

EDITORIAL

*Jeremy Gilbert, David Glover, Cora Kaplan,
Jenny Bourne Taylor, Wendy Wheeler*

Who does not remember the TV footage of the hippy, demonstrating outside the Pentagon at the height of the Vietnam war, placing a flower-stem down the rifle-butt of a National Guardsman? From the flower-power of the 1960s - a single stem - to the acres and acres of flowers outside Kensington Palace which grew in the week following the death of Princess Diana, flowers have been used to mark not only memorials, but also something like a resistance to the violent atomisations of the modern world.

In Britain in the 1980s, just when hyper-individualism and *laissez faire* were getting into their stride, flowers began to appear at roadsides where some-one had died, then outside football grounds where a tragedy had occurred, then, later, outside the school at Dunblane, and finally, in their millions, at 'Diana shrines' up and down the nation. Initially, it all seemed very un-British; but, whatever it was, it caught on - evidently giving expression to something which needed to be said.

The association between the life of a flower and the life of a man is old. It appears in the words of the Burial Service: 'Man groweth up, and is cut down like a flower'. And, as in D.H. Lawrence's 'The Odour of Chrysanthemums', the flowers which mark all our important human events - birth, marriage, death - mark the commonality, rather than the individuality, of our experience. Indeed, one of the most significant things about the death of Princess Diana - something commented upon both by professional observers and ordinary witnesses alike - was, firstly, *surprise* at its effect, and, secondly, surprise at the *commonality* of the affect, which crossed all sorts of boundaries of class, race, gender, age, and political and intellectual inclination. Nor was this any crowd-whipped group sentiment; the crowds *followed* the affect. They might have swelled it, but they didn't initiate it. This strange thing alone - the surprising commonality - is sufficient to make 'the Diana case' worthy of contemplation. What was it about the life and the death that made it resonate in such an extraordinary way across all the usual divides?

This death performed some serious cultural *work*: it *moved* things - whether bodies, feelings, or ideas. What this work was, what it made visible, and what it allowed to be said, or at least staged, is the subject of this special 'Diana and Democracy' issue of *New Formations*. In it, contributors find that the death of Diana proved to be an event through which an extraordinarily diverse number of contemporary concerns were able to meet and to be articulated. In the end, perhaps it is in the *meeting* of different

concerns that the most important 'message' of Diana's death lies. The importance of the 'Diana effect' lies in the ways in which it drew together a host of different concerns - about celebrity, about time, loss and mourning, about families, communication and suspicion, about old ways and new ones, and about kind hearts, commodities and coronets - into one, however complex, discursive space. One of the most important things demonstrated by the seas of flowers and people is the will to make big use of share-able affective spaces - in which people are lost for words - in order that share-able stories might eventually emerge out of, and about, them.

In this issue, a number of these, possibly common, concerns are raised. In 'The Cult of Celebrity' Jacqueline Rose explores the complex circulation of emotion, always both public and private, that is the key both to the drama of display and the passions that drive its performers, consumers, and analysts. Suggestively linking the recent exposure of Mary Bell with the response to the death of Diana, Rose uncovers the paradoxes that compose celebrity, highlighting the shame, secrecy and violence that is its necessary underside.

Ruth Richardson's essay on British funerary culture, its history and changing etiquettes, suggests the extent to which the Court - whose 'job' is supposedly to organise the symbolic life of the country around the figure of the monarch - has utterly and completely lost touch with the still vital symbolic life of the society over which it, however tenuously, still presides. Where the Court response was a 'shambles', the public, with greater generosity, stepped in. Richardson argues that from an initial response of pity, the continued build-up of floral tributes over the following week, particularly outside Diana's home at Kensington Palace, was an expression both of the public's rebuke to the Court, and also of sympathy with Diana's outcast state signified by the Court's meagre response. At the 'depleted' funeral, 'the public watched, in the streets, bleakly, silently, mitigating the parsimony of the show with their presence and with their flowers'. One implication to be drawn from Richardson's discussion is the political folly of underestimating the power of human symbolic needs - particularly in the realm of just acts. From her discussion we can understand the similarity of feeling-tone and will which underlies the apparently different events of Diana's death and the Labour landslide of 1997.

Diana's death and its aftermath raised crucial questions about the nature of monarchy and the concept of democracy - about how 'the people' are defined within modern Britain, about the nature of the constitution, the power of 'mass' authority and the nature of legitimacy and popular consent. These questions are explored by Anthony Barnett and Carol Watts, who each see the collective response to the funeral as marking a crucial shift in popular sensibility - becoming both a focus for a new sense of Britain as a modern nation, and as marking its limits. Each see significant connections between that intense moment of collective mourning and the Labour landslide of May 1st. Both emphasise that while Diana's appeal, in life and

death, lay in her identification with the stigmatised and excluded, it stood, too, for an alluring form of success - ambassador for a new Britain, glamorous, 'can do', energetic.

Carol Watts, drawing on the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, explores how the community of mourners became synonymous with the nation at the moment of the funeral. She argues that the articulation of a Blairite conception of the national-popular coalesced around the multivalent figure of Diana herself - as person, as symbol, and as discourse - becoming the locus of a sense of common identity in a way which at once elaborated the symbolic power of the monarchy, and broke with it by producing a very different kind of cult of celebrity. Diana represented the legitimation of a new kind of affective public sphere that included both the 'feminisation' of work, and the 'work' of emotional community, while at the same time drawing it into the sphere of 'the personal' in ways which left the distinctions between public and private intact.

Anthony Barnett, in conversation with Jenny Bourne Taylor, reconsiders, a year on, the arguments made in his book *This Time: Our Constitutional Revolution* (written in the immediate aftermath of the funeral). There, he argued that the death signalled a radical shift in popular notions of legitimacy, an end of deference and a demystification of the monarchy - albeit through the sanctification of Diana - that was in tune with new Labour's early proposals for radical constitutional reform. Here he notes that, in playing a key role in the re-legitimation of the monarchy in the aftermath of the funeral, new Labour may have missed its moment in consolidating this important shift in popular consciousness. Nevertheless, Barnett argues, a crucial transformation *has* taken place, even if it is still expressed within a royalist framework. It seems possible that Blair's government is either oblivious to, or conservatively wishes to ignore, the implications of this change.

In his essay on the importance of understanding modernity in terms of the mediation of different temporalities, Mark Gibson suggests that Diana, or the Diana effect, was able to occupy, and thus imaginatively to mobilise, the under-developed need to think about the difficulties we have with the 'longue durée' of organic developments versus the more pressing desire for radically new forms quickly capable of expressing 'being modern'. Gibson discusses the public mourning for Diana in terms of the radical disjuncture between the speed at which media events are normally produced and disseminated and the extent to which coverage was forced, during the week following her death, to slow down to more-or-less 'real' time. Gibson asks us to consider what the wider philosophical and political implications of this observation might be, and whether 'speed' and 'slowness' might not be key terms for a re-invigoration of democratic dialogue.

Nick Couldry's essay deals with the ways in which Princess Diana's death challenged the normal relations between the media and their audiences, creating a temporary, yet ultimately containable, 'symbolic reversal' in the

terms of this balance of power. He argues that the sense of excess that popular practices of mourning engendered was inseparable from the profound structural inequality of media access, creating a disturbance within a densely organised cultural field whose hold could never wholly be displaced.

Heather Nunn compares public representations of Princess Diana and Margaret Thatcher, and the ways in which they figured the 'feminisation' of contemporary politics. She looks at how these two figures mediated specific modern experiences of violence and the sacred, and at the ways in which they were brought together within political commentary at a specific conjuncture to secure Tony Blair's credentials as 'the people's Prime Minister'.

Lisa Blackman focuses on the status of 'ordinariness' in the discursive construction of 'Diana'. In particular, Blackman looks at the ways in which Diana's reported personal suffering, and her relationship to it, were taken both as indicative of her own 'ordinariness' and as exemplary of contemporary feminine suffering and of effective strategies for dealing with it.

Clare Birchall examines some of the conspiracy theories that emerged, circulated primarily over the Internet, in the wake of Diana's death. Birchall asks us to consider what these theories - and our reactions to them - tell us about the effective functioning of conspiracy theories in general, and also asks us to think about the nature of the discursive hierarchies into which they are inserted. As Birchall demonstrates, conspiracy theories emerge precisely because 'official' narratives cannot achieve closure.

Finally, Jude Davies undertakes a detailed semiotic analysis of 'Diana' as a discursive phenomenon, articulated at the intersection of discourses on royalty and femininity, class and gender. In the process, Davies excavates the precise mechanics of the production of that very specific concept: Diana, the 'people's princess'.