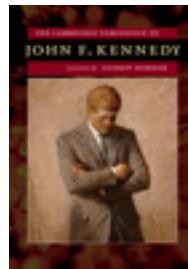


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### Chapter

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## An Eternal Flame: The Kennedy Assassination, National Grief, and National Nostalgia

Flying back to Washington on Friday afternoon, Jacqueline Kennedy had already begun to plan her dead husband's memorial service. In William Manchester's account, "She herself was a new Jackie, transformed by her vow that the full impact of the loss should be indelibly etched upon the national conscience."<sup>1</sup> She stayed with the coffin, and told Assistant Press Secretary Mac Kilduff to "go and tell them that I came back here and sat with Jack." He did. And as others on the plane began to importune her to change out of the lurid, blood-splattered pink suit, she refused them. "'No,'" she whispered fiercely. 'Let them see what they've done'" (348).

This tale is often told, in part because Jackie so successfully emerges as a figure of national resolution and in part because it carries the Kennedy administration's relentless orchestration of intimate display into a new era. But Manchester's account, as flattering as it aims to be, captures more than Jackie's new gravitas; like a seismograph, he registers the first tremors of a new sense of time, one that, however much it shares with a more general temporality of mourning and memorial, is particular to the Kennedy era and essential to the change in Jackie's character. And while this new temporality was not an exact version of the public's new experience, as we'll see, it traversed the spaces of memory in ways that seemed to chart a path forward from the assassination.

Still in Dallas, when the Johnsons broach the subject of the swearing in, Jackie continues to operate according to the usual protocols. "Yes. What's going to happen?" (317). What was going to happen was that Judge Sarah Hughes would arrive in an hour to administer the oath and Jackie would join the group. But in that hour Jackie's thoughts would be "elsewhere," according to Manchester. "She was thinking about time" (323). This "time" is a time of extended experience and unexpected interruptions: "It was such a long time," she thinks, only to be caught by surprise when Hughes arrives early. "It was unbelievable: *they* had been waiting for *her*" (323). After the oath, Jackie is gripped by a "refrain" "running through

her mind: *I'm not going to be in here, I'm going back there*" (327). "Here" is with the "Johnson people"; "there" is by the coffin with the Kennedy loyalists. Sitting "back there" next to Ken O'Donnell, she cries, "Oh, it's happened ... Oh, Kenny ... what's going to happen ... ?" (327; last ellipsis original). This is at least the second time she has said that on the plane, and although the words are the same, the meaning has transformed. In the subsequent hours, these two modes of happening – one bureaucratic and ritual, subject to protocols, the other experiential and imbricated, where the past keeps on happening in such a way that the future seems unplannable – will be woven together. And atop them both there will be a steady reflection on the events and experiences as they occur. The appearance of a figure who could claim, with authority, that "she was thinking about time" would have been paradigmatic of the Kennedy era, when experiences and reflection on the nature of those experiences were drawn ever more tightly together in the hope that they might converge. Now that figure would be embedded in a new context . . .

The funerary apparatus was, as was typical for the Kennedy era, an assemblage of bureaucracy and family. Planning would ordinarily have fallen to the Military District of Washington (MDW), which comprised the necessary ceremonial units and could bring to bear the wide range of other resources the events required, from cartographers to construction troops to honor guards. Yet even on the flight back from Dallas, Jackie and Robert Kennedy had begun to coordinate with MDW officers. Kennedy cousin Sargent Shriver would serve as liaison from the outgoing administration. Jackie was not only central to the planning but was assiduously promoted as such. "General Wehle afterward declared that 'she held all the strings, and we marveled at her clear thinking and sense of command'" (482).

This proved too much even for Manchester, who details the limits of Jackie's ambit and the vast contributions made by others. Nonetheless, nearly all of the major decisions about the funeral were made by or routed through Jackie. She pushed for the echoes of Lincoln's funeral; she chose the old-fashioned mantilla; she insisted on walking the route to Saint Matthew's. Most important, she envisioned the eternal flame. The model was the French tomb of the unknowns, which she and Jack had visited in 1961. But where the original yoked national memory to an indeterminate group, this version would tie that memory to an individual. Such perpetual devotion seemed (to some) to be misplaced, but it was high Kennedy era in its insistence on the middle-aged president's youth.

Jackie's commitment to the eternal flame configured the commemoration of JFK as a set of oppositions. The first lay in the clash between the implicit temporal boundedness of the "four days in November" and the temporal

unboundedness implied by the flame itself. The second, between planning and spontaneity, disrupted the inveterate image management of the Kennedy administration. Jackie's resolution – "Let them see what they've done" – found its own opposition in the eruptions of spontaneity beginning with the image of her on the back of the Lincoln and continuing through the botched arrival at Andrews AFB. Two paired oppositions, a matrix of possibilities, confronted the world and became the paradigm for Kennedy's memory. At the still point where the oppositions cross we find the icon, the spontaneous revelation of durable character, fixed as an image, lasting through time.

After the assassination *Life* magazine famously ripped out its planned November 29 cover story on Navy quarterback Roger Staubach. The magazine substituted thirty-five pages of Kennedy coverage, including four pages of stills from the Zapruder film, in time for its deadline of Sunday, November 24. The next week's issue included extensive coverage of the memorial service along with Theodore H. White's "Epilogue" in which Jackie (and White) christened the era Camelot. Less famously, *Life* rushed a special "Memorial" issue into print that was a hybrid of the two – "All of *Life*'s Pictures and Text on the Most Shocking Event of Our Time." It featured the same cover image as the Nov. 29 issue; the same White epilogue as Dec. 6. Where the regular issues were plump with Christmastime ads and long general interest features – on the photography of Lartigue, on "The Last Word in Operating Rooms" – the memorial issue had none. Its one innovation was a four-page spread of Zapruder images in full color. The broad kelly-green sward backstops Jackie's pink suit. The whole is doubly bordered in black: the page itself is set on a black ground, and within the images the big blue-black convertible drifts to the bottom of the frame, underlining the saturated colors above it. The spread was a new shock for readers who had only seen the day's events in black and white. The color template of the assassination would be complete when the blood-spattered pink suit was replaced by Jackie's mourning black and the sky-blue coats of Caroline and John-John. That blue was essential because it bracketed the event: in the Arthur Rickerby photo of Jack and Jackie at Love Field, the sky nearly blends into the blue accents on Air Force One. In the canvass of emotions after the assassination, bystanders noted that when the morning overcast rose "like an awning" it left behind "a translucent sky," a "faultless blue."<sup>2</sup> That blue returns, condensed, in Fred Maro's photo of the family waiting at the top of the White House stairs, where the color of the children's matching coats is picked up by the marine sergeant's braid in the foreground. Maro's photo ran on the back cover of the memorial edition and the front of the December 6 issue.

If *Life*'s images provided the art direction for the weekend's memory, its text offered two other ways of thinking about the end of Kennedy's administration. The lead editorial by managing editor George P. Hunt, "The President's Empty Chair," emphasized Kennedy's "guts," portraying Jack toughing out his chronic back pain, strategizing his way through political conflicts, and, as always, "fascinated by the press," playing it "quite frankly to enhance himself and his Administration." The rocking chair had been a major part of the president's image, and *Life* had both encouraged and covered the country's fascination with it.<sup>3</sup> Rocking back and forth, taking in the debate among his advisers, Kennedy affected a canny, almost contemplative style. His self-conscious stylization would become the paradigm for *Esquire*'s "New Sentimentality," the polar opposite of Lyndon Johnson's physicality and directness.<sup>4</sup>

The alternative to the empty chair – to the image of the president as the good-naturedly canny competitor – was the mythmaking of Camelot. And it was Jackie who insisted to *Life*'s Theodore H. White that history-minded Jack regularly listened to the musical's soundtrack before he went to bed. "The lines he loved to hear were: *Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot.*" She drove the point home, repeating the lines. White repeated them, as well, giving rise to the period's pop mythos. For all the drama that surrounded *Life*'s acquisition of the Zapruder film the weekend before, there was nearly as much wheedling surrounding White's piece for the magazine's next issue. As Joyce Hoffman has chronicled, on that rainy Saturday night, with the presses held, White served as Jackie's stenographer. David Maness, White's editor, felt the theme was too on the nose, but it stayed. Later, White felt that he had been used as a mouthpiece for the administration's final propaganda campaign; historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and other key members of the administration objected, as well.<sup>5</sup> For the men committed to the idea of "The President's Empty Chair," to Kennedy as the New Frontiersman-in-chief and the ultimate strategist, the doomed wistfulness of Broadway's King Arthur was utterly out of character.

No attempt to secure the legacy of the administration could avoid becoming mired in the metapolitics of image management. *Life*'s memorial edition could not maintain its commemorative integrity against the pull of the news, where "news" meant either the addition of a new level of commentary or a new sensory assault. It was the first instance of what would become an essential feature of Kennedy commemoration: the irresistible conjunction of memorial and news, of attention to "his enduring words" and the insistent return to "the most shocking event." For the next fifty years, every

anniversary of his death, every attempt to commemorate his life, would be decisively inflected by the emergence of potentially new information.

Two documentary films produced in the wake of the assassination embody and advance the complexities of the Kennedy memorial temporality: *Four Days in November* (1964) and *Faces of November* (1964). Both reasserted cinema's primacy in the wake of television's newfound ascendancy. The Oscar-nominated *Four Days*, produced by David L. Wolper and directed by Mel Stuart, combines documentary footage with docudrama reenactments to carry viewers back through the events of the year before. Those four days were known as television's Black Weekend, when 96 percent of American households tuned in, and on average viewers watched thirty-two hours over the four days.<sup>6</sup> The film condensed the weekend and folded in the missing context. Both its form and narration echo the *Life* issues in many ways, concluding with a dissolve from the eternal flame to a montage of JFK and his family frolicking on Cape Cod, recalling America to a time "when its own youth had just begun and everything was possible." But *Four Days*'s version of "flaming youth" is forced to contend with two other temporalities. The first is cyclical. Instead of beginning with the Texas trip, the film opens with the funerary fifty-gun salute and eventually circles back around to it. The second is bureaucratic. The film ends with a dolly across the Oval Office, pushing in close on the nameplate affixed to the back of "the president's empty chair" (in this case not the famous rocker but an overstuffed leather wingback desk chair). The rhythms of political succession join the cycle of funerary ritual and the stilled promise of a life cut short. Formally dispersed, *Four Days* is not simply a comprehensive collection of documentary footage of the weekend's events but an anthology of attempts to give those events form. In its awkward multiple endings, it captures the four quadrants of the matrix, each of them closer to the gravitational center, the iconic JFK. Yet even here, *Four Days* follows *Life*'s lead, putting Jackie at the center of events: "Amid tolling bell and bagpipes' dirge, black-veiled like some ritual figure of classic myth, Jacqueline Kennedy follows her husband's coffin on foot, leading the greatest assemblage of world statesmen to pay homage in half a century." If the axes of the matrix cross at the point of maximum tension, then the substitution of one icon for another – of Jackie for Jack – allows the intense demand for social mourning to work itself out across time, in the unfolding of a new focal image.

Robert Drew Associates' *Faces of November* is the more rigorous complement to *Four Days*. Drew Associates had been the essential documentarians of the Kennedy era, all but inventing Direct Cinema along the way. Drew, D. A. Pennebaker, Ricky Leacock, and others captured the era's origins in *Primary* (1960), came close to serving as court filmmakers on *Adventures*

*on the New Frontier* (1961), and gained access so intimate it was unclear whether the administration's political aims or Drew's aesthetic ideals were better served by *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Decision* (1963).

Kennedy's death, however, seemed to cut Drew Associates loose from its intellectual partnership with the administration. *Faces* opens with the same gunnery salute as *Four Days*, and it will cycle back to it. But cyclical endurance is the film's only temporality. The soundscape is resolutely nondiscursive: there is neither voice-over nor discernable dialogue; there is rain, the sound of flags snapping and halyards clanking against the flagpoles at the Washington Monument, and the clop of hooves. Unconcerned with capturing events, policy, or personality, the two-reel film concentrates on faces in a very particular way. Drew and his cameramen hold on individuals long enough to allow them to acquire an authority over their own reactions, and that authority is preserved in the editing. A quicker montage would turn these onlookers into reactors and would restore the events of the funeral to the center. By slowing the pace, the continuing series of faces shows us how particular emotions rise up, achieve visibility, and require response. The woman who opens the series *has* to hide her head behind the spectators in the row in front of her when the horses pass. The African American marine *has* to turn his eyes away from his destination. These are reactions not to an event, but to a feeling, recognitions of the yawning asymmetry of a relationship (to Kennedy, to power, to politics, to desire) now at an end (Figure 12.1).

The two films divide the funereal temporality between them, and each is ghosted by the other. *Four Days* relentlessly stipulates content and context; what does not have an explanation can be blamed on irony – intended or otherwise. In the wake of the shooting, we are told, “Streets go silent; without plan, businesses close, even a honky-tonk in Dallas.” The lack of planning, here, is self-consciously ironically part of Ruby’s eventual plan to kill Oswald; hushed streets are, self-consciously ironically, narrated by the film. What is true for sound is also true for time. Outside the White House, we hear, “The children’s swings are still. For a moment, but a moment only, time pauses in this quiet room of presidents.” Time, of course, does not pause in *Four Days*, not even to register the pause of the swings or the quiet in the Oval Office.

*Faces*, in contrast, can find no place for planning since its world is beyond discourse. Jackie appears but is not in charge. Forms and sounds are captured with precision, but there are no maps or agendas to guide us through. Clearly Drew Associates felt that the ticktock of the proceedings could be delegated to more reportorial media institutions. In broader terms, *Faces* liberates Kennedy-era reflection from eventfulness, casting it adrift toward



Figure 12.1 Private moments in public.  
*Faces of November* (1964), Robert Drew Associates. Fair use (DVD stills).

the eternal. As strategy, politics, and the man (or woman) in the arena fade, Direct Cinema verges on mere impressionism. No longer does being in the world entail the generation of a self-extracting theory of being in the world. *Four Days* is consumed by eventfulness, even when that requires an almost neurotic demand that every occurrence be slotted into a schedule. Put another way, *Four Days* tries to dwell in Jackie's initial temporality: "What is going to happen?" where that means "What is supposed to happen *next?*" while *Faces* exists in Jackie's second temporality, where "what is going to happen" is more emotional and more intimate. What *Faces* fails to recognize is that it was Jackie, "thinking about time," who could maintain the equilibrium between these senses of time during that crucial weekend, refusing to allow the desperate question to overwhelm the bureaucratic one.

Andy Warhol's *Jackies* of 1964 combine the eventfulness of *Four Days* with the iconic insistence of *Faces*. Warhol's fascination with the assassination deserves longer treatment and has received it from others.<sup>7</sup> What I want to emphasize is that the almost frictionless way he was able to accommodate the events of the Black Weekend confirms his preternatural sense of timing during the 1960s. By 1964, Warhol had already been working through the limits of planning and spontaneity, the eternal and the occasional for several

years. Procedurally, the photo-silkscreen process positioned his work within an economy that balanced impersonality and mass repetition against mediation and delay (first choosing images, then sending them out for screen preparation, then producing at intervals of his own choosing). What is more, his sense of the interplay of intention and time gave him a unique ability to manipulate the icons that animated the matrix of possibilities. With the assassination, Warhol's extensive series of celebrity portraits, on the one hand, and his depictions of more ordinary disasters, on the other, could now be joined.

Art historian David M. Lubin contends that among artists responding to the assassination, Warhol "most powerfully conveyed the piercing trauma of that November weekend." But Lubin has a harder time locating the source of the success of the *Jackies*. Was it due to Warhol's indifference, his empathy, his puckishness, his fascination with death, or his obsession with consumer culture? Lubin, like Art Simon, marshals quotations from Warhol's *POPism* and other biographies that provide widely varying accounts of the artist's reaction to the news of the assassination. Giving up on intent, Lubin finally suggests that the works' provocation stems from their combination of "icy classicism" and Warhol's "[keeping] faith with the media cult of celebrity" JFK "had so assiduously nurtured."<sup>8</sup> But it is, perhaps, a mistake to yoke the pictures too tightly to the events at their source. Warhol may not have "missed a stroke" when he heard, or he may have turned to his assistant Gerard Malanga and said "Let's go to work," or he may have spent part of the weekend crying on the couch with poet John Giorno. Regardless, over the succeeding months, he committed himself to making these particular pictures. Warhol's reaction might indeed be indicative of his *feelings*, but the *events* that need explanation are his decisions to make paintings of the Black Weekend, to make them of Jackie only, and to make them according to (but in important ways differently from) the protocols he had been developing that summer. We should attend to the paintings within the stream of Warhol's work before we follow the mythmaking surrounding it.

The *Jackies* continued the modularity of Warhol's portrait of Ethel Scull (*Ethel Scull 35 Times* [1963]), but relied on published source images drawn from *Life* and *Look*. A limited series of tondi followed the model of earlier *Marilyn* portraits: single images, black on gold. And like the *Marilyns*, the smiling picture of Jackie at Love Field neatly insisted on the gap between the captured moment (noon on the 22nd) and the impending tragedy. But when Warhol combined the frontal views of Jackie's ironic smiles with the shocked profiles from Johnson's swearing in, the deadened three-quarter views on the White House steps, and the resolute, nearly frontal images with and without the veil, he moved beyond portraiture into something closer to

history painting. *The Week That Was . . . I* (CR 945) and *II* (CR 946) each comprise sixteen images in a four-by-four array; each of the source images is used twice, each flipped once.<sup>9</sup> Unlike *Ethel Scull*, here each image is contiguous with its mirror. *The Week That Was . . . I* retains the gold of the tondi on thirteen of the sixteen canvases; two are white, one phthalo blue (Figure 12.2). The white canvases are the correctly oriented versions of the swearing-in profile and the most immediate registrations of shock. The blue canvas is the correctly oriented version of the picture of Jackie with JFK in the convertible on Main Street, and the most immediately ironic. *The Week That Was . . . II* is all blues, but the hue varies in ways that seem both decorative and solicitous of attention. In both versions, the blue leaps out, just as it does in the photos of the children's coats. In *I*, blue constitutes the coloristic shock to the celebrity image; in *II*, it amounts to the suffusion of the whole by reminiscence. Warhol's composite *Jackies* (including versions beyond these two) suggest not a multiplied portrait but a process; the irony of an individual tondo is now excavated, spread across the surface of multiple images. The temporal unfolding is so effective that even in those versions of "multiplied" Jackie where the image does not change (a triptych or a frieze version), the picture nevertheless feels ripped from a temporal flow rather than boiled down to irony or pathos.

As the catalogue raisonné notes, it was unusual for Warhol to give his paintings titles, but these two have been known as *The Week That Was . . .* since 1964. That title, whether bestowed by Warhol or someone at the Leo Castelli gallery, alludes to the *That Was the Week That Was*, the BBC faux-news program that anchored the early 1960s "satire boom" in the UK and then spawned an American version in the fall of 1963. Yet as Lubin notes, the Warhol paintings are not "in any discernible way satirical."<sup>10</sup> So why the title? The week of the assassination, the BBC version famously suspended its usual humor in favor of an extended encomium to JFK. A recording of that episode was then flown to the United States and aired on NBC the evening of November 24.<sup>11</sup> *The Week That Was*, in reference to the Kennedy assassination, then, indicates not satire, but the suspension of satire. What is more, the episode featured such ultra-schmaltzy moments as Dame Sibyl Thorndike reciting Caryl Brahms's poem "To Jackie," ("Yesterday the sun was shot out of your sky, Jackie,") and Millicent Martin singing "In the Summer of His Years." Within the first week, then, critiques of commercialization and "good taste" had begun to dog the aftermath of the assassination. Calling the paintings *The Week That Was . . .* transforms the question of intent into a question of media response. In the *Jackies* Warhol is not taking the measure of his immediate reactions so much as measuring up to

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Figure 12.2 The suspension of satire in Andy Warhol's *Jackie ... The Week That Was... I.*  
Acrylic, spray paint, and silkscreen ink on linen, 80 x 64 inches.  
© 2014 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts,  
Inc./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

her responses, and the image of her responses filtered through the screen of self-interrogation and self-congratulation launched by media industries.

Warhol's first public showings of the *Jackies* occurred in November 1964, at the one-year anniversary of the assassination. The Warren Commission

report had been released in September in the hope of forestalling the assassination as a central subject of the election. But volume after volume of hearings and exhibits in fact meant that the entire fall would be taken up with analysis. Indeed, for the first time in the wake of the assassination, there would be more publicly accessible information than analysis. The Black Weekend had inaugurated an era of televisual surplus – hour after hour rehearsing the same bits of information, pleading for more, admitting that there was so much no one knew. But with the Warren Report, the information economy returned to normal. The report's overwhelming evidentiary backup all but demanded popular interpretive effort.

With the Warren Report, the interplay of temporality and intention also began to congeal into a simpler oscillation. With each anniversary – a year, then ten, twenty, twenty-five, forty, and fifty – a wave of reconsiderations arrived, reassessments pegged to the market for memory. But those waves always carried the double burden of analysis and reiteration. New documents, new versions of the Zapruder film, new interviews with aging players who no longer had anything to hide, new reports on the strange deaths of witnesses – they could all be slotted into television specials and magazine articles that would once again work through the chronology of the assassination. The scale of attention dilates and contracts, spreading backward to consider events of the summer of 1963 or forward through the investigation of the Warren Commission, but ultimately bearing down on the one-eighteenth of a second between Zapruder frames 312 and 313.

For historian Beverly Gage, the accumulation of unsavory material on Kennedy has had no effect on the commemorative mind. “Rather than revise their views of Kennedy or his presidency, Americans seem to have channeled the barrage of new information into an ever-growing willingness to believe in some sort of conspiracy *against* him.”<sup>12</sup> Holding aside the inaccuracy of an “ever-growing willingness” – belief in conspiracy has been flat or declining since 1975, with Gallup recently noting that the percentage of Americans who “believe others besides . . . Oswald were involved” is “the lowest found in nearly fifty years”<sup>13</sup> – this seems almost precisely wrong. The conspiracies serve as repositories of political memory, social agents of moral blowback. For almost every particular complaint about Kennedy, there is a conspiracy that demonstrates how that failing led to his downfall. Promiscuity? Judith Exner → Giancana → Mafia hit. A bought or stolen election? Joseph P. Kennedy to the Mafia. Reliance on the secrecy state? Oswald striking out in defense of a beleaguered Castro. Callowness? Revenge of the betrayed anti-Castro forces. The conspiracies against Kennedy mirror the hidden (and sometimes imagined) operations of his administration.

While the cascade of viewpoints in the first year set the pattern for the economy of information that would come to define assassination studies, another pattern of commemoration was also taking shape. Across America, institutions were being renamed in honor of the dead president, rechristenings bound to the pattern of overreaching personalized bureaucracy that had first appeared at Arlington National Cemetery. In New York City, Idlewild was renamed John F. Kennedy Airport by the end of 1963, and it has remained happily so ever since.<sup>14</sup> Schools and streets, an aircraft carrier, and a stadium followed.<sup>15</sup> Less successfully, Kennedy replaced Benjamin Franklin on the half-dollar coin in 1964, and although his profile continues to be used in collectors' proof sets, the coin has not been minted in mass circulation quantities since 1976; the last year that any general circulation Kennedy coins were struck was 2001.<sup>16</sup> And while President Johnson renamed Cape Canaveral Cape Kennedy in what seemed to be an especially fitting tribute to the alliance between Kennedy and the Space Coast, the name only lasted a decade before being returned.<sup>17</sup>

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts was a more successful arrogation. Initially projected under President Franklin Roosevelt as the National Cultural Center, authorizing legislation for the building was not passed until 1958. The design by Edward Durell Stone was a "box with a porch," typical of Kennedy era neoclassicism.<sup>18</sup> At the time of the assassination, the fund-raising for the project remained incomplete. The project struggled along, eventually opening in 1971. By then, the style had passed, Vietnam was at its height, and Anthony Lewis saw in the building a classic instance of bureaucratic self-aggrandizement, a "giant catastrophe" that had "ruined the river front."<sup>19</sup> The Kennedy Center Honors, begun in 1978, would become the center's flagship event, a celebration of American culture, matching awards with commemorative performances. By this point, historical research had made Kennedy's legacy far more complex and conspiracy theorizing was at its high-water mark, having been endorsed by the House Subcommittee on Assassinations. In the era of malaise, the honors amounted to exactly the wan "living legacy" that no one could really gainsay.

The most ambivalent of the institutional Kennedy commemorations, however, is surely Philip Johnson's cenotaph for the fallen president in Dallas. The great open box with its unadorned central slab quickly became something of a white elephant, largely unvisited, certainly unloved. The president's death did little to temper Dallas's conservative elites, who were far more interested in promoting the city than in commemorating the assassination. Stanley Marcus, of the Neiman Marcus department store, had been to Johnson's Glass House and asked him to design the memorial.<sup>20</sup> Johnson waived his fee, the county donated a block they wanted cleared anyway, and the Marcus-led

commission raised the necessary funds. Johnson had initially suggested that passages of Kennedy speeches be carved into the memorial's walls, but he was, apparently, thwarted by members of the commission who opposed the president's politics. The constraint seems to have freed the architect, who made the cenotaph a monument to absence. He later explained, "Kennedy was such a remarkable man I didn't want to have a statue or hackneyed 'narrative,' but sought rather for something very humble and spartan."<sup>21</sup>

Spartan to be sure. Johnson authority Frank Welch ticks off the dimensions of the "50' x 50' x 30' roofless volume": its seventy-two "square, chamfered vertical concrete members are bound together with concealed steel cables forming rigid enclosing planes. The cable ends are capped with round concrete bosses" (Figure 12.3). The open box was something of a departure for the architect, who was working through his departure from Mies and the International Style by exploring variations on arches and colonnades. The loggia for the Amon Carter Museum, for example, featured four tapered columns with arches that seemed to continue from the arrises of the columns. Johnson continued building arches in commissions large (the New York State Theater at Lincoln Center, 1964) and small (Pavilion at Pond, New Canaan, Connecticut, 1962), reaching baroque overkill in the house for Mr. and Mrs. Henry C. Beck Jr. (Dallas, 1964). But for Kennedy, he opted not to build any sort of arch. Instead, as architecture critic David Dillon has noted, the monument draws on Mies van der Rohe's (unrealized) plans for a memorial to the Great War Dead in Germany. Just as the eternal flame in Washington made a monument to French unknowns a memorial to the most famous person in the world, so Johnson replaced Mies' monument to DIE TOTEN with one inscribed to JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY. Yet the Miesian severity of the box is illusory. Only eight of the columns reach the ground, making the whole thing seem to float, especially at night when lights shine down from the raised members. The hovering solidity makes the box, however unadorned, a signal instance of the creeping theatricality of Johnson's post-International Style work. Indeed, the memorial is an even purer example of minimalist theatricality than Tony Smith's *Die* (1962/1968). Michael Fried saw in Smith's six-foot cube "a kind of latent or hidden naturalism, even anthropomorphism."<sup>22</sup> Smith defended his choice of scale. Asked why he had not made *Die* larger, "so that it would loom over the spectator," Smith responded, "I wasn't making a monument." Johnson is; hence the looming. Yet the five-by-five central slab in Johnson's memorial produces the anthropomorphic effect. It seems less like an invocation of solidity and more like a vacated pedestal. Read this way, Johnson's memorial casts out narrative only to have it return as the narrative of absence.

### An Eternal Flame



Figure 12.3 Philip Johnson's Kennedy Memorial Plaza from Dallas County Courthouse Roof. Bryan Cabin is in the distance.

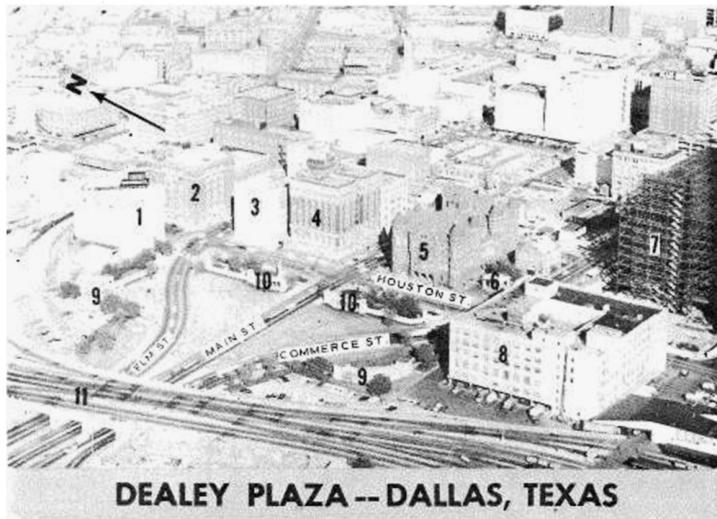
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Yet despite Johnson's avowed hostility to narrative, the memorial takes its place in context. His abandonment of columns stems in part, one suspects, from the proliferation of memorial colonnades on Dealey Plaza. The plaza entrance was flanked by matching peristyles and reflecting pools along Houston Street, and matching pergolas along Elm and Commerce. Each of the pergolas was named for a city founder; Abraham Zapruder was standing on the concrete abutment to the northern pergola – the John Neely Bryan pergola – when he filmed the motorcade. The tiny John Neely Bryan Cabin stood even closer to the memorial. The cabin was, legend had it, built by Dallas's founder on the banks of the Trinity River. Since its construction, it had been moved, reassembled, moved again, likely destroyed, likely rebuilt, and had, after the Texas Centennial, come to rest on the grounds of the Old Red Courthouse near the corner of Houston and Commerce.<sup>23</sup> A downtown landmark for generations of schoolchildren, it would stay on the courthouse lawn until the late 1960s when it would be moved yet again to make way for a parking garage entrance, at which point it would be located on the block just north of the Kennedy memorial. Here, the cabin formed a micro version

of the Parisian *Axe historique* and was visible, in all its diminutive perpendicularity, through the slits in the Kennedy memorial until the Founders Plaza renovation of the early 2000s.<sup>24</sup> In this light, the Kennedy memorial is the anti-Bryan Cabin. Johnson replaces the Lincoln logs with Kennedy concrete, forgoes shingles for open sky, turns the horizontal bands vertically, and retains the “butt end” effect of cabin logs in the memorial’s round bosses. Johnson had been cobbling together a new justification for historicism for some time, announcing in 1961, “We find ourselves now all wrapped up in reminiscence. We cannot today *not* know history.”<sup>25</sup> Now, in the Kennedy memorial, he had found a way to stay true to his – *our* – emerging historicism by making the architecture – the architecture he was in the process of making – a comment on the contextualization of architectural memory.

Johnson called his memorial “a tacit interpretation of the memorial per se,” but that interpretation was increasingly explicit.<sup>26</sup> By the time he was designing the Kennedy monument, he was prepared to declare that the main point of architecture was not space or mass, but “the organization of procession. Architecture exists only in *time*.<sup>27</sup> For both Johnson and Warhol, the assassination pushed art toward the opportunistic historicism that would characterize postmodernism in general. Johnson’s open box traced the absence of the iconic JFK; Warhol’s *Jackies* installed her in Jack’s stead. Other, later institutions would find their places in this new economy of memory. The Kennedy Library in Boston, which opened in 1979, burnished the president’s legacy and avoided the assassination while becoming a major research center. The Sixth Floor Museum in the Texas School Book Depository at Dealey Plaza, which finally opened in 1989, compensated for the library’s diffidence by opening itself up to the exploration of various and sundry assassination scenarios (Figure 12.4).<sup>28</sup> As a result, and in contrast to Johnson’s all but empty memorial, the Sixth Floor Museum became filled with both visitors and materials. Johnson’s monument was the last attempt to enshrine the experience of the assassination, to make it endure by erasing any obvious specificity. As the organizer of the procession, Johnson more or less knew what was “going to happen” when visitors arrived – how they would approach, what they would see. In other words, his answer to Jackie’s first question was comparatively simple. As for what would happen next, what visitors would experience once they’d entered the box, he had no idea. “It would be left to the viewers to find their own meaning.”<sup>29</sup> In answer to Jackie’s second question, then, Johnson all but threw up his hands. As he saw it, historicism opened up the past for interpretation, a chance for people to find their own meanings. The result, for him, was a “new feeling of freedom.” That gesture was one origin of postmodernism and has long been understood as a triumph. But the gesture amounted to an abandonment

An Eternal Flame



DEALEY PLAZA -- DALLAS, TEXAS

1. TEXAS SCHOOL BOOK DEPOSITORY
2. DAL-TEX BUILDING
3. DALLAS COUNTY RECORDS BUILDING
4. DALLAS COUNTY CRIMINAL COURTS BUILDING
5. OLD COURT HOUSE
6. NEELEY BRYAN HOUSE
7. DALLAS COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)
8. UNITED STATES POST OFFICE BUILDING
9. PERGOLAS
10. PERISTYLES AND REFLECTING POOLS
11. RAILROAD OVERPASS (TRIPLE UNDERPASS)

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Figure 12.4 A guide for the perplexed: Dealey Plaza in the Warren Commission Report.

*Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), 33.

of the Kennedy era's willed unification of national mission and personal style through the immediate application of reflection. As she flew back from Dallas, organizing that weekend's processions and thinking about time, Jackie had perpetuated all three aspects. Johnson – postmodernism – retained only the last.

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## NOTES

- 1 William Manchester, *The Death of a President, November 20–November 25, 1963* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 347. Further citations in the text.
- 2 Manchester, *The Death of a President*, 125, 160; the remark about the awning comes from Pamela Turnure.
- 3 “Presidential Chair Rocks the Country,” *Life*, April 7, 1961, 20. <http://books.google.com/books?id=-FEEAAAAMBAJ>, accessed September 26, 2013.
- 4 David Newman and Robert Benton, “The New Sentimentality,” *Esquire* (July 1964). For an account of the article’s role in 1960s culture more broadly, see J. Hoberman, *The Dream Life* (New York: New Press, 2005).
- 5 Joyce Hoffman, *Theodore H. White and Journalism as Illusion* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 2–3.
- 6 For an account of audience responses to the broadcasts of the weekend, see Aniko Bodroghkozy, “Black Weekend: A Reception History of Network Television News and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy,” *Television and New Media* 20, no. 10 (2012): 1–19. Bodroghkozy’s research provides an important qualification to Philip Rosen’s justly famous essay “Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts,” in his *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 225–63.
- 7 Important reflections on the *Jackies* include Art Simon, *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film* (2006; repr., Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2013), 101–18; David M. Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 256–61; Thomas Crow, “Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol,” in his *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 49–65.
- 8 Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy*, 261.
- 9 Georg Frei and Neil Printz, eds., Sally King Nero, exec. ed., *The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné, vol. 2A, Paintings and Sculptures 1964–1969* (New York: Phaidon, 2004).
- 10 Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy*, 260.
- 11 “A British Program Honoring Kennedy Shown Over NBC,” *New York Times*, November 25, 1963.
- 12 Beverly Gage, “Who Didn’t Kill JFK?” *The Nation*, December 17, 2013, <http://www.thenation.com/article/177632/who-didnt-kill-jfk>, accessed December 4, 2014.
- 13 See <http://www.gallup.com/poll/165893/majority-believe-jfk-killed-conspiracy.aspx>, accessed December 4, 2014.
- 14 Richard I. Ulman, “The ‘New’ Airport,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1963.
- 15 Philip Benjamin, “Drives Under Way for Kennedy Memorials,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1963, 22.
- 16 See <http://coins.about.com/library/US-Coin-Specifications/US0050-Half-Dollars/bl-US0050I-1964-Date-Kennedy-Half-Dollar-Coin-Specs.htm>, accessed December 4, 2014.
- 17 “Floridians Urge Cape Kennedy Be Renamed Cape Canaveral,” *New York Times*, November 25, 1969, 33; “Name ‘Cape Canaveral’ Is Restored by Board,” *New York Times*, October 10, 1973.
- 18 Philip Johnson quoted in Frank D. Welch, *Philip Johnson & Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 93.

- 19 Anthony Lewis, "Notes from Overground," *New York Times*, April 12, 1971, 37.
- 20 My account here follows that of Welch, *Philip Johnson & Texas*, 122–31.
- 21 Ibid., 125, citing Johnson conversation in New York City, August 1997.
- 22 Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 157. The quote from Smith is on 156.
- 23 The career of Bryan Cabin is complex, and the first important doubts about its authenticity were only beginning to surface in the 1960s (as in the letter from Carl Beeman, "Interesting History of Log Cabin," *Dallas Morning News*, March 28, 1966, 2). For a roundup of its peregrinations, see Sam Acheson, "Bryan Cabin Makes Sixth Move," *Dallas Morning News*, March 11, 1968, 2.
- 24 See Welch, *Philip Johnson & Texas*, 126.
- 25 Philip Johnson, "The International Style – Death or Metamorphosis," in *Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 118–22, 122.
- 26 Welch, *Philip Johnson & Texas*, 124, citing Johnson conversation in New York City, August 1997.
- 27 Philip Johnson, "Whence and Whither: The Processional Element in Architecture," in *Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 150–55, 151.
- 28 For a comprehensive history, see Stephen Fagin, *Assassination and Commemoration: JFK, Dallas, and the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 2013).
- 29 Welch, *Philip Johnson & Texas*, 124, citing Johnson conversation in New York City, August 1997.