Bearing Witness - Between The Professional and the Personal: An Interview With Daniel Dayan

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Daniel Dayan is well known for his research into the 'public sphere'. His recent work has distinguished 'public' and 'audience', detailed the conditions for their development (Dayan, 2005), and discussed the ethical dimension of contemporary mediated public engagement through a critical review of Roger Silverstone's concept of the 'mediapolis' (Dayan, 2007). Dayan has defined publics by their (self-) recognition as such, their collective 'commitment' to a stand, as well as their construction around a medium (such as television), an issue, and/or a 'media event' (Dayan, 2001).

Dayan is most famous for co-pioneering and developing, with Elihu Katz, a seminal work on 'media events' (Dayan & Katz, 1992). In this interview he considers the applicability of this concept to different cultural contexts, beyond the 'ceremonial' events studied in his 1992 book, and the Beijing Olympics of his 2008 book (Price & Dayan, 2008). He also provides an overview of the concept as it has developed from its conception to its contemporary relevance (for example, terrorist attacks).

Dayan's article on terrorism, the second intifada and the media (Dayan, 2002a) is one of many examples of his sustained criticism of new forms of anti-Semitism (Dayan, 2002b). Expressing concern for the forms of anti-Israelism that are no longer rational but have become a 'passion' (as put by Dutch political scientist Abram de Swaan) Dayan notes that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict narrative has generated an updated anti-Semitic vocabulary and created original forms of 'Judeophobia'.

While negotiation between the professional and the personal is visible in previous academic (Dayan, 2002a) and journalistic interviews, it may be significant to those familiar with Dayan's work that he has recently appeared as an expert witness in a court case addressing the validity of images in news broadcasts.[1] This first-hand experience of being a legal witness may provide greater context to understanding the significance of theoretical notions of 'witnessing' in his work and teaching (see for example his latest course 'Media, Performance and Visibility: Witnessing, Monstration, Reaction').

In this interview, Dayan discusses his professional and personal influences and interests, and how they have shaped his 'informed subjectivity' as a 'witness [with] a toolbox' (Dayan, 2002a, p. 82). The PLATFORM editorial team thanks him for his approachability and for kindly sharing his insight and experience.

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Mauss (Marcel Mauss Institute), Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences), Paris. He is Visiting Professor (Fall 2009) at The New School for Social Research, New York. In 2005, Dayan was a resident fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Hebrew University in Jerusalem; and an Annenberg Scholar at the University of Pennsylvania. Dayan has been a professor at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Sciences Po), Paris; and the University of Oslo; and has also taught at Stanford University and University of Paris II. In 2006, he gave the 'freedom of speech' lectures at the University of Bergen, and from 2000-2004, he participated in the European Science Foundation Research Program 'Changing Media, Changing Europe'. Dayan holds a PhD in Aesthetics, supervised by the French semiotician Roland Barthes at Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, as well as degrees in Anthropology, Comparative Literature, Semiotics and Film Studies from Stanford University, La Sorbonne and Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.

PLATFORM: Your work has been conducted across a number of disciplines such as philosophy (e.g. aesthetics, hermeneutics); anthropology (e.g. the anthropology of ceremony); television/ film studies; and political sociology (e.g. the sociology of terrorism). How did these interests develop, and can a consistent theme be detected across them?

Daniel Dayan: I was a student in France during the sixties. Embarking on a theoretical study of film or media looked then like an incongruous idea. Of course there were studies on media and film (Bazin, Cohen-Séat, Metz, Friedman, Morin) but some of these were not academic, and most ignored each other. The various fields I studied – which also included comparative literature – offered me the possibility of addressing what became a respectable field only much later.

As a student at the Sorbonne and at Stanford, I sat in many classes and took only the courses that I found inspiring, whether or not they were in the same department or part of the same curriculum. I studied with Levi-Strauss, Leroi-Gourhan, Jean Rouch, Roger Bastide, Albert Memmi (anthropology), René Etiemble (comparative literature), André Martinet (linguistics), Roland Barthes (semiotics, aesthetics). Unfortunately, and despite his invitation, I never studied with Erwin Goffmann, whose thinking influenced me throughout my career.

Many of my teachers were not part of the Sorbonne, but taught at L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. This school could be compared to the London School of Economics (LSE) or to New York's New School for Social Research. It was home to the historical school Les Annales. It was also the cradle of structuralism (Levi Strauss) and post structuralism (Barthes, Derrida). I decided to take my PhD there. In a way, the range of disciplines I chose to study was an 'assemblage' that became 'territorialised' only much later. 'Cultural studies' would offer almost the same mix of disciplines: semiotics, sociology, anthropology, film theory, television studies, reception theory. But as John Corner put it, Cultural Studies were built around a political nexus: investigating the 'popular'.

Political sociology was not one of my initial interests. My interest for terrorism stemmed from reasons that were only in part political. I was astonished at the disinterest of media scholars in terrorism. Later I became equally amazed at the astounding silence of most visual semioticians during the controversies surrounding the 'Mohammed cartoons'. Was the content of such images self-evident? What was the point of being an image expert if you had nothing to say?

Terrorism originally interested me because it was a new and proliferating television genre, a genre in which the role of the media seemed at least as important as that of the violent actions they reported. Journalists and terrorists were inextricably imbricated. Their paradoxical, often

hostile dependence on each other led me to think of terrorism as a new type of 'media events'. My interest in terrorism also stemmed from two other reasons.

I was acutely aware of the fact that the conceptual apparatus through which we describe warfare was anachronistic: most contemporary conflicts were reported through inaccurate narratives. The semiotics of wars used to involve symmetry, reciprocity, neatly differentiated roles. Now, as Arjun Appadurai has shown, large vertebrates were fighting protozoa. Mosquitoes were fighting elephants and winning the battles. Asymmetry was not some accidental feature. It had become the rule. Also, roles changed. One no longer had to be either a civilian or a soldier. Except in the world of legal fiction, you could be both. It was a matter of time-budgeting. Following French sociologist Gerard Rabinovitch, I further noted that most narratives of wars focused on two main sets of actors: peoples and nation-states, civil societies and leviathans. Any significant protagonist in a conflict had to be either one or the other. There was no third possibility. Yet, Rabinovitch insisted, such a binary model was misleading. It ignored the existence of a third protagonist, a protagonist that was neither the state nor civil society. This actor, a key actor of modern warfare, consisted of mafias, cartels, armed groups, states within the state, and international organisations. Sometimes this third actor could be collapsed with civil society. At other moments it conquered, replaced or confiscated the state. Yet this third actor could lead an independent and relatively stable existence over decades and thus could be said to be neither state nor civil society. But such an existence was not validated by a status or a name. My questions then concerned the narrative challenges encountered by journalism. How do you deal with asymmetrical situations when the very words you use imply symmetry? How do you deal with triadic situations, when the narrative you use is that of a dyad?

My second curiosity concerned the transformation undergone by the discourse on terrorism. Over one century, from a discourse of condemnation (Conrad, Dostoievsky) it turned into a discourse of acquiescence, or (sometimes explicit) admiration (John Adams' opera 'The death of Klinghoffer', Karl Heinz Stockhausen's or Jean Baudrillard's commentaries on 9/11). At the end of the 19th century, terrorism was essentially despicable. At the beginning of the 21st, it was largely condoned. Was it a matter of identity (new sets of actors and victims)? Was it a matter of pity, of heightened sensitivity to the suffering of the human groups which terrorists claimed to represent, in line with Boltanski's description of 'distant suffering'?

Influenced by Boltanski, I tried to describe some of the argumentative topoi through which 'distant terrorism' was addressed in the 21st century, once earlier topoi such as revulsion, horror, accusations of inhumanity had been rejected. (1) The topos of 'anti-anti' did not directly celebrate terrorism, but attacked those who attack it. It often took a legalist form. (2) The topos of 'the noble bandit' took terrorists out of context, and turned them into an object of Western post-adolescent rêverie. (3) The topos of 'performative fear' stated that there is no such empirical reality as terrorism. Terrorism is in the eye of the beholder. Our fears had invented it. (4) Finally the topos of 'tu quoque' dissolved the reality of terrorism by stating that everyone partakes in terrorism, and in particular, the states that combat it, and the individuals who are its ostensible victims. Actual terrorists became lost in the immense crowd of 'real' terrorists. Terrorism had become either condoned or invisible. Yet, terrorism by definition is an exercise in visibility. How could it be at once visible and invisible? And for whom?

P: You are especially distinguished by your co-pioneering work (with Elihu Katz) on 'media events', a concept first articulated in *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Dayan & Katz, I992) and elaborated in subsequent publications (Price & Dayan, 2008; Dayan, 2002a; Dayan & Katz, 1995). Will you provide a critical review of the concept of 'media events', as it

has been used by you, your colleagues and others who have been influenced by it, situating it in relation to both academic and non-academic debates?

DD: You are asking me to turn into an intellectual historian. Let me try.

By focusing on television's symbolic events, Elihu Katz and myself became part of a tradition that already included Gladys and Kurt Lang, Philip Elliott, Edward Shils, Daniel Boorstin. This tradition grew to include our own work and that of our 'traveling companions', commentators and critics, including Jeff Alexander, James Carey, Nick Couldry, Peter Csigo, Daniel Hallin, Michael Schudson, Paddy Scannell.

Let me first point to how we used the concept, by mentioning Scannell's useful distinction between mere 'happenings', (things that happen and belong in the realm of news) and actual 'events', situations that are endowed with a symbolic dimension. Many happenings become events, but they do so in retrospect. Their symbolic dimension emerges weeks, years or centuries after the fact. But there are situations whose symbolic dimension is simultaneous to the event. The 'event' is enacted and received as symbolic. It is symbolic from the start. When it acquires a certain size and is performed on television, it is what we call 'media event'.

An event that manages to be already symbolic at the moment it occurs does not just happen. Such an event is willed into being. It may already belong in a repertoire of symbolic forms and be described as a 'ritual'. It can also be seen as an expressive venue for those who perform it, and defined as an 'expressive event'. In fact, the same situation can be legitimately addressed in either way. Choosing one or the other description is a matter of research strategy. By stressing the ritual dimension, you tend to narrow your corpus but get a better focus on the symbolic power of gestures. By stressing the expressive dimension, you open up the range of situations considered and their very heterogeneity allows you to grasp key internal differences.

Let me now address non-academic uses of the phrase 'media events'. In academic contexts, it concerns a restricted corpus of willed performances: expressive or ceremonial events. In normal parlance or journalistic use, the notion of media events has a much wider meaning. It includes anything (a happening or event) that is given full media attention. For journalists, the phrase 'media events' can refer to at least three different phenomena: (1) major news events such as televised wars, assassinations, earthquakes; (2) extended social dramas like the Simpson trial or, earlier, the Dreyfus affair; (3) our own 'expressive events', television rituals that typically last a few hours or at most a few days.

Today, the wider vision and the narrower one tend to become less antithetical. This has to do with the banalisation of the media event format through its adoption by everyday journalism. Yet the blurring of a clear distinction between media events and major news events is a reality that I fear. The danger has been forcefully stressed by Dan Hallin and Michael Schudson when they object to allowing a 'public sphere of consensus' altogether swallowing the public sphere of 'legitimate controversy'. I believe it is important to separate the latter from the former, to maintain the specificity of 'journalism as usual'. In other terms, it is important to keep media events distinct from news events, to keep factual statements distinct from gestures, to keep a genre devoted to forceful 'speech acts' distinct from a genre in which 'propositional content' is of the essence.

Last point. For me a 'media event' is a major, gigantic, societal 'speech act'. I would like to insist today on two sorts of events that our 1992 book hardly addressed. First are those events which

Jim Carey characterised 'political rituals of shame, humiliation, excommunication'. Second, and symmetrical to the first, are the many 'rituals of truth and reconciliation' organised around the world. These always involve a dimension of acknowledgment: they confirm that purported massacres, victimisations, atrocities indeed took place. This acknowledgment is a form of regard. It involves an ethics of recognition. Thus, there are 'media events' of regard, respect, recognition, and 'media events' of insult, disrespect, contempt.

P: You have most recently engaged with the concept of 'media events' using the case of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Is 'media event' a universal concept that can be adapted as a sort of 'ideal type' to the analysis of any 'event' and/or context, including those associated with 'non-western' contexts such as the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and Africa?

DD: My first answer is Yes. Media events can be adopted by any society and adapted to the society's needs. All societies have funeral rites. All societies organise public responses when traumas occur. No society can dispense with some way of managing collective attention, nor can it dispense with a hierarchy of attention. Media events are a major attention instrument. In a way they are the equivalent of a drum roll. But is such a 'drum roll' culturally neutral? When 'media events' are those of 'others' are they 'other' media events? What is it that heightened attention highlights?

On the surface, the media events of 'others'' look like our own. Broadcasting the run around the Kaaba in Mecca does not immensely differ from broadcasting the pope's Urbi et Orbi blessing in Saint Peter's square. Both religious traditions use the rhetorics of media events to invite distant audiences to join in a celebration. Take another example: the Olympics. The stadium may be larger in Greece, or smaller in Australia, or look like a bird's nest in China, but all stadia are meant to be comparable. Olympic cities around the world have been turned into the same 'unplace'. Does this mean that media events are delivered, ready-to-perform, with a few blank spaces indicating "Please add your name, address, zip-code, and some folklore"?

In fact, media events profoundly differ in terms of whether or not they are democratic. Look at the uneven distribution of two subgenres. 'Coronations' are to be found everywhere, because all societies   have (or fabricate) traditions. 'Contests' tend to remain attached to pluralist societies. They may be found elsewhere, but when the context is not democratic, they turn into pseudo-contests, rigged contests, contests in which the actors fake their commitment to a rational-legal order.

Yet the question you asked is not about ideological context. It is about civilisational difference. Where should we look for an answer? First, in our own past. Occurrences of martyrdom are displayed in countless paintings, churches and museums. Yet the willing and deliberate embracing of death, is rarely, if ever, the occasion of western media events. Similarly, punitive events, events meant to frighten and intimidate, have been providing highly visible ceremonies for centuries. Yet, they have now disappeared from the range of spectacular practices. Even the western countries where capital punishment still exists are reluctant to bring hanging, injection or guillotine to collective attention. However, spectacular punishment is still alive in other parts of the world and occasionally emerges in full view. The beheading of Daniel Pearl is meant as a symbolic gesture intended for collective viewing. Videos of suicide-bombers are conceived in view of TV broadcasts, and also meant to be sold as videos on market places.

Thus I could suggest at least one difference between western media events and 'other' events. It has to do with the visibility or invisibility of death. No corpses are to be seen on 9/11. To

explain such a difference, perhaps we should turn to Foucault's distinction between societies where one practices 'spectacular punishment' and the 'disciplinary' societies of our 19th and 20th centuries.

P: At the *International Communication Association* conference in Chicago, USA (May 21-25, 2009), you highlighted the difference between 'visibility' and 'visuality', ideas that seem to feature in your current work. Will you explain the distinction between them, and the importance of this distinction?

DD: Let me offer an example. Moments of 'shame' as described by German philosopher Claudia Welz, are moments in which we feel the need of erasing our body. The person who experiences shame wishes to disappear altogether, to be swallowed by the ground. In shame, subjects are at war against their own visibility.

Now take the question of shame from another angle. Can one photograph shame? One can certainly capture gestures through which a subject responds to shame such as hiding, covering genitals or breasts, lowering or averting the gaze. But is this shame or merely the gestural behavior associated to shame? The experience of shame, the slow invasion of your body by an irresistible emotion is certainly accessible through narrative. Is it accessible to photography? This question is no longer one of visibility, but of visuality. With visibility what was involved was a suffering subject, an ethical subject, a strategic subject. What was involved was an interaction between this subject and other subjects. Visibility involved a relation. With visuality, what is at stake is the specificity of a 'substance of expression'.

Visibility involves a pragmatic dimension. It belongs in the realm of social relations. It concerns psychology, sociology, ethics. Visuality rather asks semiotic, or rather 'mediologic' questions. For example: Is there an iconic dimension to the writing of mathematical equations? Or (as in Saussure's suppressed writings) is there a 'paragrammatic' dimension to Latin poetry?

All this suggests that visibility does not necessarily require visuality. We do not need the mediation of images to make ourselves visible to each other, to call on each other's attention. Children do it simply by crying. Yet visuality is an instrument for visibility. Television clearly associates the two. It performs visibility through visuality. Take another example: when we look at distant historical periods, what we are left with is their visuality. We are left with Versailles, and not with the spectacle-state of the sun-king. Visibility as interaction has disappeared. We are left with its trappings. Visuality allows us to imagine former visibilities.

P: Your work has significantly been focused on the production and reception of audiovisual media (television and film). How do contemporary media developments such as globalisation, mediation and digitalisation influence the study of these media? As many contemporary media users use a broad repertoire of media, how useful is it to isolate distinct media for analysis?

DD: Let me start with the second part of your question. The present situation often represents a nightmare for semioticians used to weighing the influence of medium on content. What is the point of studying in exhaustive detail the semiotics of a given photograph of an event when the same event reaches you at the same time on television, on internet, by phone and in print? We have reached a situation in which the multiplicity of mediations dwarfs the specifics of each mediation. Are we to treat mediated situations as if they were the referent? Perhaps we could rather, at this stage, change the level of analysis. How then could we address the juxtaposition

and reciprocal interaction of different sign-systems? Evaluate their effects on cognition?

Barthes stated that all semiotic systems were complex systems utilising language as one of their components. But Barthes was pointing to simpler situations (language plus image, or language plus fashion). And he was dealing with situations in which different subsystems were already combined. What happens when such systems exist independently, and meet in our heads?

Now the first part of your question. In a recent paper ('Showing and Sharing', *Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Sciences*, 2009) I referred to the work of historian Jeffrey Ravel on theatre-going publics in 18th century France. Ravel focuses on those spectators (usually young men) who instead of being seated, stand crowded together next to the stage in the theatre's cheapest area, called the 'pit' or 'parterre'. Parterre spectators allowed themselves to talk back to the actors on stage, to denounce their performances, to deride their acting style and delivery. Parterre members went so far as to tell the king's appointed actors to forget about the king and conform to their own wishes. They were literally stealing the performance both from its appointed actors and from its appointing patron. Parterre members were not merely heckling. Parterres represented a constant threat to officially sanctioned performances. They were striking at the royal 'public sphere of representation'.

Certain blogs or websites seem to adopt a similar role today, when displaying and discussing already displayed images. They talk back to major centralised media, to the media of 'centre and periphery', to the media of the imagination of the collective. Their performances share at least two dimensions with those of parterres. First, like parterre members, the bloggers disrupt a certain order of representation (the role of central television in the imagination of the collective) by daring to challenge the monopoly of established official displays. Second, they make clear that members of the public can be performers as well, that members of the public can be the initiators of alternative access to current events. What characterises the new public sphere is this proliferation of discordant images, and finally a contrary situation in which images speak to other images of the same events.

P: Will you meditate on the relationship between your personal and professional thinking and/or life? Do you draw distinctions between them?

DD: I have no doubt that my personal life, my personal interests and preferences influence, if not the content of my research, at least its agenda. For example, I was a kid in Casablanca when the king of Morocco who had been deposed by the French colonial power came back from exile. This was a moment of collective fervor. It was part of a larger movement throughout the world, colonisation was over and new countries were entering the independence process. In Morocco, large bedouin tents were erected for street celebrations, people were coming to you with improvised gifts, some swore that the profile of the king was neatly visible on the moon. I shared the popular enthusiasm, enjoyed this effervescence. I also felt that this could be the end of the world I had known, a prelude to the dispersion of my family, a prelude to exile. All this probably influenced my work on media events and on diasporas.

My personal background entailed other consequences. I speak and read many languages which has allowed me to teach or lecture in numerous countries. Yet, in two of the languages I speak (Hebrew and Arabic) I am in fact illiterate. This experience of illiteracy became a professional skill. While I master the very formal rhetorics of French oratory, I can also function like an illiterate person, rely on proverbs (the poor man's encyclopedia), and improvise lectures like a street-story teller.

But my professional life also influences my personal life. Professional expertise does not disappear when I walk in the street. I keep seeing things with the gaze of an anthropologist, sociologist, or semiotician. My gaze is trained, and it remains trained. Thus I keep noticing little, banal, ordinary monstrosities. I am astonished at what I see. I ask (in Brechtian manner) "how could this, which I see, be at all possible?" This astonishment is often at the basis of both personal, political, choices and research questions.

P: I have been most significantly impressed by the clear emphasis you give to the ethical notion of 'commitment' – theoretically, professionally and personally. Theoretically, your work has been influenced by critical theory (Dayan, 2002, pp. 80-81). Professionally, you have referred to yourself as a "witness [with] a toolbox" (Dayan, 2002, p. 82). You have also reflected on personal risks you have taken in encountering and confronting racism. In your view, what is the meaning of 'commitment' and how does it relate to the idea of responsibility?

DD: This is a beautiful question, and a difficult one to answer because of all the nuances I would like to introduce. All my answers converge around one notion: the ethics of 'seeing'. But let me follow some of the directions you suggest.

Theoretically, I am attached to critical theory, but in a critical manner. Barthes taught me something he learned from his own teacher, Brecht: to be astonished at realities that might seem banal, common-place and not particularly interesting, at realities that are invisible because they are the rule. Barthes turned Brecht's astonishment into a method (his *Mythologies* are Brechtian songs turned into essays). I inherited a frame of mind that comes from the Frankfurt School. Yet, in regard to this frame of mind, I often practiced what Foucault calls 'Paresia', the virtue of (respectfully) disagreeing with your teachers. Thus I admired Sartre, but not his admiration for Mao. I admired Foucault, but not his celebration of Khomeini. I admired Deleuze as an extraordinary literary critic, but remained puzzled by his 'anti-oedipus' or his celebrations of 'schizophreny'. I practiced Paresia by applying the approach of my teachers to subjects they did not want to see, by pointing out that sometimes those who teach us new visions tend to restrict their own. I practiced Paresia by insisting that I saw what I saw[2] whether or not it matched official accounts. In some cases this consisted of pointing out that the images and stories offered on major news channels contradicted each other, and that either images or narratives had to be inaccurate. In some cases it amounted to saying that the emperor was naked, or that there was no emperor at all. Of course this insistence was not always welcome.

Professionally, I see my role as that of an 'expert'. I do know something about media. Being raised in the French Sartrian tradition, I know the difference between intellectuals and experts. Intellectuals are exalted figures who must take the risk of meddling with what is 'none of their business'. Experts are lesser, petty figures. They speak of the little domain they know. Experts are meant to be the experts of something, but almost always end up being the experts of someone. An expert is an argument standing on two legs, a resource. I am skeptical of this dichotomy in which the intellectual is a superman and the expert a mere instrument. I believe that intellectuals should equip themselves with some expertise. Sartre did exactly what he advocated, often with catastrophic results, embracing causes he knew nothing about, assuming that generous impulses could never be wrong, haughtily dismissing embarrassing 'détails'. I also believe that experts should be intellectuals, enter public debates, take the risk of being committed to what their toolbox (knowledge, disciplinary training, education, culture) enables them to see. This is often what I have tried to do in Paris, by taking part in debates on and about television or by giving interviews to newspapers.

Personally, I happen to be, among other things, a Jew. Since, for historical reasons, I have been directly exposed to anti-Semitism this aspect of my identity tends to supersede many others. Yet I have had to decide for myself what being a Jew means. It first means that I am not to be gagged and blindfolded by community loyalties. It also means that I am not to find myself floating above the world like some abstract, universal conscience. I do not believe in universalism as a status. I believe in universalisation as a process through which one confers a universal dimension to an always situated position. In other terms, I am neither an 'organic' Jewish intellectual nor a current version of baron Munchhausen, lifting himself in the airs by pulling on his boot straps. This brings me close to what Walzer calls a 'connected intellectual'.

As a connected intellectual, I am particularly sensitive to certain issues. I often leave the ranks of the 'advocacy' publics spectating the world from a noble (and safe) distance, and join those 'orphan' publics that must fend for themselves. Should I feel guilty for fighting the type of racism that is directed against me? I believe that reacting to situations that I experience first hand is at least as important as adding a signature at the bottom of a manifesto.

My particular form of commitment has to do with my training. Years ago, Michael Schudson wrote a beautiful paper in which he discussed a cognitive experiment. Spectators were shown trout and told these trout were hamburgers. When later asked what it was that they saw, most of them said they saw hamburgers. When I have seen a trout, my professional training gives me the confidence to insist it was a trout. This exercise requires a certain aplomb. I admire the confidence that characterised people like Hannah Arendt, or Raymond Aron. Both walked through the 20th century with their eyes wide open. Both were trained as philosophers, and their training allowed them to see what others could or would not see. But their major virtue was courage. The courage of speaking out what they saw.

At my modest level, I often see things – often small things, details – that others (my friends, my colleagues, my students) overlook. My training allows me to notice those details. My commitment consists in speaking out what I saw.[1] In many cases, remaining silent would be either frivolous or cowardly; it would be akin to crossing the street when someone is beaten-up in order not to be caught in a fight. I am not often courageous, but, when I am, my commitment consists in pointing to those details that completely change our perception of certain situations. Having my eyes open entails a responsibility. I am a witness (a witness with a toolbox).[2]

P: Tell us about your life as a PhD student, and your PhD. As an established academic, what advice would you give to graduate researchers working in media and communications, regarding the construction of personal or professional worldviews in general, as well as specific professional choices and practices (e.g. publications, conferences, teaching)? How has the academic profession developed since you were a graduate student, how does the academic profession compare to that in the past, and what are the implications of these ideas for new generation graduate students?

DD: I have described my life as a student by answering your first question. My PhD was an amplification of my work on 'suture' in classical cinema and dealt with the aesthetics of John Ford. It was much more ambitious than my essay on the 'tutor code' (which was an MA paper at Stanford). I relied much less on Lacan or Althusser, and much more on Benveniste, Derrida, Austin. My dissertation became a book in French. It was taught at the Sorbonne and used as an example of the 'semio-pragmatic' approach, but it never enjoyed the polemic success of the 'suture' paper.

Concerning careers, there are many reasons why I should not serve as a model. First of all, I never exclusively focused on being an academic. I wrote short stories and scripts, worked as a translator, spent one year as a director at Theâtre de la Cité Universitaire in Paris. Also I never conducted my career in any systematic way. I accepted the first job offer I got, because it emanated from a scholar I admired: Elihu Katz. My role model was (once more) Roland Barthes who did not consider himself a teacher, but as a writer or an agent of intellectual subversion. Barthes had no publishing strategy. He gave texts to whoever asked, including obscure journals. Despite some (lucky) exceptions, I have tended to do the same. This attitude involves an enormous amount of aplomb (or fatalism). It is one that today's students can hardly afford. Except in France or Italy where a system of castes (Bourdieu's 'noblesse d'école') still dictate careers, today's scholars must act as 'scholarly entrepreneurs'. They cannot dispense with strategy.

The only advice I am able to give concerns two virtues. The first is audacity: moments of luck are often disguised as challenges. The second is honesty: acknowledging the failure of a research or the inadequacy of a hypothesis can often become an original contribution.

P: What are you working on at the moment?

DD: My current work is concerned with the role of media in managing – granting, denying or imposing – *collective attention.* It stresses the role of the media but also analyses the attention-seeking strategies developed by social actors. I look at various modalities of *visibility* in contemporary societies, such as 'appearing' (Arendt, Goldfarb, Goffman), 'regarding' (Honneth), 'surveilling' (Foucault, Meyrowitz), 'witnessing' (Peters, Dulong, Pinchevsky & Frosh), 'contemplating' (Bill Viola and video art), 'spectating' (my own work on 'enunciative' shifts in American cinema, from John Ford to Jonathan Demme).

Practices of *showing* are of particular interest to me because they combine both attention and visibility. Under the general rubric of 'monstration', I am trying to re-explore such 'genres' as video art, classical cinema, television news and reality TV. I often rely on my earlier work (ethnographic explorations of situations of conflict; controversy or terrorism; theoretical essays on gazing; and film). I also bring a new emphasis on journalistic practices and the problem of truth. A reflection on 'performatives' and 'deictics' finally allows me to revisit paradigmatic media approaches and to read them against the grain.

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Endnotes

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1. P: As a professional image expert, Dayan was one of the witnesses who testified in the defamation case opposing the director of a French media watchdog agency Media-Ratings to French public television broadcaster France-2 and its prominent Middle East correspondent Charles Enderlin. In 2000, France-2 had broadcast 55 seconds of footage showing a 12 year old Palestinian boy, Mohammed Al-Dura, and his father, Jalal, described as caught in crossfire between the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The images showed the boy crying and clinging to his father, the father gesturing for the shooting to stop, and then the still body of the boy slumped in his father's lap. Accompanying these images, Enderlin's reporting asserted that the boy had been killed by the IDF, and when the France-2 broadcast was replayed by international television networks, the boy became a symbol of Israeli violence against Palestinians:

> Osama bin Laden referred to al-Dura in a post-9/11 video; the killers of Wall Street

Journal reporter Daniel Pearl placed a picture of him in their beheading video; streets, squares and academies have been named after al-Dura. He became a poster child for the [second] intifada.

(Gross, in Gur, 2008)

When the watchdog agency was sued, in 2004, for claiming that France-2 had staged the above footage and deliberately deceived the public, Dayan testified, in 2006, that, while the footage may not have been staged, the images which France-2 broadcast were inconclusive and did not provide visual evidence supporting the statements Enderlin had made in the accompanying report (Augean Stables, 2006). Dayan thus rejected France-Television's narrative. He also questioned the transformation of a controversy about specific images into a debate about the credibility of a journalist (C. Enderlin) who did not attend the event and actually never claimed to have done so. See:

Stables, A. (2006) Court's Decision on Karsenty. http://www.theaugeanstables.com/al- durah-affair-the-dossier/courts-decision-in-the-karsenty-case/. (Accessed 10 November 2009), and
Gur, H.R. (2008) French Court Overturns al-Dura Libel Judgment. The Jerusalem Post. http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1211288137213&pagename=JPArticle%2FShowFull Article first published 21 May 2008, updated 24 May 2008.

2. DD: Here is an example of what I would 'see' and point to. The following lines are an excerpt from a testimony written by Michael Posner, current US Assistant Secretary of State in preparation for the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. In this case, it is of course Posner that points:

> ... In the past 5 years, the Council and its predecessor organization, the UN Commission on Human Rights, have commissioned more than 20 reports on Israel, far more than any other country in the world. Since the Council was created in 2006, it has passed 20 resolutions on Israel, more than the number of resolutions for all 191 other UN members combined. The Council also has held 11 special sessions, 5 focused exclusively on Israel ...

This is an abstract, arid statement; full of figures, numbers etc.. Yet, to anyone who has read about agenda-setting, this apparently dry list of figures represents an almost freakish concentration of visibility. It means that the council is in fact clogged, prevented from devoting adequate time to other situations around the world, many of which deserve at least equal attention and some, much more. How can one explain this amount of attention? Is the gravity of conflicts judged on the basis of some objective criteria (for example, the numbers of human beings wounded or killed)? In this case, obviously not. Is it rather a matter of the identity of the nations involved? It seems so. But what does it entail?

Back to astonishment. Of course, my astonishment is not a proposal for censorship, though it will be, no doubt, accused of being one. Stigmatizing all violations of human rights, including those discussed at the United Nations, is necessary and legitimate. Yet my astonishment remains. It asks a simple question: Why? What makes this disproportion not only possible, but banal?

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