

Surfaces in *Jackie*: Representing Crisis and the Crisis of Representation

Pablo Larraín broke new ground with his trilogy of films that engaged directly with events surrounding the Pinochet dictatorship. These films proved controversial in Chile due to the ongoing contestation around the official histories—from the events leading up to the election of Salvador Allende to the contemporary Chilean social landscape. *No* proved especially controversial, since it chose to revolve its story of the 1989 plebiscite around the director of the advertising campaign (in many ways, a cog in the neoliberal experiment that placed Pinochet in the first place). Like *Tony Manero* and *Post Mortem* before it, *No* presents events from “an ambivalent perspective.”¹ This fraught position gives the impression that these films side no more with the traumatized mourners of past atrocities than they do with those that remain loyal to the dictatorship. As Nike Jung has termed it, this shift away from “evidential documentation to imaginative represents a shift away from empirical veracity”² and towards “emotional states that can be aligned with historical experience.”³ The ethical debates surrounding historical representation⁴ and post-memory narratives⁵ thus become crystallized. In these films, attention regularly turns away from *what* happens to *how*; from *when* to *how long*; from mimetic truth-seeking to phenomenological historical fictions that foreground “the structures of direct experience.”⁶

As I have argued elsewhere,⁷ Larraín’s approach to historical fiction is concerned above all with what Jacques Rancière termed “the poetics of knowledge,”⁸ which recognizes a negotiation that occurs between testimony and empiricism in historical narratives. Larraín’s fictions are especially provocative versions of this, due to their preoccupation with matters of national identity and collective trauma. These films provide a way of intervening in ongoing public conversations, in ways that challenge the consensus narrative. This narrative is largely determined by a universalized discourse of dictatorship; detached from emotional insight; limited to restrictive testimonies within the narrow framework of bipartisanship; and ultimately lacking interrogation of more contradictory histories. With *Tony Manero*, *Post Mortem* and *No*, Larraín has utilized the ambivalence at the heart of history in order to mobilize the poetic potential of fictions, thus reorienting the constituent actors and timelines of historical events. This chapter explores the historical poetics of *Jackie*—a unique fictionalization of Jackie Kennedy’s response to the murder of her husband, President John F. Kennedy.

The Kennedys and the Crises of Representation

The American governmental landscape changes in the 1960s. This change is rooted in the departure of conservative leader Dwight Eisenhower and the subsequent appointment of the liberal poster boy, JFK. Mirroring societal, cultural, and technological changes, the American public’s fascination with

¹ James Harvey, ‘Democratic Ambivalence in Post Mortem,’ *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 26, no. 4 (2017), 539-551.

² Nike Jung, ‘History, Fiction and the Politics of Corporeality in the Dictatorship Trilogy of Pablo Larraín,’ in *History, Memory and Film*, ed. by Jennie Carlsten and Fearghal McGarry (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), 121.

³ Jung, ‘History, Fiction and the Politics of Corporeality in the Dictatorship Trilogy of Pablo Larraín,’ 129.

⁴ See Theodor Adorno, ‘Cultural Criticism and Society,’ in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 17-34; Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Différend* (Minneapolis, MA: University of Minnesota, 1988).

⁵ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁶ Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 5.

⁷ Harvey, ‘Democratic Ambivalence in *Post Mortem*,’ James Harvey, *Jacques Rancière and the Politics of Art Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018)

⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History* (Minneapolis, MA: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 23.

Kennedy was – as is well documented by many cultural historians⁹ – indicative of a new order of governmental personality. In hindsight, the success of Western leaders since Kennedy (especially noticeable at a time of high populism) can be rooted, in many ways, in the cult of personality surrounding his campaign for candidacy.¹⁰

Gregory Frame has drawn attention to the fundamental role played by film and television in the myth-making surrounding JFK, particularly to the role played by Jackie in the formation of their brand's iconographic imagery. Focusing on the *Life* magazine interview around which Larraín's film revolves, Frame argues that Jackie played a pivotal role in securing Kennedy's legacy through the invocation of "fictional, fantastical, and filmic metaphor."¹¹ Such was the success of this myth, Kennedy has since become the "idealised reflection of American leadership... built on a simple vision of utopian promise."¹²

The image politics of the Kennedy campaign fuses profoundly with a politics of the image in D. A. Pennebaker's pioneering documentary, *Primary* (1960).¹³ The film's formal style is rooted in the direct cinema tradition, "predicated as much on a philosophical reawakening as on the portability of equipment."¹⁴ This observational style sometimes clashes with this new form of governmental personality. Stephen Mamber argued that *Primary* was an "agonizingly artificial"¹⁵ rendition of the *cinema verite* aesthetic, confusing the receptive camera of Albert Maysles with artistic naiveté. We might instead note – with Jeanne Hall – Pennebaker and Maysles's visionary ability to capture the "planned political drama on stage,"¹⁶ exemplified with Jackie's fidgeting, white-gloved hands, showing the "spontaneous mini-dramas"¹⁷ that take place away from the larger picture of things. This intimate detail, critiqued by documentary theorists, is emblematic of the wider mediatization of Jackie. Both self-possessed to engrossing extents and stylized from outside by external sources, her public image echoes the ambivalent figuration of American pop cultural icons of the era (such as Marilyn Monroe and Bob Dylan).

The authenticity of Jackie's character is a question that Larraín mobilizes throughout. This is crucial in both a thematic and formal sense, since superficiality is emblemized through a conceptual preoccupation with surfaces. Insofar as surfaces govern the strategies of Brand Kennedy, Larraín is concerned throughout with foregrounding the scarcity of depth in Jackie's persona and the bubble she inhabits, thus mapping the surfacing of the political in textual, textural, and gestural dimensions across the diegesis. The film achieves this, as I will demonstrate, through a complex combination of visual textures that draw from diverse formal, historiographical, and technological choices. Echoing *No*'s use of diverse textures, Larraín creates a distinctive visual style by combining technologies of the

⁹ Including Thomas Brown, *JFK: History of an Image* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988); John Hellmann, *The Kennedy Obsession: The American Myth of JFK* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Paul R. Henggeler, *The Kennedy Persuasion* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995).

¹⁰ This point is central to Robert C. Smith's argument in *John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and the Politics of Ethnic Incorporation and Avoidance* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013).

¹¹ Gregory Frame, 'The Myth of John F. Kennedy in Film and Television,' *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 46, no. 2 (Winter 2016), 25.

¹² Frame, 'The Myth of John F. Kennedy in Film and Television', 25.

¹³ Indeed, Larraín seamlessly refers to this by revolving the narrative around the interview Jackie gives to *Life* magazine. Robert Drew produced *Primary* whilst Editor at *Life*, thus foregrounding the close ties the Kennedy's had to the magazine. This subtly adjoins the tailored account given by Jackie to the preferential image documented in Pennebaker's observational film.

¹⁴ Dave Saunders, *Direct Cinema: Observational Documentary and the Politics of the Sixties* (New York, NY: Wallflower Press, 2007), 189.

¹⁵ Stephen Mamber, *Cinema Verite in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary* (Cambridge: The MIT Press), 32.

¹⁶ Jeanne Hall, 'Realism as a Style in Cinema Verite: A Critical Analysis of "Primary",' *Cinema Journal*, 30, no. 4 (Summer, 1991), 31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

past and the present, thus recognizing the ideological rootedness of representational images. Mediated content, fictional narratives and the technologies themselves all exist as products of specific times and places, bound in a *dispositif* of politics aestheticized.

While consistent with Larraín's body of work, *Jackie* needs also to be understood in relation to the debates around the visual culture of Kennedy and his murder. The images of the event can be cited alongside the most iconic images of the twentieth century. Yet, for all their apparent signification (the shocking murder of a Western leader in the open and, with it, the death of a liberal dream), good semioticians know to distrust images and to attend to their more intensely coded signifiers. For Roland Barthes,¹⁸ images are regularly rooted in cultural myths, reifying meaning and regularly detaching the text from wider historical contexts. In postmodern image culture, this has changed through the relentless recycling and repurposing of iconic images which "replaced history and virtually abolished historicity."¹⁹ The contextlessness of said images renders them empty signifiers. In the contemporary digital media landscape, the meaning of images is always under threat through now-commonplace practices of appropriation. Where before, then, the image of the Kennedys in the motorcade might have signified the end of a great liberal myth,²⁰ its meaning today can vary wildly.

Warhol's Jackie and the Surface

Jackie begins with an image of the protagonist in mourning, which might invoke immediately the film's context as a site of empathic engagement between spectator and image.²¹ However, there is something unconventional about this particular image of grief – something that does not fit codified images of grieving widows. Take for instance the coupling of Mica Levi's strained strings with Jackie's vacant gaze as she walks towards the frame.²² She is shell-shocked and overwrought, but also pristinely manicured, invoking immediately the tension between sincerity and performance that seems to define her public image. Ambivalently holding Jackie between states, this is a jarring representation that foregrounds a chaotic psychological crisis. Crucial to the film's innovation, too, this offers a more diverse experience of grief than the usual melancholic inertia typically associated with images of grieving women. Marta Zarzycka has contested the widespread embrace of empathic readings, in ways especially relevant. The grieving mothers of war veterans, for instance, are regularly "appropriated by the public sphere and framed within a larger, national context, effectively undermin[ing] the woman in her function as an individual and a lover, turning her into the fantasy of the weeping widow who has honorably sacrificed her lover to the nation."²³ The reification of such images short-circuits any response other than a melancholic one, which restricts the grieving woman to the role of the widow. This is especially problematic with Jackie Kennedy. As a public figure

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972).

¹⁹ William Wees, *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* (New York, NY: Anthology Film Archives, 1993), 45.

²⁰ In ways very similar to those identified by Jean-Luc Comolli and Paul Narboni in their analysis of *Young Mr. Lincoln*: Cahiers du Cinéma, 'John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*: A Collective Text by the Editors of Cahiers du Cinéma', translated by Helene Lackner and Diana Matias, *Screen*, 13, no. 3 (1972), 5–44.

²¹ As explored by Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2013).

²² Played by Natalie Portman, whose previous melodramatic work includes Executive Producer, Darren Aronofsky's, *Black Swan* (2010). Portman carries some of that performance's expressive tendencies over here, too. For a closer engagement with the expressive performance of Portman, see Lucy Bolton's *Contemporary Cinema and the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

²³ Marta Zarzycka, 'Outside the Frame: Reexamining Photographic Representations of Mourning,' *Photography and Culture*, 7 (2014), 71.

routinely marked by notions of cosmeticism, there is a danger of simply reinforcing cultural myths.²⁴ This is not to say that Larraín recuperates Jackie's image. *Jackie* is by no means a straightforwardly sympathetic treatment of its subject. Rather, by challenging the popular conception of the grieving First Lady, *Jackie* attends to the broader social and cultural dynamic that founds and debunks popular cultural myths.

By staging this dynamic, the film implicitly creates a dialogue with Andy Warhol's series of works on Jackie's grief. Warhol produced over 300 silkscreens, focusing on eight images shortly before and after her husband's death. Lifted from their original context, reproduced, recolored, placed side-by-side, the series aggravates the conception that images of mourning can account for authentic experience. Cecile Whiting has argued that Warhol's images show how Jackie's private grief became public ritual—that her sorrow was not hers, but belonged to the nation.²⁵ Echoing Zarzycka's argument, Whiting stresses that the public image of Jackie is not her private self but a contrived image that Warhol exposes for its superficiality. Keith Tester makes a similar claim, arguing that these portraits display “the amorality of technologically reproduced images”²⁶ and ultimately shows up news media's “surface representation of the state and place of the individual.”²⁷ Warhol's Jackie, then, is a harsh evocation of soulless celebrity, detached from human emotion and defined instead by surfaces. This theme carries over into Larraín's film.

The film centers on the interview Jackie gave to *Life*²⁸ after John's death and is structured around a series of flashbacks. The first flashback shows the filming of the famous White House tour, broadcast on CBS and NBC in February 1962. One of several intimate discussions with Nancy Tuckerman (the White House Social Secretary, played by Greta Gerwig), Jackie faces her, practicing her introduction with her trademark husky whisper. Nancy tells her to refer to the White House as “The People's House” (now a common nickname) in order to “make it seem more personal.” This is an early example of Jackie's manufactured public image. However, it does not show the staged performance as a deceptive act by a spin artist, but as though honed through training: she is working. From this angle, carefully designed self-presentation is the labor of a First Lady, in ways that do not mark the Kennedys' term out very much from the Eisenhowers' or Roosevelts' before them. This changes in the flashback that follows shortly after, though, when we first return to the day of the murder. Twenty-one months pass between the two events. The shift in Jackie's persona—from labored amateur to trained professional – is clear.

Jackie is shown, back to the frame, facing a three-way mirror (**figure 1**), the two wings revealing two sides of her face, the middle blocked by the back of her head (and a famous arch of dark brown hair). The same husky whisper is heard rehearsing a speech in Spanish, which she will deliver to voters in Massachusetts, juggling her visit to Dallas with the next scheduled appearance. The cut shows her striding through Air Force One to accompany the president as they exit the plane. The sound of the crowd outside is audible as the pair are shown, side-by-side, in close-up. He asks if she is ready and Jackie's reply has the air of a sultry, seasoned performer. In this tone, the husky whisper brings about an erotically-charged quality usually reserved for her diametrical opposite in popular culture mythology (“are you a Jackie or a Marilyn?”). If the earlier scene appeared to show Jackie's manufactured image as the product of duty and labor, this scene gives the impression of mastery,

²⁴ Karen Dunak has argued that even some of the cosmetic features of Jackie's persona need to be understood as contributing to ‘the shaping of broader expectations and transformations of womanhood’ (Karen Dunak, ‘Jackie Reconsidered, again: Jacqueline Kennedy and 1960s-era American womanhood,’ *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture*, 11 (1), 2018, 62).

²⁵ Cécile Whiting, ‘Andy Warhol, the Public Star and the Private Self,’ *Oxford Art Journal*, 10, No. 2, ‘The 60s’ (1987), 66.

²⁶ Keith Tester, ‘Moral solidarity and the technological reproduction of images,’ *Media, Culture and Society*, 17, No. 3 (1995) 478.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 479.

²⁸ Theodore White, ‘For President Kennedy: An Epilogue,’ *Life* (6 December 1963).

revising, in hindsight, the damsel-like image displayed there. And as she descends the stairs from the plane and arrives in the mass of bodies, the camera captures her flicking her fringe sideways, gazing out awkwardly, aloof and overcome by the atmosphere. Therefore, the rapid transition between these two states gives the sense that Jackie's public image is no more than a surface that she can remove and replace at will.

The arrival scene also utilizes a formal language of feminine performance from diverse sources. With its use of mirrors, *Jackie* draws parallels with the melodramas of Douglas Sirk and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, as well as more recent revisionist melodramas by the likes of Todd Haynes and Darren Aronofsky. Frequently utilized in order to “embody social critique or a self-reflexive awareness of the conditions of representation,”²⁹ the mirror is used in *Jackie*—as in other melodramas—to seek “confirmation of her sense of self by habitually studying her appearance.”³⁰ Yet, as a reflective surface, the mirror allows for an immanent questioning of the image presented beyond the subject-centered notion of selfhood. By presenting a literal *mirror image*, the spectator is encouraged to view the image of Jackie as a construct – be that an ideological one interpellated from without, or a theatrical one performed as though from within.

This utilization of the mirror image along more or less Lacanian lines relies also upon its coupling with another familiar visual technique: the close-up. Mary Ann Doane detects a similar inclination to resolve the meaning of facial close-ups in binary terms claiming that “theories of the face come to terms in some way with this opposition between surface and depth, exteriority and interiority...The close-up in the cinema classically exploits the cultural and epistemological susceptibility to this binary opposition.”³¹ Drawing from early film theory and silent films, Doane's argues that the facial close-up usually regards the spectator as much as the image, assuring us that “we can indeed see and grasp the whole.”³² Visibility and intimacy hereby apparently leads to an authoritative image of the bigger picture. The facial close-up “acts as a nodal point linking the ideologies of intimacy and interiority to public space,”³³ echoing Zarzycka and Whiting's comments on the blurring of public and private self. Like Juliette Binoche's actress protagonist in *Copie Conforme* (2010), Larraín's Jackie is constantly urging us to engage with the surface of the image so as to attend to its aesthetic design and never simply its emotional force.

Evident initially in Warhol's series, Larraín utilises the binary logic of inner and outer depth in Jackie Kennedy's iconic image. *Jackie* demands we remain with the surface in order to appreciate its socio-cultural design, regularly problematising the view of Jackie as authentic or inauthentic. Instead, the surface provides an imperative aesthetic concept for the deconstruction of representational crises – originally explored in Warhol, but reformulated here in twenty-first century visual culture.

Remediation

²⁹ Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 9.

³⁰ Tarja Laine, *Bodies in Pain: Emotion and the Cinema of Darren Aronofsky* (New York, NY and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), 137. Again, it is interesting to note that Tarja Laine is writing, here, in relation to Portman's performance in *Black Swan*.

³¹ Mary-Ann Doane, 'The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema,' *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 14, no. 3 (Fall 2003) 96.

³² *Ibid.*, 109.

³³ *Ibid.*

In *Zaprudered: The Kennedy Assassination Film in Visual Culture*,³⁴ Øyvind Vågnes argues that the remediation of images throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century has complicated the public imaginary of historical events – even those witnessed by hundreds at the time, millions on television, and millions more since the event. Vågnes contrasts the reified emotional schema of *In the Line of Fire* (Wolfgang Petersen, 1993) with Christopher Brown's painting, *Elm Street* (1995), which foregrounds the potential for distortion in documentary images. Far from becoming reified and folded back into the larger myth of JFK then, the appropriation and restaging of Kennedy's death and the events surrounding it can have more contingent aesthetic effects.

The same subversive potential might be found in Jackie's generic domain. Biopics are regularly guilty of contributing to the mythological tendency of reification. This is produced primarily, as Belén Vidal explains, through the "delivery of consensual pleasures related to formal conservatism."³⁵ As box office figures and middling critical responses suggest, the biopic represents a routine exercise in film spectatorship, frequently presenting the life and times of a hero in the orderly spatiotemporal domain of a clear narrative. Rather than departing from the present in order to seek shelter in the past, Larraín utilizes the contemporary digital cinema's ability to bring together many different media forms, mixing old with new in order to refine and revise the archival images of representational media. In this sense, what Jussi Parikka would call media archaeology occurs: "new media remediates old media."³⁶

The aim of this remediation of the technologies used at the time of the diegetic narrative is to achieve greater historicity (than that typically afforded by historical fictions). It recognizes the specificity of the media form as central to the effects of that signified. For example, while the historical fiction of the American civil war has changed its narrative radically from D. W. Griffith to John Ford to Nate Parker, the technologies of each film's production are themselves imbued with questions of ideology. And insofar as the media product is itself, as Marshall McLuhan teaches us, emblematic of the technology, a semiotics of the 16mm, 35mm and digital cinematic image reveals a historical dimension to be unpacked alongside the mimetic fiction that unfolds on-screen. By using technologies contemporaneous with the events depicted on-screen, Jackie broaches contemporary debates on the nostalgia of representational media.

The starkest use of this technique is the reconstruction of the White House tour. Jackie is shown in deep conversation with Nancy about how to best impress the public. She receives some words of reassurance before walking away from the foreground, deeper into the image. She greets the camera operator and the introductory montage of the (real-life) televised program can be glimpsed momentarily on the screen of his monitor (**figure 2**). A cut then blows up these images and switches the aspect ratio from Jackie's 16:9 to early television's academy ratio. We see the grand exterior of the White House and an authoritative voiceover reminds the spectator of the historical context. This mimics the images and sounds of the original. The cut to interior shows Portman's Jackie walking towards frame, again impersonating precisely the pace and gait of her source. Her opening dialogue is lifted verbatim from the response provided in the original. Where slight details change, this seems to be an attempt to convey economically the characteristics portrayed in an hour-long program in the much shorter sequence afforded it in this film. For example, where the presence of a quiver in Portman's voice was not originally present in one statement, it can be located in later answers in the original.

³⁴ Øyvind Vågnes, *Zaprudered: The Kennedy Assassination Film in Visual Culture* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2012).

³⁵ Belén Vidal, 'Introduction: The Biopic and its Critical Contexts,' in *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, ed. by Tom Brown and Belén Vidal (New York, NY and Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 20.

³⁶ Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?* (London and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 3.

One subtle difference regards the adjustment to the framing of Portman's initial entrance. Where in the original, the camera is situated at a greater height and at an angle (providing a stylized presentation of the depth of the hallways and splendor of the arched ceilings), Jackie utilizes symmetry, flattening the image and using the frames of doorways as decorative frames for the subject (again reminiscent of Sirkean melodrama). The stasis and positioning of the camera provides a disconcertingly staged quotation of the original film's spatial configuration. This repositioning of the subject at the center of the image is an unsettling reintroduction of quattrocento vision. It pre-empts other uses of symmetry in the film, such as the tableau reconstruction of Jackie's return from Texas, positioned too centrally alongside Bobby Kennedy, in a way both evoking and troubling the spatial arrangement of archival images.

Archival images are utilized even more daringly later in the film, as Jackie is shown in a limousine departing for the funeral procession. Visually quoting Clint Eastwood's moment of crisis in *In the Line of Fire*, archival still-imagery of assembled mourners is superimposed on the windshield and atop the face of Jackie (**figure 3**). The window acts as a screen for the masses to be projected upon. And it is a projection, not a reflection, for those bodies in the world outside the diegetic car are not the ones we see in this image, thus producing yet another fusion of old and new forms of image-making, in ways evoking both the repressed in historical accounts and the ethics of historical reconstruction. Layering one image atop another—through montage and superimposition—the diversity of sources and histories is foregrounded through the clash and conjunction of the surface.

Corporeal surfaces

Doane's take on the facial close-up regards the sense of physical proximity as much as it does interior meaning. She claims that critics' and theorist's preoccupation with the technique is emblematic of "an attempt to reassert the corporeality of the classically disembodied spectator."³⁷ Insofar as *Jackie* invites an interrogation of the surfaces of Jackie's expressive façade, then, its close-ups are also significant for the affective dialogue initiated with the spectator. This seems like the opposite to Warhol's approach. Where his series of works aggravate the common patterns of grief and tragedy, this view of *Jackie*'s close-ups would appear to favor more conventional notions of empathic reception and "emotional contagion."³⁸ However, rather than offering an antithetical alternative, I would like to argue that there is a corporeal intensity in *Jackie*, which does not rely on a "semiotic phenomenology" reflective of "the universality of specific scopes of experience."³⁹ Instead, the corporeality of *Jackie* continues Warhol's concern with surfaces, beneath the epidermal layer. At its moments of graphic violence, the corporeal intensity of the film does not limit the potential spectatorial responses to the restrictive terms of empathy; it multiplies them. This promotes an affective response, apart from the immediacy of the narrative present and thus "disengaged from the customary constraints of spatial coherence and temporal chronology."⁴⁰ The material remnants of her husband's death force us to engage with the image in ways undetermined by what Davide Panagia terms the "narratocracy"⁴¹ of diegetic or extra-diegetic accounts. Story, as the "prevailing regime of perception in the theoretical analysis of political phenomena,"⁴² prioritizes seamlessly intelligible accounts in the historical archive. It thereby 'commits vision to readerly sight while partitioning the

³⁷ Ibid., 108.

³⁸ Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 126.

³⁹ Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, 6.

⁴⁰ Matilda Mroz, *Temporality and Film Analysis* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 30.

⁴¹ Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 11.

⁴² Ibid.

body into specific areas of sensory competency'.⁴³ *Jackie* foregrounds the materiality of flesh and blood in ways that attend to the historical value of bodily surfaces.

Analysing representations of dying in mainstream cinema, Michelle Aaron writes of “a cinematic lexicon of dying” consisting of “self-sacrifice, saintliness, triumph, self-discovery, painlessness, stoicism, futurism, beauty and the good death.”⁴⁴ *Jackie*’s presentation of JFK’s death is very far from “good.” His life is taken; the mythical saintliness—routinely expounded in popular histories – is mocked; disorder is preferred to triumph; a fraught crisis of selfhood is favored over self-discovery (of the dead and the grieving). There is nothing painless, stoic or beautiful about John’s brutal murder in *Jackie*. Despite Jackie’s attempts to describe her husband’s broken skull, mass of blood and pieces of flesh as “beautiful,” one cannot avoid the gruesome nature of the event. The corporeal effects of a bullet’s entry into a head cannot be questioned and, as one of the few facts taken for granted in the film, flesh and blood offers a source of empirical evidence as it navigates “the poetics of knowledge.”

Reports from the events following the murder tell of Jackie’s refusal to change her bloodstained dress. Images of Lyndon Johnson’s swearing-in to office show Jackie in a daze. JFK’s blood is hidden from frame, but its scent must be present, imaginable one assumes in the awkward expressions of the onlookers – the new President included. Larrain’s foregrounding of the soiled dress throughout the film is a form of historical excavation, bringing to light something that has been suppressed in the testimonial archive (**figure 4**). Hiding the violence from reportage is a form of sanitization, which Larrain hereby interrogates. It is a continuation of the “restorative corporeality”⁴⁵ of *Tony Manero* and *Post Mortem*, but it does so in the very different context of the American liberal political landscape and celebrity culture.⁴⁶ One gets a sense of this in the reconstruction of the moments immediately following the assassination.

By setting the film during the aftermath of JFK’s murder, *Jackie* promises to enliven its narrative with a spectacular explosion of flesh and blood, of the sort usually associated with horror films. For a long time, this never arrives. Much of the film is more concerned with the bureaucratic dialogues that arise in response to the death of a president (in ways again highly reminiscent of *Post Mortem*). We are deprived of the event itself; the spectator is left only with the aftermath. With no visualization of the moment of bodily penetration, nor sonic representation (of rupturing flesh and bone, gunfire, or horrified vocal reaction), the body of the deceased is privileged over the murder of the president. When Jackie is asked to describe the sensation of the event, we are shown the motorcade departing from the scene of the crime with the corpse of John sprawled out over her lap. One can make out specks of red on the back of the car, but John’s body is mostly hidden from view due to the angle.

This is subverted late on in the film when, in counsel with a priest, Jackie confesses to having lied about her lack of memory of the event. Immediately a cut takes us back to the murder. A two-shot shows the aftermath of the first gunshot, with John holding his throat, but with no blood visible. A cut takes us, momentarily, to a side-on view of the couple with John in the foreground. This allows for a view of the bullet’s impact rather than its flight and, as such, a more explicit rendering. John’s head flies immediately back then forth; the blur of its movement covers the face of Jackie. Its falling back is accompanied by a splattering of red across the frame. As it falls forward, the effects on his head (the amassing of blood; the exposure of the cranial cavity; the red-pink of the brain) are shown long

⁴³ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁴ Michele Aaron, *Death and the Moving Image: Ideology, Iconography and I* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 104.

⁴⁵ Jung, ‘History, Fiction and the Politics of Corporeality in the Dictatorship Trilogy of Pablo Larrain,’ 125.

⁴⁶ Although it might be argued that a much closer analogy can be made, here, whereby Cold War American policy folds into the mapping out of Latin American governance as portrayed in his earlier films.

enough for the spectator to note the meticulous detail afforded its depiction. His head hangs forward, revealing the horrified expression of Jackie, herself now caped in her husband's blood. This is the moment too-distant in the Zapruder video and hidden altogether from the Johnson inauguration images. Blood—this blood—haunts the film, and it is in this moment that this will become most apparent. As Xavier Aldana Reyes has argued, the common attribution of spectacle to violent images tends to conflate the affective with the appreciative/cognitive, delimiting the possibility for thought beyond the instrumentalization of diegetic horror.⁴⁷ Similarly, rather than criticizing the exploitation of harm for the purposes of spectacle, the gruesome portrayal of bodily harm contains a potential for something invisible to enter the image.

Yet, this is not to claim that these images have a coded signification akin to allegory, either. Levelling the narrativized signification and the cold materiality of the body, the spectator is instead confronted with the bodily event of death in ways akin to the “body horror” of David Cronenberg’s films, as analyzed by Steven Shaviro, who argues that they “display the body in its crude, primordial materiality.”⁴⁸ For Shaviro, bodily trauma depicts “new arrangements of the flesh [that] break down traditional binary oppositions between mind and matter, image and object, self and other, inside and outside, male and female, nature and culture, human and inhuman, organic and mechanical.”⁴⁹ Such a new arrangement of the flesh exists in this image that foregrounds the surfaces of John’s insides atop the external surfaces of Jackie.

The spectator is thus invited into the reactivation of history through a technique that subverts narratocracy through corporeal surfaces. It does this not through a “semiotic phenomenology” bound up in the mainstream “cinematic lexicon of dying.” Rather, the “restorative corporeality” of these images “short-circuit the social logic of information and representation by collapsing this logic back into its physiological and affective conditions.”⁵⁰ The crisis of representing reality is thus bound not only to bodies *representative* of crisis, but in and of themselves, thus exceeding “the limits of social control to the extent that they locate power and desire directly in an immanent experience of the body.”⁵¹

Temporal disruption

While using remediation to historicise the visuality of surface meanings, Larraín simultaneously engages in the reconfiguration of historical narratives through challenges to chronology and temporal experience. As Eleftheria Thanouli has explained, challenging models of linearity is a common tendency in contemporary cinema, as significant changes in the systems of causality, time and space alter “the way the narrative controls the transmission and flow of story information.”⁵² A similar argument has been made by Jan Simons, who brings together poststructuralist theories of history and narrative with contemporary takes in order to define a model for “complex narratives.”⁵³ Citing Paul Ricoeur, Simons claims that narrative “configures” what would otherwise be a simple succession of events into a “meaningful whole.”⁵⁴ In defense of complex narratives, Simons argues such narratives “remind us that we need to make our languages more complex to grasp the ways contemporary films

⁴⁷ Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Horror Film and Affect: Towards a Corporeal Model of Viewership* (New York, NY and Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 90.

⁴⁸ Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 114.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵² Eleftheria Thanouli, ‘Post-Classical Narration: A new paradigm in contemporary cinema,’ *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 4, No. 3 (2006), 192.

⁵³ Jan Simon, ‘Complex narratives,’ *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 6, No. 2 (2008), 111-126.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

cope with increasingly complex social and cultural environments.”⁵⁵ *Jackie* draws upon this heterogeneous narrative form in ways contemporary with the time of the film’s release; but also, divergently, contemporaneous with the crisis-point from which the complexity of social and cultural environments (or at least the mediatization of that complexity) might have originated. In other words, disrupting the causal, chronological logic of classical narrative is not a mere puzzling affectation that can be located across Larraín’s films—it is the formal structure most socially adept to historicizing this particular fiction.

Like the elliptical timelines reflecting the allegorical psychological crises of Raúl Peralta in *Tony Manero* and Mario Cornejo in *Post Mortem*, *Jackie* plunges its spectator into different times and spaces in order to reflect the effects of social and psychological crises that spawn from the event of JFK’s murder. In order to get beyond the tendency for narratives that take place “within an uncriticized temporal framework, within a time that corresponds to the ordinary representation of time as a linear succession of instants,”⁵⁶ Larraín employs a narrative that disrupts linearity. The diegetic present appears to be the interview. From here, flashbacks take us to (among other events) the assassination, the funeral, the many bureaucratic discussions, intimate moments between Jackie and John, her discussion with John Hurt’s priest. Sometimes these events are introduced more or less explicitly, through the *Life* journalist’s related question. But there are other, more nuanced formal techniques used to redirect the narrative, such as the use of sound bridges fusing together past and present.

Visually, slow motion is also employed, as though bringing to the surface time itself, in ways reminiscent of Gilles Deleuze’s “time image.”⁵⁷ As with Deleuze’s notion of the crystal image of time in cinema, “the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time...it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past.”⁵⁸ Collapsing both the present moment of the interview and the virtual past, *Jackie*’s narrative evokes the fraught sensation of a present enraptured by legacy and doubt. This might account for the unsettlingly overbearing presence of the White House, stressed through framing techniques and Levi’s eerie score. Taking Jackie’s lead in the White House tour, the film hopes to reinstall a sense of historical memory of the events that have emanated from this house. From national campaigns of enslavement and settlement (from Columbus to Washington to Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and so on and so forth) to a newfound regard for public image, the crystallization of time brought about by Jackie’s remembering is an exemplary version of Larraín’s founding of the present in the past. Two invisible entities – Jackie’s personal and America’s public memory – are brought to the fore, then, through the employment of disruptive timelines and the unsettling *tableaux vivants* of American colonial history. Jackie’s testimony thus becomes a site of temporal coexistence between past and future.

Conclusion

Jackie Kennedy’s personal crisis becomes a stage for the elaboration of social and cultural crises emanating from 1960s America. The film interrogates the surfaces of expressive performance, of the divergent textures of different media forms, and of trauma done unto the body. The surface becomes a fruitful aesthetic device for Larraín in ways conceptually similar to Warhol, but formally far more diverse. Like Warhol, Larraín is attentive to the superficial tendency of Jackie’s image, formed for and through public expectations; but these multiple aesthetic techniques result in a subject more developed and complex in character.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 123.

⁵⁶ Paul Ricoeur, ‘Narrative Time,’ *Critical Inquiry*, 7, No. 1, ‘On Narrative’ (Autumn, 1980), 170.

⁵⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

⁵⁸ Ibid., 81.

Jackie's status as a cinematic work is crucial in this sense. Unlike the moralizing of Warhol's factory-line (as explained by Tester), Larraín broaches the historical development of technological reproducibility (now in its conclusive stage of immanent reproduction through the digital) in order to unpack a history of Western image culture, refiguring the event through a disruption to chronology and crystal images, objects and tableaux. That *Jackie* is Larraín's first Hollywood film is significant in this sense, too. It brings to bear aesthetic techniques utilized across his Pinochet trilogy on the industry whose "reactionary cultural fanaticism wholeheartedly serves [the] methodical idolization of individuality."⁵⁹ Horkheimer and Adorno's observation on the cult of personality in popular culture is mapped on to the new governmental images initiated by Brand Kennedy. The moment of the protagonist's personal crisis brings to light a dual consciousness, which is itself the product of a contemporaneous crisis: that of representation in twentieth century global media.

In *Jackie*, then, Larraín's ability to correlate actors in world history picks up from where he left off with earlier work. Another link is made in Larraín's broader historiographical project: from *Jackie*'s historical focus on its site of origin in the US, the neoliberal coup of Pinochet and the absolutism of global capitalism in *No*. In order to arrive at the leadership Ronald Reagan, and Pinochet, the US had to have the myth of JFK and the institutionalization of mediatized political coverage, incentivizing the public around a simplistic social narrative.

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⁵⁹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2002), 112.