

**Stella Bruzzi**

## THE PINK SUIT

**O**N THE MORNING OF 22 NOVEMBER 1963 Jacqueline Kennedy, First Lady to the 35th President of the United States, was prevaricating over what to wear for an impending visit to Dallas, Texas while her husband quipped in front of a breakfast crowd at the Chamber of Commerce, Fort Worth:

Two years ago I introduced myself in Paris by saying that I was the man who accompanied Mrs Kennedy to Paris. I am getting somewhat that same sensation as I travel around Texas. Why is it that nobody wonders what Lyndon and I will be wearing?

(Kelley 1978: 200)

Minutes later, the President's wife emerged in the Chez Ninon pink wool suit she would then wear for the fatal open-topped motorcade ride through Dallas. The image on the cover of the November 1963 commemorative issue of *Life* Magazine carries a close-up photograph in 'vibrant colour' (Lubin 2003: 115) of Jack and Jackie Kennedy prior to the president's assassination, arriving at Dallas' Love Field airfield:

The Kennedys look tall and vibrant. They come so close to the photographic plane that they seem within our reach, giants among us . . . the photograph has the formal density of a carefully constructed painting. It is filled with intriguing visual symmetries and repetitions.

(Lubin 2003: 115, 117)

For all the wrong reasons, Jackie's elegant pink wool suit rapidly became universally recognisable, the quintessential, blood-spattered relic of the assassination, withheld from public view in the National Archives.

This is an essay about authenticity, re-enactment and the afterlife of an object that, while it has been endlessly copied and reproduced, exists more as a fantasy object, a nostalgic trigger to memories of trauma and collective loss. Jackie Kennedy's iconic pink suit was itself a copy – albeit, according to recent versions of the story, an authorised New York-made copy – of a Chanel original. Whether or not the emblematic pink suit originated in France or the US is important because of Mrs Kennedy's politically unhelpful attachment to Parisian couture. When, in 1959, her Senator husband declared himself a candidate for the presidency, and especially once he had been elected president the following year, Jackie's personal style became a focus of national interest. Her preference for French fashion drew some unwelcome media attention, although she became wise to the political importance of dressing down while campaigning. In September 1960, editor of *Women's Wear Daily* John Fairchild received a cable concerning Kennedy purchases of Paris couture and, 'after checking every Paris couture house', found that Jackie Kennedy and her mother-in-law Rose were important private customers of, among others, Chanel, Dior, Lanvin, Cardin, Givenchy and Balenciaga (Fairchild quoted in Picardie 2011: 300). These and other reports caused Pat Nixon, wife of Kennedy's Republican opponent in 1960 to publicly defend US designers and shed doubt on Mrs Kennedy's patriotism. These pressures ultimately led Jacqueline Kennedy, once she had become First Lady, to entrust French-born but US-based designer, Oleg Cassini, with coordinating much of her 'official' wardrobe, starting with the long ivory satin gown she wore to her husband's inauguration.

During her White House years of 1960–63, Mrs Kennedy's predilection for Paris couture was carefully stage-managed; largely suppressed for US functions but allowed to resurface, for instance, when she accompanied her husband on a state visit to Paris in 1961. Among the many couture clothes she took to France for this visit was the elegant ivory silk evening dress designed by Hubert de Givenchy, embroidered by Hurel with silk floss, silk ribbon and seed pearls that she wore to the official dinner at the Palace at Versailles, hosted by President and Mdm. De Gaulle. The benefits of being accompanied to Paris by his couture-obsessed wife were not lost on President Kennedy who joked at a press luncheon in Paris in June 1961 (and as referenced in Fort Worth two years later): 'I do not think it entirely inappropriate to introduce myself to this audience. I am the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to Paris, and I have enjoyed it.'<sup>1</sup> Criticisms of her extravagances, however, meant that, on other occasions, Jackie felt compelled to mask her patronage of Parisian fashion houses (much as she also successfully hid her chain-smoking from public view) by openly championing their stateside imitators: the Manhattan boutique A La Carte, or Chez Ninon, established by Nona Park and Sophie Shonnard in the late 1920s. As the catalogue accompanying the 2001–2 John F. Kennedy museum exhibition *Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years* noted: 'Through Chez Ninon Jacqueline Kennedy acquired clothing that was legitimately made in America, although designed in Paris' (Bowles 2001: 31). Jacqueline Kennedy was no stranger, therefore, to the art of copying.

Exemplified by the series of multi-image portraits of Jackie Andy Warhol produced in the immediate aftermath of the assassination is the notion that there was never only one Jackie, but several. Like all icons, Jacqueline Kennedy was public property; but even after she became Jackie Onassis, even in death, her

public image was shot through with nostalgia for the White House years, forever associated with JFK, 'Camelot' and the gruesome finale in Dallas 1963. After her death in 1994, much of the press coverage leap-frogged the more recent past and was accompanied (see, for example the cover of *Life Magazine*) by images of her when married to Jack Kennedy. This formal Jackie image of the 1960 to 1963 era, however, often looked as if it was such a strain to maintain: the awkwardness of being the couture-adorned wife was frequently palpable, epitomised by the disconcertingly asymmetrical bouffant hairstyle and the primly unadventurous red Chez Ninon suit she donned for *A Tour of the White House with Mrs John F. Kennedy*. This much fetishised televised tour of the newly decorated presidential residence was broadcast by CBS and NBC on St Valentine's Day, 14 February 1962 (and repeated the following night) and was reputedly watched by three out of four US television viewers. As here, Jackie Kennedy's White House years were characterised by formal glamour and conservative chic. Although she was an influential fashion leader, in the many images of her performing official duties her clothes become barriers shielding her from onlookers, particularly the stiffly structured, sculpted designs of her Oleg Cassini gowns. Rather than follow the contours of her body, her formal clothes (for all her love of couture) sit seemingly in conflict with them: the official clothes wear her, not vice versa. In his extraordinary gushing tribute *Jackie Under My Skin: Interpreting an Icon*, life-long fan Wayne Koestenbaum argues that

We called Jackie an icon because her image was frequently and influentially reproduced, and because, even when she was alive, she seemed more mythic than real.

(Koestenbaum 1995: 10)

However hard it is to imagine the average early 1960s US housewife 'reproducing' one of Jackie's Chanel knock-offs, an essential component of Jackie's iconic aloofness and unknowableness was her armoury of gleaming formal clothes.

The relationship between Jackie Kennedy and her clothes altered irreversibly on 22 November 1963. The pink wool Chez Ninon suit she wore on that day – though seldom featured in articles and books about her style and fashion – is the outfit for that she is best remembered. A tasteless and/or naive exception to this rule is the book of 'John F. Kennedy and his Family' cut out dolls, available for purchase at, among other places, the Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas, dedicated to the assassination. Here, a pristine and unbloodied pink suit – offset by the bouquet of red roses presented to her at Dallas Love Field – is included as Mrs Kennedy's final paper outfit (Tierney 1990: Plate 15). The First Lady had worn the pink suit several times between 1961 and 1963, and it was reputedly at her husband's request that she then wore the outfit for the visit to Texas. The suit is still central to how the assassination is remembered, despite – or maybe because of – the way in which its vibrant colour jars with the day's tragic violence. This collision between bright and gloom is crystallised in the 8 mm home movie footage of the assassination: local dressmaker Abraham Zapruder's flickering 26.6 seconds of colour Kodachrome film that accidentally captured the moment Kennedy was shot. The mere mention of 'the Zapruder film', art historian John Beck suggests, 'is

enough to call up an entire range of pictorial and cultural connotations' including the First Lady's

pink outfit clashing with the luminous flat green in the background, the fierce black and chrome of the limousines flashing in the Dallas sun, the shock of red from the President's head.

(Beck 2005: 183)

Alongside the anomalous vividness of the Zapruder film sits the complex history of the suit itself. The colour of the suit and how it chimed with the redness of the roses presented to Mrs Kennedy on her arrival at Love Field featured in many news reports from 22 November. In *Report* (1963–67), Bruce Conner's experimental collage junk film focused on the assassination, the cheery voices of the local news reporters recounting Mrs Kennedy's radiance as she arrived at Love Field overlays both archive images of that arrival and images from later in the day, after the president has been killed. The juxtaposition between the blandness of the live news reports describing the bouquet with an image, for example, of the same bouquet abandoned, a short time later, on the back seat of the presidential limousine, adds complexity and intellectual distance to the more straightforward poignancy of the film's repeated images of Jackie Kennedy leaving Parkland Hospital with her husband's confined body. The pink suit remains one of the most consistent signifiers of that day, though its meaning altered irrevocably in the few seconds it took to kill JFK.

The First Lady notoriously refused to take off her blood-soaked suit, standing beside Lyndon Baines Johnson in it, as he is sworn in aboard Air Force One, and emerging, still unchanged, from the aircraft in Washington hours later. Jackie's secretary Mary Gallagher, who was also in charge of her wardrobe, recalls how, outside the operating theatre in Parkland Hospital, Jackie stood waiting 'for word of her husband, whose blood had just been shed into her lap, staining her suit, legs and shoes' (Gallagher 1969: 289), refusing to change in order to 'let them see what they've done'.<sup>2</sup> The blood is clearly visible in photographs and newsreel, and Lady Bird Johnson recalls:

I looked at her. Mrs Kennedy's dress was stained with blood . . . and her right glove was caked, it was caked with blood – her husband's blood. Somehow that was one of the most poignant sights – that immaculate woman, exquisitely dressed, and caked in blood.

(cited in Lubin 2003: 196)

When, upon her return to the White House shortly before 5 a.m. on 23 November, Mrs Kennedy did finally take off the pink suit, her maid Provi placed it in a box, which was then passed to Jackie's mother, who inscribed 'November 22, 1963' on its lid before storing it in the attic of her Georgetown home, beside her daughter's ivory silk taffeta wedding dress. The suit was subsequently bequeathed by Caroline Kennedy to the National Archives (that also has the jacket, shirt and tie JFK was wearing when he was shot) and now resides in a vault in Maryland, uncleaned and preserved at a temperature between 65°F and 68°F and 40 percent

humidity, shielded from light and to be kept from public view – at Caroline's request – until 2103.

Jackie's attire for the trip to Dallas remains a site of symbolic conflict, the place where the clash between the gentility of the House of Chanel, the suit's vibrant colour and the violence and gore of the assassination collide. As Justine Picardie argues, 'Whatever else died with Kennedy's assassination, the Chanel suit survived, a shred of visible evidence from a split second when history was made, even as it appeared to fall apart' (Picardie 2011: 306). The dried blood clearly visible when Jackie disembarked from Air Force One in Washington ensured that the dreadful stains would not be forgotten. It is often said that on that day in Dallas 'time stood still', that 'innocence died that day', that this was 'the end of Camelot'. The death of Kennedy – alongside all its attendant artefacts, including the pink suit – represents a moment of transition, loss and closure; it also offers up a momentous redefinition of the real. As Steve Seid, in an essay about Ant Farm and T.R. Uthco's video art film about the assassination, *The Eternal Frame* (1976), wrote:

What could be considered our nation's first official snuff film, the Zapruder footage, in a mere handful of frames, encapsulated the loss of the real. Of course, this was loss was itself real – a visualized tragedy, demanding that you avert your gaze from both the death and the unknowability of death.

(Seid, 2004: 32)

In *The Eternal Frame*, Doug Hall (a member of T.R. Uthco, a group of San Francisco artists) plays the 'Artist-President' – a performative, ironic rendition of President Kennedy, who (in the mid-1970s) is still alive but, as he explains during a televised address at the start of the video:

Like all other presidents in recent years, I am, in reality, only another face on your screens. I am, in reality, only another link in that chain of pictures, that makes up the sum total of information accessible to us all as Americans.

This speech continues over the image of Hall in front of a mirror making himself up to be JFK, stating that 'the content of the image I present is no different from the image itself' and that since him/JFK 'no president can ever be more than an image, and no image can ever be in the past, or could ever be in the future, anything but dead'. In *The Eternal Frame*, Kennedy's 'image-death' as Hall refers to it also causes the demise of any naive belief in the real.

Discussing the later impact of Nixon and Watergate on 'the impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real' (1994: 19), Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*, returns to the day Kennedy was shot, arguing:

All previous presidents pay for and continue to pay for Kennedy's murder as if they were the ones who have suppressed it – which is true phantasmatically, if not in fact. They must efface this defect and

this complicity with their simulated murder. Because, now it can only be simulated . . . The Kennedys died because they incarnated something: the political, political substance, whereas the new presidents are nothing but caricatures and fake film – curiously, Johnson, Nixon, Ford all have the simian mug, the monkeys of power.

(Baudrillard 1994: 23–4)

Baudrillard likewise dates the death of the real to the events in Dallas on 22 November 1963, suggesting (in contradistinction to *The Eternal Frame*) that the Kennedys (i.e. Jack and later Bobby) were substantial, whereas politicians who followed were mere simulations. Baudrillard, like many others, over-idealises the 'long gone' pre-JFK era when 'those who died' (such as 'James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, and the Kennedys'), 'really died simply because they had a mythic dimension that implies death' (Baudrillard 2004: 24), going on to maintain that history became 'our lost referential' as we felt the 'death pangs of the real' and entered, post-Second World War and Cold War, 'an age of simulation' (Ibid: 43).

There exist numerous paradoxes and contradictions when it comes to discussing and defining the impact on representation and history of John Kennedy and the early 1960s more generally, all of which impinge on the possible conceptualisation of the symbolic importance of Mrs Kennedy's pink suit. One such contradiction is that, while many commentators argue for the assassination of 1963 as the moment when reality died and falsity or performativity took over, others associate the death of the real with Kennedy's rise, not with his death. JFK was, from the start of his career, all about image: his privileged childhood was immortalised in hours of home movie footage; he was the first television era US president, whose charismatic appearances in the televised debates against Richard Nixon are widely credited with having helped him grind out a narrow victory in 1960; he comprehended the value of image and participated willingly in two key direct cinema documentaries: *Primary* and *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment*. Writing presciently before Kennedy's death, Norman Mailer, for example, said of Kennedy that:

He is not a father, nor a god, not a god-figure, nor an institution, nor a symbol. He is in fact – permit the literary conceit – a metaphor . . . Jack Kennedy is somewhat more and considerably less after all than a hero or a villain – he is also an empty vessel, a man of many natures, not all of them necessarily rooted in granite.

(Mailer 1967: 168, 169)

Jack Kennedy's 'genius' according to Mailer, was to recognise the immense cultural importance of the movies (Ibid: 169), while Mailer's genius was to view Kennedy as a palimpsest, an empty slate onto which we could inscribe our fantasies and whose 'magnetism is that he offers us a mirror of ourselves' (Ibid: 170).

A crucial element in this discussion of the pink suit and the disintegration of 'the real' around the time of Kennedy's assassination is Jackie's survival. Warhol produced multiple images of Jackie (sourced largely from issues of *Life* from around the time of the assassination) in response to the media blitz that followed John Kennedy's death and 'the way the television and radio were

programming everybody to feel so sad'.<sup>3</sup> Warhol's series of Jackie silk screens functioned as metaphors for how the media successfully reached an unparalleled number of people in the immediate aftermath of the assassination; the series also highlighted the fact of Jackie's survival, and that her continued presence would inevitably inflect future re-enactments of the assassination. To re-enact a person or an event entails both acknowledging that the gap between past and present is unbridgeable, while simultaneously bringing the dead past 'back to life'. A re-enactment's ambivalence is crucial, as is maintaining and signalling the distinction between re-enactment and its original iteration.<sup>4</sup> It seems fundamental to all re-enactments of the Kennedy assassination that the performative copy never becomes interchangeable with the 'real' object of study, for as Bill Nichols implies, if the difference goes unrecognised, 'the question of deceit arises' (Nichols 2008: 73) – although I am more concerned with ignorance or lack of knowledge than with downright 'deceit'.

The gap between iteration and reiteration, enactment and re-enactment is a significant void, and one that I term 'approximation'.<sup>5</sup> The JFK assassination has spawned multiple re-enactments, from the FBI and Secret Service visit to Dallas on 24 May 1964 at the behest of the Warren Commission 'to determine as precisely as possible what happened' and 'to simulate the conditions that existed at the assassination scene on November 22'.<sup>6</sup> Dramatic simulations almost invariably involve the pink suit and someone taking the part of Jacqueline Kennedy, as she sat beside her husband during the fatal motorcade ride. All such versions of the pink suit, however, are inherently approximate. In spite of the importance of detachment and gaps to re-enactment, 'approximation' as a term encapsulates both distance and proximity: that an event and its re-enactments or echoes cannot be collapsed into each other, even if they help us in getting closer to the truth or to gather evidence. If something is 'approximate', even in the most ventriloquist examples, it can be mistaken for or similar to but never precisely be the same as the object it resembles. While approximation ultimately questions the very notion of originality or authenticity, Nichols posits that the re-enactment 'forfeits its indexical bond to the original event' and 'draws its fantasmatic power from this very fact' as it will never cease to be an uncanny 'repetition of what remains historically unique. A spectre haunts the text' (Nichols 2008: 74). He goes on to make the crucial observation that re-enactment is enjoyable, as 'pleasure flows from an act of imaginary engagement in which the subject knows that this act stands for a prior act, or event, with which it is not one' (Ibid: 76). Approximations or re-enactments are both propelled by the *frisson* of recognition: of knowing a film's or a drama's point of reference, while also being able to recognise that the reconstruction and its point of reference are not equivalents. It is into this gap that we insert our desires, convictions and opinions.

The pink suit has been imitated, Jackie Kennedy approximated and the assassination re-enacted many times. There are waxwork models of the ex-First Lady in pallid renditions of her Chanel knock-off, Jackie Barbie dolls and individuals, male and female, who dress up in versions of what she wore on 22 November 1963, as in the film *The House of Yes* (Mark Waters, 1997) in which Parker Posey plays an unbalanced woman who thinks she is 'Jackie O'. As I write, if you type 'Jackie Kennedy Onassis Costume – 60s Pink Suit' into your Internet search box,

you can buy yourself a decent-looking 'Deluxe "Jackie in Dallas"' copy for \$189.99, albeit one that uses black as opposed to blue trim and is still erroneously described as having been designed by Elsa Schiaparelli. The pink suit remains the subject of countless blogs and fashion websites, some of which trace the influence of Jackie's pink suit but most of which simply recount its by now over-familiar history. Repetition, and the repetition of information in particular, is key to understanding the enduring symbolic impact of the pink suit. One blog, for example, over a picture of Michelle Obama in a darker pink tweed suit, declares that the later First Lady 'is obviously fond of her predecessors (sic) vintage style as she was a sure fire doppelganger in the Maria Pinto pink tween suit'; and immediately underneath Obama is an image of the late Princess Diana in a Gianni Versace rendition of the ensemble: a coral pink short-sleeved spring suit with matching pillbox hat.<sup>7</sup>

The original pink suit – the one that in couture terms was an inauthentic, if legitimised knock-off – is perpetually recalled through these copies, these layers of approximation that on the one hand bring that original back, but on the other affirm that they will always remain differentiated, separate from it. Although still fetishised and repeated with such abandon, the pink suit will forever bring back to our collective consciousness the 'unspeakable' events that defined the 1960s (Merton 1966: 4, *passim*). I will now turn to three approximations of the pink suit in three different dramatic settings: *The Eternal Frame*, which casts Doug Michels as Jacqueline Kennedy in drag; the 1983 US mini-series *Kennedy*, in which Blair Brown plays Jackie (and Martin Sheen JFK); and the notorious, widely panned 2011 History Channel mini-series *The Kennedys*, with Katie Holmes as Jackie, dressed in a Giorgio Armani-designed replica pink suit.

*The Eternal Frame* centres on multiple re-enactments of the Dallas assassination, concluding with a series of vox-pops from people who have just attended a screening of the final edited piece. The starting point for all the film's re-enactments is the Abraham Zapruder footage (a bootlegged copy of which is played just after the titles), although, unlike their authentic source material, the varied reconstructions were meticulously planned. As Chip Lord of Ant Farm states:

This was a complicated production, and we knew there had to be the Zapruder camera, there had to be the Orville Nix camera on the other side of the street, and we thought we should have color video, and black-and-white video, and super-8 film. Super-8 film would be the most authentic to the original Zapruder. So there were a number of camera positions, and then we needed still photographers.

(Phillips 2007: 4)

Having said this, as Lord goes on to observe, 'it wasn't a very authentic remake' inasmuch as the filmmakers only used the one car, but 'it was enough for people to look right back in their memory to that moment and shed a tear' (Phillips 2007: 5). Jackie is the focal point of these repeated re-enactments, which typically conclude (after Zapruder, of course) with her clambering over the boot of the car, before being pushed back down into her seat by a secret service agent as the motorcade speeds away under the Stemmons Freeway. Michels' drag rendition of Jackie is the element of the performance furthest removed from the original source

material and arguably the video's most irreverent and sacrilegious feature, as here the usually demure First Lady, upon successfully completing a studio rehearsal of the drive through Dallas, is seen winking at the camera, or striding across the gravel from hotel lobby to minibus on her way to Dealey Plaza brandishing her bouquet of red roses as if wielding a cudgel.

The performers are here relocating to downtown Dallas in order to perform their full site-specific re-stagings of the assassination, about which Michels says:

there have been other reenactments . . . At the same time, the Kennedy assassination was still very sacrosanct, and I don't think anyone had really violated it as art, or interpreted it as art . . . nobody had done bloody close-ups like we did. That's for sure.

(quoted in Lewallen 2004: 76)

Woven into the structuring fabric of *The Eternal Frame* is a complex ongoing dialogue about performativity and the potential collapsing of the division between the real and re-enactment. Michels is a key component in this; one of the video's enduring paradoxes, for instance, is that the pink suit he wears is a more accurate, albeit less boxy, replication of the Chez Ninon/Chanel original than many others. In addition, when the performers get to Dallas, acknowledgement of the inauthenticity of Michels' rendition of Jackie is repressed by the bystanders watching the re-enactments, one of whom explains to his grandchildren that the actor 'is dressed just like her', while another calls it 'a beautiful enactment'. The serial re-enactments are interrupted briefly by a paparazzi-style photo-shoot, as Michels and Doug Halls (as the fatally wounded president) pose in lurid colour for close-ups in the back of the president's limo. Amidst the frenzied whirring and clicking of camera shutters, Halls is slumped, his face splattered with blood with Michels rising up above him, mouth open in horror and his white gloves also caked in blood. The faithful re-enactments of the Zapruder film that, as an onlooker says, feel 'like the real thing', do not confront us with the same ethical issues as this inserted photo-shoot, which somehow crosses over into assassination forbidden territory. The Zapruder film or subsequent re-stagings of the assassination from alternative locations on Dealey Plaza preserve a safe distance between reality and fantasy through maintaining their authenticity by never giving us the close-ups of Jackie's horror at the moment her husband's head was blown off. *The Eternal Frame's* transgression is to bring too close and in luminous colour the moment when the pink suit's elegance was violated by the president's fresh blood, violating in turn the event's mystique and fantasy to an even greater extent than when magnifying the Zapruder frames showing the impact of the third bullet on Kennedy's head, which, in the digitally enhanced versions of the home movie now freely available, remain all too graphic.

Ironically, the impact of the third and fatal bullet is handled in a comparably sacrilegious manner in the otherwise turgid and bland 1980s mini-series, *Kennedy*, in which Blair Brown and her pink suit are hosed with JFK's blood as if in some low-budget splatter movie. In contradistinction to the series' otherwise dubiously reverential dramatisation of JFK's life, the pink suit, although perhaps less elegantly fitted, is, down to the trim, the blue ring on the gold buttons, the short white

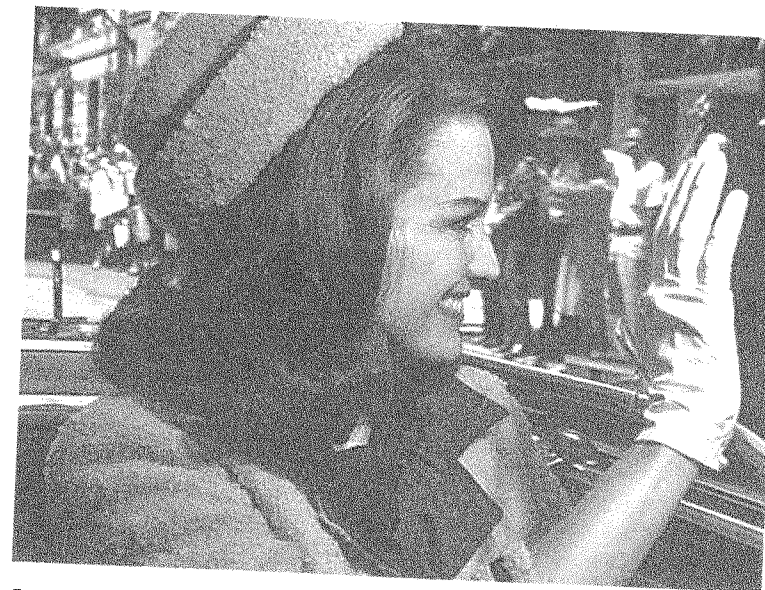


Figure 17.1 Blair Brown's pink suit before the assassination in the 1980s mini-series *Kennedy*.

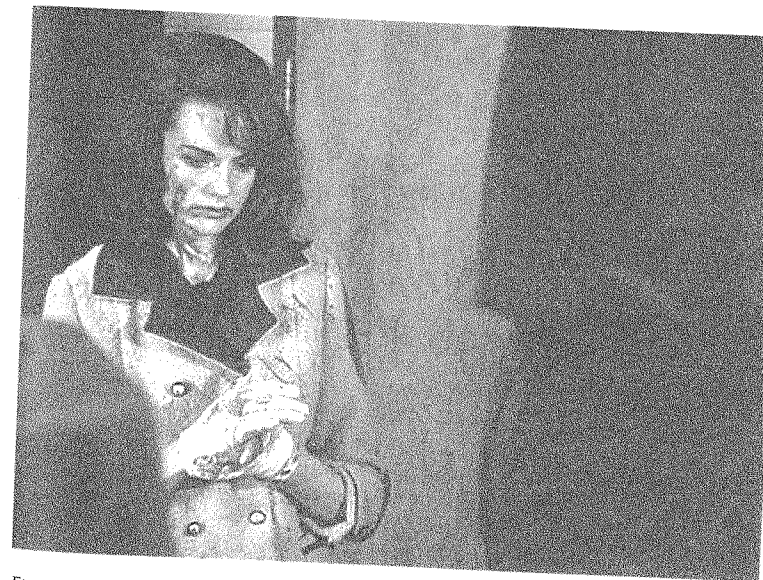


Figure 17.2 Blair Brown's pink suit after the assassination in the 1980s mini-series *Kennedy*.

gloves and the fussy undershirt, very close to the Chez Ninon original. The suit is first glimpsed in the last episode of *Kennedy* over breakfast in Fort Worth and is swathed in pathos and poignancy, for not only are we already anticipating its imminent defilement, but also the Kennedys have, following the death of their infant second son Patrick, entered a new and happier phase in their marriage. Following a short sequence of black and white archive of Air Force One arriving at Love Field, Blair Brown as Jackie emerges in the pink suit, holding the familiar red roses to greet the people who have come to welcome her and Jack to Dallas. Here, close-ups enable us to appreciate the weight of the wool and the accuracy of the suit's colours. As the motorcade proceeds downtown, the feeling of encroaching doom, like the strain of an over-wound coil prior to being released, encircles the close-ups of Jackie smiling and waving to the assembled throngs. Suddenly, the sound becomes muffled as, in close-up from inside the car, Martin Sheen as Kennedy clutches his throat and looks over at his wife as the first bullet strikes; she bends down so they are almost touching, before a shot sounds and Jackie's face, in extreme close-up, is covered in blood. Pandemonium breaks out, the limousine screeches off and we just see the First Lady crawling along the boot before being urged back into her seat by the secret service agent, as in the authentic archive.

Upon arrival at Parkland Hospital, Jackie is cradling her husband's head, everything 'caked', as Lady Bird put it, in blood. This scene, like the suit, sticks close to the fact and is lifted pretty much verbatim from Kitty Kelley's unauthorised biography *Jackie Oh!* (which, in turn, embellished but mimicked more authoritative accounts such as Mary Gallagher's *My Life With Jacqueline Kennedy*). In Kelley's book – as in the mini-series – secret service agent Clint Hill realises what was paralysing Jackie:

He immediately ripped off his suit coat and laid it on her lap so she could cover the President's head. The sight of his spilling brains and tissues was too unbearable for others to see. Caked with blood, Jackie stumbled into the hospital, never letting go of the coat covering her husband's head.

(Kelley 1978: 203–4)

The symbolic conjunction of the First Lady, the pink suit and the blood concludes *Kennedy*, which ends on a close-up of Jackie's bloodied face looking over at her husband's corpse.

In the much later History Channel series *The Kennedys*, the contextualisation of the presidential trip to Dallas is more convoluted, as it includes, for instance, JFK's alleged affair with Marilyn Monroe in 1962, the political tensions in Texas prior to the visit, the mutual distrust between Robert Kennedy and LBJ and father Joseph Kennedy's stroke. Unlike most other accounts, the re-enactment of the assassination also shows the other side of the narrative, namely Lee Harvey Oswald's last minute preparations on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository. In addition, this version, more as Oliver Stone does in *JFK* (1991) makes greater use of genuine black and white archival material (of the motorcade's stately progression through Dallas) and faked archive (of the TSBD, for example). The relevance of the black and white, I think, is twofold: first, that the series is seeking to confirm

its authenticity and second, that only two artefacts of the assassination are consistently associated with colour – the Zapruder film and the pink suit.

Perplexing, therefore, is the series' relative *inauthenticity* when it comes to the suit. In this approximation, remarkably little presidential blood reaches Jackie, so little in fact that neither her face nor her jacket end up besmirched. By virtue of having been designed by Giorgio Armani, this rendition of the suit was granted a couture identity independent of the Chez Ninon original and the tragedy that engulfed it. The suit that adorns Katie Holmes in *The Kennedys* is thereby leant a symbolic existence semi-independent of the assassination. This Armani reincarnation deviates from the original in small but crucial respects: it is made from a lighter, less textured wool and in a paler fabric; the trim is black as opposed to dark blue; its buttons are gold, without the darker inner ring; its cut is slightly different and less 1960s; and, most significantly, the bowed shirt Jackie Kennedy wore underneath it has been replaced by a plain, round-collared undershirt. Armani, who, in 2006, had designed Katie Holmes' wedding outfits, was engaged, reputedly at the behest of Holmes herself, to make two outfits for *The Kennedys*: the pink suit and the imitation inauguration gown (after an original designed by Ethel Franken at Bergdorf Goodman). Reproducing such an iconic outfit as the original Chanel copy, synonymous with both a momentous historical event and another couturier's signature style, is an unexpected choice for a colleague of Armani's stature, although as series costume designer Christopher Hargadon explains, Holmes and Tom Cruise had 'a relationship with Armani, and when they found out she was doing the project, they asked to make her clothes' (Odell 2011).

More overtly than other approximations of the pink suit, the Armani version for Katie Holmes, by virtue of its small differences as well as who designed it, is uncanny. We recognise it immediately as being a replica of the assassination-day suit, but it nevertheless remains distinct from it. In his essay 'The Uncanny' (1919), Freud defines the uncanny as 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (Freud 1919: 340) and offers various definitions of *Heimlich* (homely) and *Unheimlich*, positing that these are not clear opposites – that the unfamiliar or unhomely is not necessarily frightening and vice versa. He continues: 'Heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with the opposite, *unheimlich*' (Ibid: 341).

The uncanny can be related to trauma, and indeed the convergence of the familiar and beautiful (Jackie and the suit) with the violent and brutal (the assassination) will remain forever uncomfortably uncanny. In one essential way, however, the uncanny as applied to the multiple performances of Jackie's pink suit differs sharply from Freud's when he envisages that an uncanny effect is often produced 'when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality' (Freud 1919: 367).

While it is not the case that the distinction between the imagination and reality is 'effaced' when the suit is copied, it is the case that the reincarnations of the dress bring into reality and consciousness something that previously resided in the imaginary, or more accurately, in this instance, in the memory. As Freud goes on, 'the uncanny is something that is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it' (Ibid).

One vital aspect of the repeated re-enactment of the pink suit is that every new approximation invites us to re-enter the pleasurable fantasy that the trauma in which it became a central player – Kennedy's assassination – did not happen. Because all the dramas and reproductions of the pink suit necessarily include the outfit in its pre-assassination unsullied form, it also encapsulates the fantasy that the trauma could, this time, be averted. This uncanny dramatic irony is integrated into the drama of *The Eternal Frame*, as one of the 'reporters' in Dealey Plaza engages in a dialogue with one of the 'secret service agents':

*Agent:* Unfortunately, we fucked up on this one.  
*Reporter:* What do you mean?  
*Agent:* Well, he got killed.  
*Reporter:* How do you know that? Did you kill the president?  
*Agent:* No. I saw it though. I saw his head come off.  
*Reporter:* Let's do it as if it hasn't happened yet.  
*Agent:* As if he's still alive? . . . It's a beautiful day.  
*Reporter:* You don't expect anything to happen, do you?  
*Agent:* Well, we're always worried about Dallas. It's a tough city. It's a gun city, and there's a lot of kooks here'.

So the agent rejoins the motorcade as if able to protect the Artist-President and his wife, played by a man in drag, from fatal bullets fired 12 years earlier. The uncanny layers of such impersonations of the assassination, Jackie and her pink suit bring back into consciousness not only a repressed memory of 22 November 1963 but also how nearly it could have been averted. The pink suit, as one of the day's most evocative symbols, will always be a site of rupture as well as nostalgic recollection.

### Conclusion

To end with a different variety of approximation: the blog *Jezebel* asked in 2008 – that is, just after Barack Obama was elected to the office of US president – 'Michelle and Jackie O: twins separated at birth?',<sup>8</sup> before critiquing a series of photographs that show the two First Ladies in vaguely similar outfits: two red suits and two yellow suits. 'Long before Ted Kennedy endorsed him for president', Jennifer's page starts, 'I've been telling anyone who'll listen that I think that Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, are the contemporary version of Camelot . . . at least sartorially: Michelle is Jackie 2.0'. Running parallel to these discussions of the similarities between the two First Ladies, there exist both the oblique and signposted overlaps between Barack Obama and Jack Kennedy, which Obama and his press office have readily endorsed with encounters such as Caroline Kennedy's visit to the Oval Office on 3 March 2009 to mark Obama's first 100 days in office, during which Obama crouches under the famous Resolute Desk, much as Caroline's baby brother John had done in 1963. The echoes between Jackie Kennedy and Michelle Obama are likewise uncanny, not because the two women look like each other, but that a sense of uncanniness is assumed and thereby imposed on Michelle Obama, which has its roots in a rather strange sentiment: she possesses a sense of

style and is a First Lady, thereby assuring the similarities between her and Jackie Kennedy.

There have been numerous imitations of Jackie Kennedy for the screen, primarily on television: Francesca Annis in *Onassis, the Richest Man in the World* (1988), Michelle Gellar in *A Woman Named Jackie* (1991), Joanne Whalley in *Jackie Bouvier Kennedy Onassis* (2000), Jill Hennessy in *Jackie, Ethel, Joan: The Women of Camelot* (2001), Jacqueline Bisset in *America's Prince: The JFK Jr Story* (2003) or Jeanne Tripplehorn in *Grey Gardens* (2009). It is intriguing how many of the actresses who have played Jackie have been British. Another English actress, Rachel Weisz, pulled out of playing Jackie Kennedy in a film project *Jackie*, which dramatises the immediate aftermath of the JFK assassination, to be replaced, it is rumoured, by Natalie Portman. Perhaps so many British actresses have been cast in the role because of her peculiarly stilted speaking voice, or perhaps because it is still forbidden to render Jackie too closely. Jackie Kennedy has been much copied, but as with approximations of the pink suit, the difference between reality and representation, between original and re-enactment is consistently maintained. The pink suit will always be a defining signifier for the events in Dallas of 22 November 1963, and so, to an extent, will continue to exist independently of the person it adorned, Jackie Kennedy. Just as the suit itself is preserved under lock and key in the National Archives, Maryland, so, as a result of this absence and repression, its meaning will never be unlocked. It will be remembered only through rapidly fading memories, archival images and copies. The idea of future generations being able to finally see the authentic and bloodstained suit is a disturbing idea, but also a salutary reminder that probably the majority of people in 2103 will not care about what the suit signifies, but will view it with the interested but dispassionate detachment visitors to Ford's Theatre might now look at the frock coat, waistcoat and trousers Abraham Lincoln was wearing when *he* was assassinated in 1865. The pink suit, by virtue of its multiple inferences and subsequent re-enactments, continues to haunt us: a palimpsest or ghostly signifier as well as the ultimate fetish object of the JFK assassination.

### Notes

- 1 This oft-cited comment is available from many sources, including YouTube, as the speech was televised, and c/o the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston (see [www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Jacqueline-Kennedy-in-the-White-House.aspx?p=4](http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Jacqueline-Kennedy-in-the-White-House.aspx?p=4)).
- 2 Various attributed to Jackie, to JFK aide Kenny O'Donnell and others, a version of 'let them see what they've done' appears in most accounts of the aftermath of the assassination. Gallagher's version, attributed to O'Donnell, is: 'it'll show the world what's been done to Jack' (Gallagher 1970: 293).
- 3 Cf. [www.artconnected.org/resource/91183/sixteen-jackies](http://www.artconnected.org/resource/91183/sixteen-jackies).
- 4 Cf. Bill Nichols 'Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject', *Critical Inquiry*, 35 (Autumn 2008), 72–89.
- 5 This refers to my current Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship and the following book (to be published by Routledge): *Approximation: Documentary, History and the Staging of Reality*.

- 6 'Chapter 3: The Shots from the Texas School Book Depository – The Trajectory (Films and Tests)', *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy*, [www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html#films](http://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-3.html#films).
- 7 'Retro Threadz: Where Fashion is Rediscovered', [www.retrothreadz.blogspot.co.uk/2011/08/mod-monday-jackie-kennedy.html](http://www.retrothreadz.blogspot.co.uk/2011/08/mod-monday-jackie-kennedy.html).
- 8 [www.jezebel.com/351264/michelle-and-jackie-o-twins-separated-at-birth#ixzz16tmXozXq](http://www.jezebel.com/351264/michelle-and-jackie-o-twins-separated-at-birth#ixzz16tmXozXq).

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## Fiona Cox

### FAB LESBIANISM AND FAMILY VALUES

#### Costuming of lesbian identities in *The L Word* and *The Kids Are All Right*

AS JANE GAINES OUTLINED in her highly influential article on costume in Hollywood cinema, onscreen clothes have traditionally reinforced narrative and revealed aspects of character – in particular female character – so that, typically, 'Dress Tells the Woman's Story' (Gaines 1990). Characters tend to be 'costumed with rather than against . . . personality', and onscreen outfits are expected to indicate elements of identity such as 'gender, age, nationality . . . social class' and so on (Gaines 1990: 184, 186). But what happens when a character's traits include lesbian identity?

Historically, lesbian and gay male representation in film and on television has been fraught, with such characters – where visible at all – typically depicted via negative stereotypes (Russo 1981; Tropiano 2002). Richard Dyer's foundational work on gay and lesbian representation explains stereotypes as forged by dominant cultures to 'other' groups of people, with lesbian and gay stereotypes reinforcing that such individuals 'fall short of the "ideal" of heterosexuality' and therefore belong outside of society (1977: 31). As a result, stereotypes are considered 'bad'. As recently as 2010, out lesbian comedian Sue Perkins responded in the *Guardian* newspaper to a media report on the representation of gay, lesbian and bisexual people on television with the following: 'the same issues keep arising. For gay men, it's the predominance of the camp cliché. For lesbians, despair at the outdated butch-femme stereotypes.' To replace these, Perkins called for more 'real' depictions of gay people; for example, 'just sitting around paying bills like Average Jos' (Perkins 2010).

Problematically for designers, critics like Andrea Weiss point out that avoiding typing in representations of lesbian and gay characters 'denies cultural difference' so that portraying people who do not inhabit gay types but simply "happen to be gay" . . . become[s] another form of invisibility' (1992: 63). Offering a possible