

*She was in the damaged vehicle like the statue of a goddess inside a shrine consecrated in the blood of a faithful youth.*

— JG Ballard, *Crash* (1973)

It is Wednesday 29 July 1981, and England is getting married.

From St Paul's Cathedral to the outskirts of Buckingham Palace, the jubilant crowds exult. Two million of them have been gathering, sometimes for days. But it is in front of the screens that another scene is played out, 750 million TV viewers eager to participate in the media delirium are glued to their sets. Making it one of the most watched television events in the world to this day.

The wedding saw the marriage of Prince Charles, pretender to the throne, and Diana Frances Spencer, daughter of Viscount Althorp. They have been together for three years, covered by the press and public opinion, and the Queen has endorsed the romance, a perfect marketing coup by Albion's chief puppeteer.

On this sunny Wednesday, onlookers dressed in the colours of the Union Jack are crowded around the edges of the barriers and security cordons. The hotdogs fill them up, and, as usual, the grey beer; correlative to the street hysteria among the citizens of the crown. All generations are present. Red, blue and white in a compensated dolly of a new information era that is slowly sliding into other times without any railguards.

Media and politics in the crash of the century.

tina, there is no alternative, is the slogan that vomits in the faces of the race riots in Brixton and elsewhere. 1981 is Margaret Thatcher humiliating the striking English proletariat and cynically taunting IRA. It is the conservative, anti-communist iron fist for an England plagued by unemployment and racism. It is anarchy in the UK.

This New Age fairy tale for the disillusioned comes at the right time, in a distinguished carnival doped with scopic amphetamines. Aristo-mediatically, Diana Spencer is now Lady Di. An ideal effervescent pill for people with permanent hangovers. Bread and circuses is the axiom. At just 20 years old, the Princess of Wales will be the perfect mechanical bride. Picturesque enough to be projected immediately into the media stratosphere. She arrives as a superstar, and her drift into the image field will not cease, until her shocking death 16 years later. From Murdoch's Sun to Netflix, she will trust ad vitam tabloids and screens all over the world.

Not dead, but already a glossy zombie, she moved from magazines to sensationalist shows. If the media were her church, the paparazzi were her priests, stalking her day and night wherever she went. The Diana franchise is a goldmine. An inexhaustible source of emotions that can be sold and hidden away to the highest bidder.

So this wedding is the perfect McLuhanesque event. The media becomes the message, the popular success of this alliance as a prelude to the collusion of public relations and mass communication. Her brother Charles will say at her funeral: «...that of all the ironies about Diana, perhaps the greatest was this - a girl named after the ancient goddess of the hunt was, after all, the most hunted person of the modern era»

In June 1982, the birth of her first son, William, Duke of Cambridge, concluded the Falklands War in the news, a conflict that was also exemplary in its manipulation of images in the eyes of the public. In 1987, she shook hands with an AIDS patient, a first for a public figure.

Her divorce from Charles ironically brought her back to the people, and by losing her position she became a pop princess, hostage and accomplice to flashbulbs and photographers. It was impossible for her to leave the limelight. In 1997, during an awareness campaign on the issue of minefields in Angola, she crossed one. The international treaty will be signed later that year.

In this skilfully orchestrated mediagraphy, the cross-sectional princess pierces her era. When she was young, she dreamed of being a dancer, and here she is at the heart of the information broom. Between charity events, royal rumours and heartbreak, she choreographed her life for all to see. Her final ball was on the night of 30-31 August 1997 under the Alma bridge in Paris, in the company of her lover, Dodi-Al-Fayed, with whom she had posed a few days earlier. In a morbid irony, it was chased by the paparazzi that their car hit the thirteenth pillar of the tunnel.

Therefore, it can only be a cabal. Her Majesty's services had studied this modus operandi, the Duke of Edinburgh had planned the assassination, or Mossad... Whatever the case, according to Dodi's father, and many others, the assassination theory prevails.

The conspiracy has never ceased to be a theory, here or elsewhere.

What is certain, but equally theoretical, is that it embodies the end of modernity. Conclusion of the sequence plan of a life in the spotlight, the accident as the culmination of the high-speed meeting of aesthetics and politics, of reality and fiction. His death comes as a symptomatic event of a time that no longer hesitates to make a spectacle of death. From the royal carriage to the Mercedes S280 (W140) the avenue was marked out. From the Palace to the pavement, from the bridal parade to the funeral procession, the script was perfectly written. Until it was executed. The media will outlive the message.

As proof, her funeral was watched by an estimated 2 billion people worldwide, making it the most watched royal event of all time on live television.

And perhaps Lady Diana, with her last breath, saw herself as infinite in the reflection of the crumpled car body. Perhaps in a mixture of diamonds and safety glass, she saw her final show. Made of crackling cameras and ambulance sirens, crushed bones, clotted blood and shit. Perhaps then, in the wreckage of the sedan's windscreen, she saw her silhouette merging with that of the voyeurs who had been chasing her for years, finally fulfilling her ultimate fantasy. Even today, she still floods popular culture.

Then, the close interweaving of sex and death, of the creepy and the intimate, will intertwine in countless fictions made of blurred realities. In the fusion of flesh and metal, realpolitik and science fiction become real.

If there is a conspiracy, is it that of reality against history, of the dominant against the dominated, or more pragmatically, of humanity against itself?

the show must go off

## **Lady Diana**

1981, Londres (Royaume-Uni)

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