

Seeing Double: Jacqueline Kennedy Through Media

Jacqueline and John F. Kennedy's rise to fame aligned with the technological advancement of photography and television that shaped America into a mass-mediated nation in which people's lives could be consumed. The media was instantly attracted to Jackie's glowing youthfulness and glamorous style that revolutionized the American female ideal. The media's proclivity to surveil people's lives merged private and public spheres, and its obsession with Jackie made her a malleable figure and her identity more fluid. The "Jackie craze" was fueled by the packaging and repackaging of her *image*, drawing audiences farther away from Jackie as a person and into the world of fantasy and speculation. In this essay I will analyze pop art, fashion advertisements, and Pablo Larrain's film, *Jackie*, to suggest that the repurposing of Jackie's image transforms her into a mythological figure.

Memory theory plays a significant role in the way we interact with media. Media has the potential to immortalize people, but with immortality comes the responsibility to adapt to the changing zeitgeist. As culture changes, so does the way in which we remember and make sense of history. As Marita Sturken suggests, historical artifacts and representations of the past can jog a person's memory, but they can also dictate to us how we should remember someone or something:

On one hand, photographed, filmed, and videotaped images can embody and create memories; on the other hand, they have the capacity, through the power of their presence, to obliterate them... The image plays a central role in shaping the desire for cultural memory, specifically the need to share personal experiences. Indeed, the camera image blurs the boundary between cultural memory and history. Well-known images become part of our personal recollections, personal (and 'amateur') images often move into public arenas.¹

¹ Sturken, Marita. *Tangled Memories the Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2009, p. 20, 22.

Representations of the past test the permeability of our own memories as they make it more difficult for us to differentiate personal memories from a collective public memory, or as Sturken calls it, a “cultural memory.” Memory becomes vulnerable to media because while memories are naturally transient and ephemeral, media are produced to be long-lasting. Media publicizes the personal while people’s consumption of media makes personal that which was made public. Therefore, memory and media exist in a constant dialogue with one another. Even though media can develop memories, they also flatten them; media create and recreate Jackie’s image to the point where her image becomes the essence of her being and the essence of our memory of her.

Jackie’s resistance to the press perpetuated the media’s fetishization of her because it made her enigmatic, a moving target that could not be pinpointed, a “Silent Goddess.”² Media did not reproduce Jackie’s image with the intent of giving her a voice but worshipping her silence. Oline Eaton’s idea of ‘Silent Jackie’ is that her silence enhanced her glamorousness and dignity.³ However, it is not historically accurate that Jackie was silent to the media as she appeared in one of John F. Kennedy’s campaign ads and most popularly gave a White House tour in 1962 that was “the first prime-time television documentary in which a woman provided the majority of the narration,” along with a series of “oral histories” with Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and William Manchester, and a couple of interviews after her husband’s assassination.⁴ Jackie’s desire to establish strict boundaries, protect her privacy, and stay out of the limelight encouraged the media’s curiosity of the First Lady, her alluring “silence” becoming an essential part of her mediated image. Jackie’s “silence” was made even more prominent when juxtaposed with her husband who took advantage of the spotlight the media shone on him. Even when Jackie did

² Patton, Greg. “The Silent Goddess.” *San Bernardino County Sun*, May 21, 1994.

³ Eaton, Oline. “Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis: A Celebrity Afterlife In American Culture.” *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2019, pp. 324-325.

⁴ *Ibid*, 323.

speak, her whispery, child-like voice shocked viewers and sparked criticism. The media had the effect of honoring Jackie's silence and simultaneously silencing her as her image took on a life of its own, the media's concern not being who Jackie *was* but who she *appeared to be*.

In the beginning of the 1960's, Andy Warhol was still transitioning from commercial illustrator for magazines such as the *New Yorker* and *Vogue* to pop artist. Peter Stanfield proffers that Pop Art evolved from the late 1950's to the early 1960's when it went from being synonymous with Pop Culture and was broadly defined as fine art that absorbs commercial material to developing into its own movement with distinct properties and aesthetics such as representing everyday objects and symbols from popular mass culture and using techniques inspired by advertisers and comic strips.⁵ Warhol began his career as a pop artist by painting superheroes like Batman and Superman. In 1962, he started using his photo silk screen technique to make portraits of Marilyn Monroe after her death that summer. Warhol delved deeper into his fascination of death when, following the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, he began working on what would later become a series of over 300 portraits of the first lady. He focused on eight photographs of Jackie collected from *Life* that he cropped to frame her facial expressions—two showed Jackie smiling in a pillbox hat prior to the assassination, two more photos showed her right after John F. Kennedy's assassination during the swearing in of Lyndon B. Johnson, and the final four showed her as a widow during the state funeral three days post the assassination.⁶ Warhol narrated the tragedy that shocked the nation through the nuances of Jackie's face. Warhol multiplies the few faces of Jackie into hundreds, making her the face of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Warhol uses Jackie's emotional arc over the course of the

⁵ Stanfield, Peter. "The Who and Pop Art: The Simple Things You See Are All Complicated." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* (Wiley-Blackwell), vol. 29, no. 1, 2017, p. 2.

⁶ Sooke, Alastair. "Culture - Jackie Kennedy: Andy Warhol's Pop Saint." BBC. BBC, April 18, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20140418-jackie-warhols-pop-saint>.

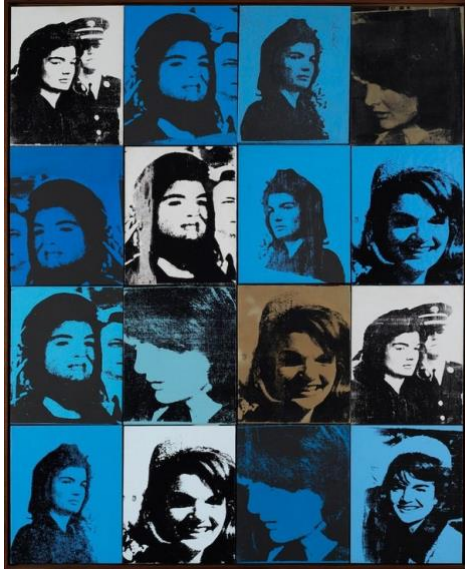
assassination, freezing her within the context of her husband. Jackie is reduced to a conduit to express *his* story rather than her own; the nation's memory of John F. Kennedy is recalled *through* Jackie. Jackie also becomes the face of a grief-stricken nation and the lamenting world, representing everyone except for herself. She is transformed into an admirable artistic rendition of newspaper headlines, and her sorrow becomes an object of voyeuristic obsession.

Warhol used mass-media and consumerist culture to inform both the subject and methodology of his art. Warhol would select a photo from the media and then have others do the screening so that each painting took about four minutes to produce.⁷ Warhol's highly efficient art process resembled that of factory labor; he worked with a machine-like automatism that mimicked the production of mass-manufactured goods associated with the Taylorist assembly line in Fordism that sought to maximize profit and minimize cost. Warhol's factory represents the 'factory society' in which "the production of capital amounts to the reproduction of social life."⁸ The merging of artistic procedure and the capitalist economic structure collapses leisure and work and politicizes the personal. During this time, Neoliberalism began to dominate human relations because it redefined citizens as consumers and remodeled them into something that could be consumed.⁹ The commodification of people convoluted the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity and deemphasized originality. It reshaped beauty and social standards and supported an increasingly mediated and aestheticized society that caters to the masses instead of the individual.

⁷ Galenson, David W., and Bruce A. Weinberg. *Age and the Quality of Work: the Case of Modern American Painters*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1999, p. 768.

⁸ Graw, Isabelle. "When Life Goes to Work: Andy Warhol." *October*, vol. 132, 2010, p. 100.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 103-104.



Warhol's *Sixteen Jackies* could be read in numerous ways.¹⁰ It could be a commentary on the intrusiveness of media; the way viewers see Jackie zoomed in from many angles in a range of emotions conjures feelings of imposition and a penetration of privacy. The repetitiveness of her face suggests that Jackie cannot hide from us, but we also cannot escape from her; for every person that studies this artwork,

sixteen Jackie's stare back at them. The fact that a general timeline of events could be sketched based on these heavily cropped images also indicates the wide circulation and prevalence of these photos in media. The compilation of Jackie's face is both unnerving and alluring, nauseating and intoxicating. It is like an obsessive psychological study of Jackie's grief, a puzzle that tries to piece Jackie together. However, this is also a fragmentation of Jackie—the artwork is not cohesive or chronological but is a pixelated image of Jackie. The electrifying colors of the work are suggestive of a drug-induced perception that tears viewers away from reality. While viewers lose a sense of themselves, they also lose a sense of Jackie as a person as she is reproduced to the point of dehumanization. Every boxed in face of hers is just another product on the assembly line waiting to be consumed and discarded. It is overwhelmingly colorful, redundant, and invasive, and in the process of consuming and being consumed Jackie exists as a simulation and the audience is caught in a hyperreality.

¹⁰ Warhol, Andy. *Sixteen Jackies*, 1964. Private Collection, New York., © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

As an Eastern Orthodox Catholic who was often exposed to female saints, Warhol's relationship with Jackie could be likened to a Renaissance artist painting a saint. Warhol's series of *Round Jackies* depicts her smiling face stamped on a spray-painted gold background that is reminiscent of a halo.¹¹ The bright blue hues in *Sixteen Jackies* could also be found in many paintings of the Holy Virgin. The idolization of Jackie turns her audience into her disciples: "Jackie was like a contemporary, secular version of a saint, venerated by the masses."¹² *Round Jackies* is iconography for a secular culture. In this light, Jackie's "silence" appears almost sacrificial and self-penitential and "Saint-Jackie" overlaps with independent Jackie. While the media degrades Jackie into a mass-produced item, it also sanctifies and fervently worships Jackie; either way, Jackie becomes inhuman.



Allan D'Arcangelo's painting *Madonna and Child* memorializes Jackie as both a religious and fashion icon.¹³ It depicts Jackie in her iconic hairstyle, pearls, and A-line dress beside her daughter, Caroline, with their heads both encircled by golden halos. The painting is a "hard-edge" portrait of Jackie in which the details of her image are represented using blocks of bright, contrasting colors.¹⁴ Jackie and Caroline are both faceless figures that look like a photo stand-in through

¹¹ Warhol, Andy. *Round Jackie*, gold paint and silkscreen ink on linen, 1964, Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York.

¹² Sooke, Alastair. "Culture - Jackie Kennedy: Andy Warhol's Pop Saint." BBC. BBC, April 18, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20140418-jackie-warhols-pop-saint>.

¹³ D'Arcangelo, Allan. *Madonna and Child*, acrylic and gesso on canvas, 1963, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

¹⁴ "Culture Spaces ." *Culture Spaces* . Whitney Museum of American Art , n.d.

https://www.culturespaces.com/sites/ceportail/files/dp_uk_pop_art_collectionwhitney_museemaillol_bd.pdf.

which anyone could poke their head. They are flat, emotionless, generic entities that are defined solely by their hair and clothes. While it suggests that Jackie's look is so woven into America's cultural memory that she can be identified by a few minimalistic features, it simultaneously rejects her identity by leaving her and her daughter faceless, dimensionless, and hollow. Her silhouette reminds us that we do not actually *know* Jackie, we can only *recognize* her. Like Warhol's Jackie's, she is enshrined in divine connotations but is also generalized and diminished—Jackie's image is a visual synecdoche in which a few materialistic parts are designed to stand in for her personhood. The painting celebrates Jackie as a maternal figure but also objectifies her as a fashion totem. Ironically, the transformation of Jackie into a celebrity both consecrates and typifies her.

Jackie's image echoes beyond the museum and in people's homes when they peruse magazines and see Jackie look-alikes in countless advertisements regardless of whether or not they are selling women's fashion. Inspired by the classy looks of Audrey Hepburn and Givenchy, Jackie manages to develop her own timeless style that ultimately revolutionizes modern American fashion. Jackie's conservative, clean-cut style made her look effortlessly elegant: "And the look was very simple—no complicated cuts, no fussy trims, very few prints. The dressmaker suits had her favorite three-quarter-length sleeves and boxy jackets and straight or slightly gathered skirts."¹⁵ Although very expensive, Jackie's fashion sense was popular for its modesty and simplicity. Dominick Dunne claims that her clothes stay in "our collective aesthetic memory" and are "engraved on our national psyche."¹⁶ Jay Mulvaney reinforces this idea of a universal Jackie when he calls her a "global ambassador of style."¹⁷ Our memory of Jackie is

¹⁵ Mulvaney, Jay. *The Clothes of Camelot*. New York: St Martins Press Inc., U.S., 2001, p. 87.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. xii.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 55.

rooted in her seamless fashion sense that redefines vogue. Jackie and her style exist as a single entity—since we cannot think of one without thinking of the other, they are inseparable, mutually inclusive, and synonymous with one another.

Advertisements selling the “Jackie look” set the tone for what women should be wearing and investing their money in. Not only was the media saturated with images of Jackie but also with women who dreamed of looking like her. This obsession with becoming Jackie took a serious turn when Jackie sued Christian Dior for wanting to use Barbara Reynolds as a look-alike model in an advertising campaign in 1984.¹⁸ Although Jackie ended up winning the case, it exemplifies the misappropriation of Jackie’s image for the sake of increasing profits—it was a

general assumption that women did not only want to *emulate* her but to *embody* her. Advertising promoted Jackie as something to be possessed.

Jackie absorbed a classic French style to fabricate an aura of American aristocracy that women of varying social statuses will attempt to

restore. A 1966 advertisement for Saks Fifth Avenue shows a woman wearing a dark thoroughbred shift dress with a white pillbox hat and white wrist gloves.¹⁹ The model’s outfit along with her dark hair, thin body, and straight posture create a striking resemblance to Jackie.²⁰ The advertisement is not just selling clothes but rather is selling the appearance of Jackie’s



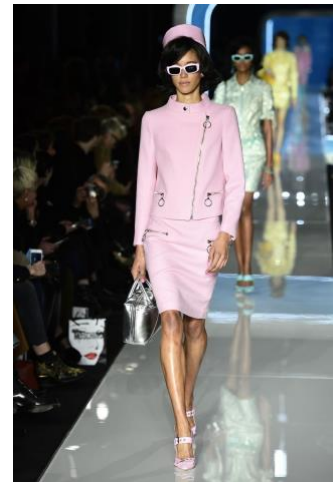
¹⁸ Shenon, Philip. “COURT SUPPORTS MRS. ONASSIS ON AD.” The New York Times. The New York Times, January 13, 1984. <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/01/13/nyregion/court-supports-mrs-onassis-on-ad.html>.

¹⁹ “Vintage Clothes/ Fashion Ads of the 1960s (Page 2).” Vintage Ad Browser. Accessed December 12, 2019. <http://www.vintageadbrowser.com/clothes-ads-1960s/2>. [For additional examples see Figures 1-2].

²⁰ “Royalty Free Stock Photos, Illustrations, Vector Art, and Video Clips.” Getty Images. Accessed December 12, 2019. <https://www.gettyimages.com/>. [For additional examples see Figures 1-2].

identity. It is eerie to consider how easy it is to commodify an identity and adopt it as one's own, yet advertisements such as these prime females to know that if they want to be considered glamorous then they must attempt to live up to the "Jackie ideal." Therefore, Jackie becomes a fashion movement, an aesthetic to be modeled, a brand. The Jackie label is even something royalty such as Kate Middleton and Princess Diana look to for inspiration.²¹ Even though Jackie's legacy lives on in people's fashion choices, she is emblemized for her lavish taste and the fetishization of her façade leaves her humanity in the shadows.

In Fall 2018, Moschino released a 60's inspired runway show that reimagines Jackie's most iconic outfits. Moschino's Jeremy Scott is known to use his influence as a haute couture fashion designer to bring awareness to today's consumerist culture—in the past, he has had a McDonalds-themed collection and one in which he sent models down the runway wearing heaps of trash. In this 60's collection, an archetypal pillbox hat is secured atop every model's head and the bright fabrics are reminiscent of Jackie as a pop art muse.²² As one Jackie struts after another, viewers are brought back to the idea of Jackie on an assembly line. These Jackie "clones" appear more doll-like than human, and their clothes look like a fusion of Barbie and



Jackie's style. Jackie once said to her designer Oleg Cassini: "You know the kind [of dresses] I like: a covered up look. Even though these clothes are for official life, please don't make them too dressy, as I'm sure I can continue to dress the way I like—simple and young clothes, as long

²¹ See figure 3.

²² Fisher, Lauren Alexis. "A Parade of Jackie Kennedy Clones Walked The Runway at Moschino." *Harper's BAZAAR*. Harper's BAZAAR, February 21, 2018. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/fashion-week/a18581059/moschino-jackie-kennedy-fall-2018-show/>. [see figure 4]

as they are covered up for the occasion.”²³ These runway looks bring a new meaning to Jackie’s youthfulness, and although the models are mostly covered up, the outfits are more body-fitting than Jackie’s and have an element of sex appeal to them. Moschino’s rejuvenated Jackie’s criticize Jackie’s objectification by ironically repurposing her signature style. Scott shifts Jackie from an iconic fashion symbol to a consequence of consumerist culture—Jackie becomes a beast of burden that is crushed under the heavy weight of overproduction. This fashion show is more comparable to a funeral than it is to a parade—rather than celebrating Jackie’s continued existence 50 years into the future, it mourns the cookie-cutter Jackie we have come to love. The show presents us with a multiplicity of Jackie’s custom made for the modern age, but they are robotic and all essentially the same.

In an attempt to add depth and dimension to her as a person, Pablo Larrain’s film, *Jackie*, imagines Jackie’s anguish after the traumatizing assassination of her husband. It shows Jackie narrating her own story instead of having the media do it for her—it represents Jackie behind the curtains reclaiming her own identity. The film opens with Natalie Portman as Jackie telling the journalist at her doorstep that this will be her “own version of what happened.”²⁴ When Nancy calls her “Mrs. Kennedy” later on in the film, Jackie corrects her: “I’m not the First Lady anymore. You can call me Jackie.”²⁵ Larrain’s film shows Jackie come head to head with the ways she knows she is misperceived; she addresses the nation’s concerns about her costly spending habits when redoing the White House, coldly laughs at her memory of Jack calling her collection of art a showcase of “vanity,” and yells at Bobby that she is not “some silly little debutante” he thinks she is in order for her to be taken seriously. Jackie semi-confidently tells the

²³ Mulvaney, Jay. *The Clothes of Camelot*. New York: St Martins Press Inc., U.S., 2001, 31.

²⁴ *Jackie*. Film. Pablo Larraín. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2016.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

journalist, “I’ve grown accustomed to a great divide of what people believe and what I know to be real.”²⁶ As the First Lady, she had learned how to cope with the fragmenting of her own identity to construct multiple Jackie’s. Viewers are encouraged to sympathize with Jackie’s experience of being told who she is. We understand her need to be stern in order to be heard and taken seriously, especially as a wispy female voice in a sea of dominating male voices. But we also see her bruised tenderness behind her stony exterior when she is alone and in her private sphere, chain-smoking and drinking, talking about praying for death and the cruelty of God. Even though she is still seen dressed in lavish clothes maneuvering through extravagantly designed rooms, all of her material possessions pale in comparison to her profound loss. The illustration of her bereavement and dispossession creates room for viewers to relate to the immense emotional pain that appeared to exist outside the realm of her mediated image of a pretty face for a love of high art.

The film also stresses Jackie’s struggle against being misrepresented by the media through her dedication to displaying the truth. When she is urged to exit out of the rear of the plane because of the press, Jackie boldly says, “Let them see what they’ve done.”²⁷ Additionally, when she is told to leave the children behind when John F. Kennedy’s casket is moved to the Capitol because of the press she responds, “Those pictures should record the truth. Two heartbroken, fatherless children are part of that.”²⁸ Even though she spent most of her time as First Lady in her private sphere being a mother, it is after the assassination when everyone is telling her to hide from the cameras that Jackie most needs to be seen by the press. Jackie’s commitment to the truth is seen as courageous and admirable, refreshingly raw; with not being

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid.

First Lady anymore comes a sense of being liberated from expectations. However, even Jackie confesses that she has trouble separating fact from fiction, private from public and admits that truth itself can become murky; she tells the journalist, “I lost track somewhere. What was real. What was performance.”²⁹ While being First Lady forced her to put on a front and wear a mask, it is after the assassination that she is seen trying to parse out what was and was not role play for her. When the priest tells her to take comfort in her memories of her husband she responds, “I can’t. They’re mixed up with all the others.”³⁰ The film includes a resonant frame in which a stunned Jackie dressed in her pastel pink Chanel outfit blankly stares into a three-paneled mirror after her husband’s murder, as if after the assassination she is confronted to make sense of this triptych of Jackie’s. Jackie’s image as First Lady, mother, and wife seem to merge into an undifferentiated mass of identities, audiences, and memories—even Jackie herself has difficulty splicing together her cleaved image into a coherent identity.

Jackie ultimately becomes a character in the Camelot myth she construes to commemorate John F. Kennedy’s presidency. Jackie tells Theodore H. White that she “realized history made Jack what he was,” but it could just as well be said that the media made Jackie what she is to us today.³¹ Jackie’s transformations across mediums constantly rewrite our struggle to understand Jackie and Jackie’s struggle to be understood. However, like the end result of a long game of Telephone, we run the risk of inventing a new character altogether. Perhaps the closer we come to feeling like we know who Jackie was, the farther we actually move from Jackie Kennedy herself. “For one brief shining moment there was Camelot.”³²

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ White, Theodore H. “For President Kennedy: An Epilogue.” *Life Magazine*, December 6, 1963.

³² Ibid.

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White, Theodore H. "For President Kennedy: An Epilogue." *Life Magazine*, December 6, 1963.

Figure 1:



Charles of the Ritz Fashion (1963)

Figure 2:



Bergdorf Goodman Brocade Knit Fashion Hat (1962)

Figure 3:



Figure 4:

