambassadors on the clearly ONE-WAY journey across borders, unsolicited yet living proof that the First World cares. In the language of “love” rather than power, these women claim to relinquish their enormous political, economic, and symbolic capital to the have-nots. As with all over-loaded icons, these women looked so transparent. It’s all so simple, this love talk. One could love Diana and love Mother Teresa and still hate politics—as if the naturalized act of charitable giving had nothing to do with the expansionism of imperialism, Catholicism, and late capitalism.

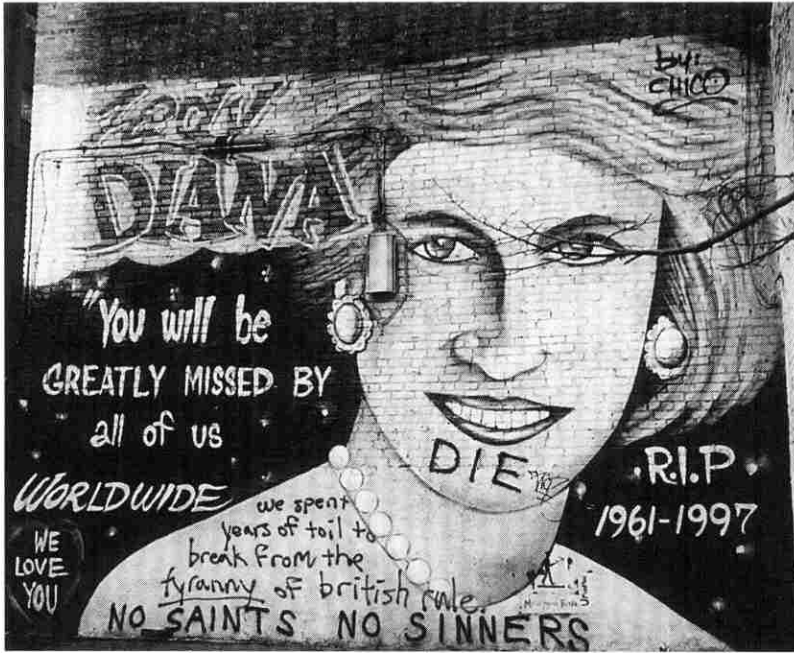
Lost too, perhaps, is the colonial nostalgia for the Royal Love. For viewers in the former colonies, Diana also embodied a love-hate relationship with empire and imperialism, which she simultaneously represented and transcended. Her estrangement from the Royals allowed for the ambiguous positioning, the *nepantla* of Latin American postcolonialism, or the “ambivalence” stemming from what Homi Bhabha refers to as the “double articulation” (the like, but not quite) of the colonial predicament (1994:86). What options do colonials have but to juggle the complicated play of identification/disidentification? She was living proof that the Royal Love had failed. Yet the love of the Royal could continue through “our” love of her. And our love for her led us to the possibility of transcending the racism at the heart of colonialism through her new romantic attachment to Dodi. This dark, sexy, playboy “other,” the ultimate consumer, was the antithesis of Charles—the ultimate, old-fashioned, nerdy “one of them.” It made her, supposedly, “one of us”—one of those left out or betrayed by an atrociously uptight establishment. OK, Dodi was a billionaire jet-setter—maybe not quite one of us. And in our heart of hearts we wonder if they would have been happy; but the beauty of fairy tales depends precisely on the suddenness and untimeliness of their endings.

In another way, of course, Diana’s death was about the loss of another form of materiality. Her image gave a “universal” face to the disembodied globalism facilitated by satellites and the worldwide web. A product of intercommunication systems, the “Diana” we saw was never and always “live.” Never “live” because, as one publication put it, “No Pix, No Di” (Frankel 1997:53). Her liveness was a product of mediation. Susan Stewart, in *TV Guide*, wrote:

I know for a fact that Diana existed apart from television: I once shook her hand. It was exciting—she was already an international icon—but almost meaningless. All I remember is a blur of blond hair, a purr of a greeting. There are at least a dozen film clips of Diana more vivid in my mind than our actual off-screen meeting. (1997:24)

Her physical existence, even redundant in life, served merely to authenticate her more complete, “real,” and ubiquitous image, which continues to defy the limits of space and time.

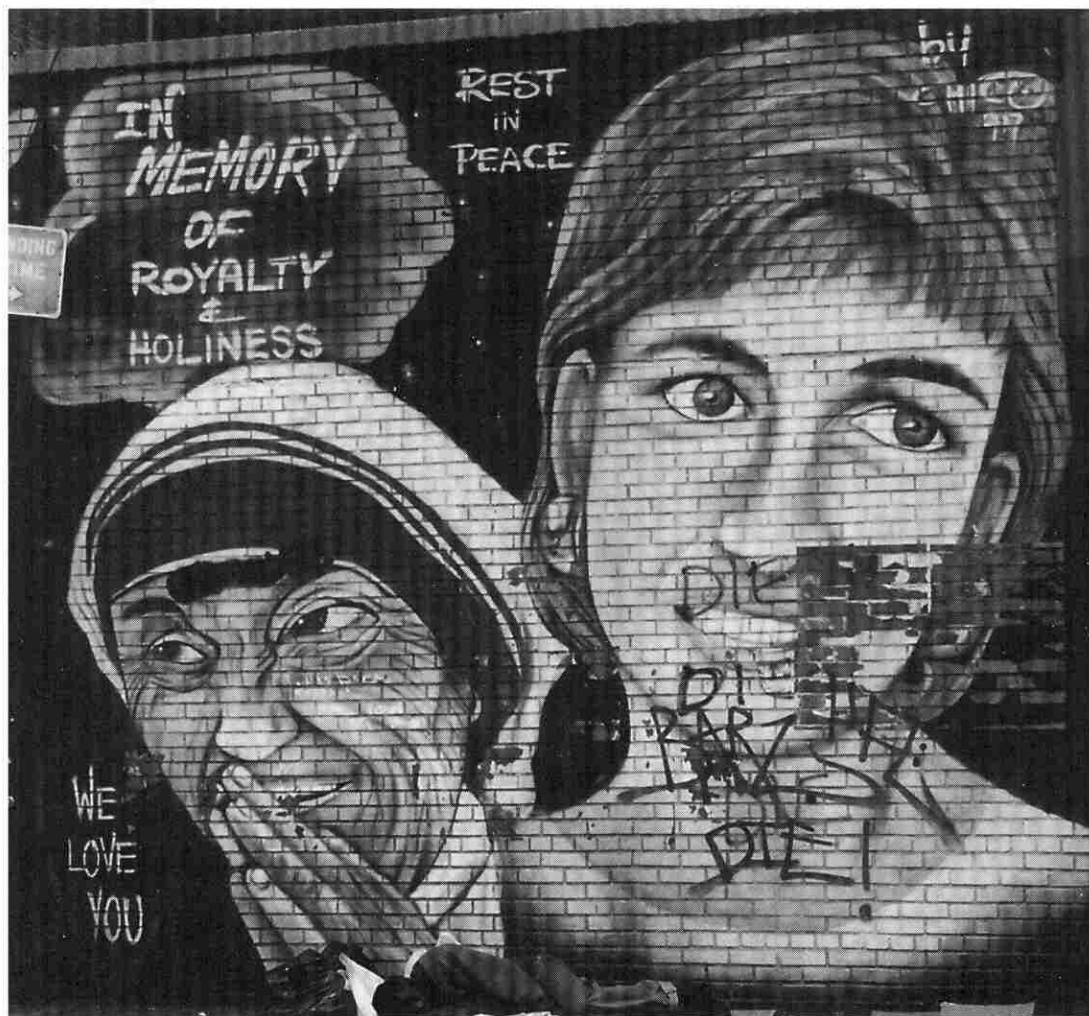
Thus, she was never (but is always) “live” and “here” everywhere, haunting our present. A virtual Di, her image will outlive her death—the signifier



13. "No Saints, No Sinners" graffiti on the Diana mural by Chico. East Houston Street, New York. (Photo by Diana Taylor)

has no need of the signified, except as authenticating remains. She existed; that's enough to hang our dramas on. The web asks us to light a candle for her, expanding the simulacrum of participation. She is a fetish, a sacred image whose meaning emanates not from within but is assigned to it from without. As a fetish (whether in psychoanalytic terms or as commodity fetishism), her success stems both from the facility with which anxieties and fears are displaced onto her and the process of disavowal whereby the public can admire the image while ignoring the violence that contributed to its making. Her vulnerability, unhappiness, and physical distress only contributed to her popularity, for as someone noted, the unhappier she was, the better she looked. Since her death, a new (and improved) generation of commodities circulate with her image on them—commemorative stamps, plates, and dolls. The music and books she's inspired have reached the top of the charts and grossed millions of dollars. Her name is invoked in the war against drunken-driving, land mines, AIDS, bulimia, and other assorted social ills. A new army of designers will take charge of dressing and tutoring the ghost. Sightings have already been reported. New performances, political, artistic, or entrepreneurial, will rise out of these archival remains. Other women will dance in that space of impossibility made visible by her performance.

But after the orgy of promiscuous identification has passed, do communities feel the abandonment and exploitation of the one-night stand? When we look in that colonial mirror, does her reflection look back at us, or do we see ourselves—complete with pigtails and popped buttons. The Latino murals to "Princess Di" now have "Die" written all over them. The murals, as spaces of communal, public mourning, show signs of ongoing debate. Someone has written "NO MORE SPECTACLES AT ALL, LADY DIE" in yellow paint on the admonishing mural that had warned about "media overkill" (plate 12). The mural that had declared its love for Diana, announcing that she would be missed worldwide, now has a consciously postcolonial message on it: "We spent years of toil to break from the tyranny of British rule. NO SAINTS,



14. "Die, Die, Die" on the "In Memory of Royalty and Holiness" mural by Chico. (Photo by Diana Taylor)

NO SINNERS" (plate 13). The Holiness and Royalty mural featuring Diana and Mother Teresa not only screams "DIE! DIE! DIE!" but participates in another form of circulation (plate 14). This photograph shows more than the displaced images of transnational globalism. It captures, too, the flip side of that same economy that leaves people out in the cold—the displaced people, poverty, and homelessness that volunteerism does not dissipate on the Lower East Side.

Diana's ghost keeps dancing, tracing the convergence of preexisting phantoms and the latest crisis—always a re-writing, an updating, a making actual, of something that is already. Diana's death and funeral constitute both a first and a repetition, a ghosting, a performative re-appearance. "The people" are not only the consumers, but also the constructed of this death. The spectacle of the specter makes the spectator. Instead of mourning, we consume grief—the recipients, not the agents, of an emotion that is not our own. "The people" light imaginary candles for Diana on the web in a virtual act of identification. The event has staged the need for participation. Is it so strange that

we all want to respond in our own way in a drama we know full well is not our own? If we must engage, as it seems we must, can we at least establish the terms of engagement? Maybe it's not so odd that we, like the artists of the memorial walls, may wish to insert our own version of events by placing her next to our own victims, next to other icons of caring, knowing full well that the gesture will never be reciprocated. But as always, there is the ambivalent push-pull of the imperial fantasy. The "DI" erupts in "DIE." These rituals of passing insist that we forget that we don't belong, even as we remember.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper will be published in *Mourning Diana* (Kerr and Steinberg, forthcoming).
2. All front-page headlines from September 1997.

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