The Zapruder Film as Representational Crisis

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ABSTRACT

The Zapruder Film as Representational Crisis

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Abraham Zapruder's 26-second film of the assassination of John F. Kennedy is an indisputably unique piece of cinema. Despite its incredible currency in the world of national political history, and the shadowy world of conspiracy, it has a checkered past with regards to its assimilation into the discourse of film studies. Looked at, variably, as a piece of documentary, reportage or abstract fragment, it has been discussed largely for its cultural, historical or legal impact. This dissertation will chart its deeper implications when considered as a discrete film text and theoretical object, and will contend that, in this light, the Zapruder film participates in a fundamental disruption of the cinematic apparatus' promise of a holistic representation of reality.

This disruption will be fundamentally connected to the film's interaction with the primary theoretical concepts of attraction, indexicality and contingency as they are understood in the discipline. An investigation of the Zapruder film's formal and structural similarities to the earliest cinematic products and the disruptions connected to the cinema of attractions and early types of "event" filmmaking will be essential. Connections to the use of attractions in experimental film will also show productive comparisons. Fiction film's connection to these issues and their engagement with the disruption proposed by the Zapruder film will also be important. Here it will be necessary to chart the way narrative can act as both a palliative and intensifying force for the epistemological uncertainty of the images proposed. Finally, we must understand the extent to which the dynamic and ever-changing context of digital remediation has affected the disruptions of the Zapruder film.

All of these considerations are not intended to fix the meaning of the Zapruder film or to detract from its impact in other realms. The key intervention of this dissertation is to open a space for it, not as an orphan child of circumstance, but deeply connected to the process and fundamental structure of cinematic representations as such. This work then is not so much recuperative as it is meant to fully understand and appreciate the depth to which film texts on the borders of the discipline can speak to its very core.

Acknowledgements

Apart from being a talented amateur filmmaker, Abraham Zapruder was an avid tinkerer. He would rig up all kinds of gadgets around the house and play with the wiring to the point where a family friend mused that she was afraid that one day she would ring the doorbell and the house would blow up. I have likewise tinkered with this dissertation, in one form or another, for almost a decade. What kept the house from blowing up was the kind and supportive network of my friends and family. My wife and two children have not known a world in which their husband or father is not working on this project. They have braved innumerable stresses and tensions, exasperated howls as I have worked my way through this material. The sheer length of the project and my constant tinkering has defined their lives and not always for the better. I thank them unreservedly and apologetically for their patience, their strength and their support. To my mother and father who have helped in innumerable ways at every stage and have braved anguished phone calls and vitriolic tirades on the nature of academic writing, I likewise thank them and apologize.

Professionally, this work has been immeasurably aided by my supervisor Dr. Martin Lefebvre. Our innumerable and wide-ranging conversations gave shape to the shapeless and direction to the lost elements of this work. I would also like to thank all the members of the faculty that gave me advice and support over the years. Likewise, the staff and graduate program assistants at the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema have braved untold bureaucratic hurdles in my defense.

Though this work bears my name, it should really include all of theirs as well. It as much a product of their efforts as it is of mine. I can confidently state as the literal and unvarnished truth that what you read here would not have been possible without them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures

Introduction

Ultimately, it is only 26 seconds of film. A car comes around a corner, a man inside waves to the crowd of onlookers, he is shot and the car speeds away. It seems strange, and somehow at the same time strangely appropriate, that so much political, legal and even epistemological controversy should surround such a short film. This footage, shot by an amateur home movie enthusiast, is undoubtedly unique. Unique, however, not just for its subject matter, which would put it at the top of any journalist's list of credentials had a professional captured it, but also for its construction: the way it frames the event.

The volatility of Abraham Zapruder's film of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy adds to the list of these special characteristics. As a home movie, it was unprecedented in scope, content and distribution. As piece of physical evidence it was damaged, manipulated and misread. As a piece of personal property it was hidden, guarded and traded for vast sums of money. This volatility follows it into the world of film study and analysis where it has been categorized as a home movie, a documentary, a piece of reportage, found footage and simply as a film fragment. But rarely has it been formally identified as a cinematic work.

In academic as in more popular venues the discussion of the Zapruder film is irrevocably tied with the events of the assassination. Countless histories, from high-minded records to the downright prurient, litter bookshelves of multiple nations about JFK, his assassination and the events preceding and subsequent to November 22, 1963. When extracted from this context and discussed as a piece of film, Zapruder's work has been more dealt with as an object for art history and visual culture as it has for what it says about cinematic representation. Therefore, its most commonly cited reference is in Art Simon's *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film*. However, this investigation is fundamentally about the assassination itself and the role of the Zapruder film in the "assassination debates" that raged around it for what it proved or did not prove. Visual Culture scholars like Øyvind Vågnes in his book *Zaprudered: The Kennedy Assassination Film in Visual Culture,* have spoken specifically about the curious proliferation of the film as a document through television, visual art and material culture. These books, along with countless essays have tracked the influence of the assassination *through* the Zapruder film, as if it were co-extensive with the event. As documentary scholar Stella Bruzzi

notes in her review of Vågnes' book, we still lack a theoretical framework for understanding the influence of the film.[1]

This research will take the position that the Zapruder film must be understood not only through its unique form or content, but in relation to what it reveals about the nature of cinematic representation. More specifically, the film's shock is not merely due to its capturing of one of the most important political events of the twentieth century, but also lies in a fundamental disruption it operates with regards to the relationship between viewers and camera-vision as developed over the course of that century. This dissertation will argue that the Zapruder film's shock harkens back to the primary spatial and temporal disconnect visible to audiences of early cinema. And furthermore it played an essential role in a moment of crisis in the conventions that underpinned those relationships that had been challenged throughout the century.

In order to accomplish this task, this dissertation seeks to create a body of theoretical and analytic support to understand the Zapruder footage as a film, rather than simply a fragment (i.e., a piece of footage) or felicitous mistake. This attitude is taken advisedly and in full understanding that the nomenclature does not fit precisely, but the framing is not only original, it is instructive. As documentary reportage, fragment or home movie the Zapruder film has been studied differently. Such discussions detract from this work as they necessarily preoccupy themselves with taxonomically assessing what the Zapruder film *is,* whereas this research seeks to expand the dialogue on what the Zapruder film *does* for our understanding of cinematic representation. When looked at in this way, the Zapruder film reveals itself to be a mirror in which we can see our desires for cinema's power over us and the world reflected back. What attracts us to it and how we see it is very much defined by what we want cinema to do. It has served many as evidence of a criminal conspiracy, evidence of a cover up and evidence of the contested nature of media ownership, but before that it serves as the record of a real-world event. But the Zapruder film is more than a snuff film or even material evidence of a crime; its formal qualities speak to the essential instability of cinematic representation. This dissertation will follow the ways in which filmmakers and viewers respond differently to that instability and how

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[1] See Stella Bruzzi's review of *Zaprudered: The Kennedy Assassination Film in Visual Culture.* Bruzzi, Stella. "Zaprudered: the Kennedy Assassination Film in Visual Culture." *Screen,* Volume 53, Issue 3, 1 September 2012, Pages 332–335. In part this lack of theoretical foundation is addressed by Jean-Baptiste Thoret's book *26 secondes: L'Amérique éclaboussée*. His ideas will be discussed in Chapter 4, as they only apply to fiction film, and support mostly figural analyses.

this moment of crisis is less a unique moment in cinema history, and more a unique iteration of themes and ideas that have underpinned cinematic representation from its very beginning.

Firstly, the project will present the film in its production and distribution context, as playing a major role in the considerations of ownership, copyright and intellectual property as related to the broadcast and journalistic structures of its day. This section will be largely historical and give later discussion a solid grounding in not only the events surrounding Zapruder's filming of the assassination, but the conditions under which it emerged into the wider world.

Secondly, this research will propose the Zapruder film as a theoretical object, contributing much to our understanding of central concepts of film studies such as attraction, indexicality and contingency. The unique way in which the Zapruder film connects with these terms is inalienable from the disruption of conventional modes of viewing in numerous historical contexts. Its disruption will here be linked to one of these moments: the introduction of the camera's view of events at the turn of the nineteenth century. The concepts, then, will bridge these two moments in cinema history for their unique revelation of the gap between camera and world.

The third section will explore how experimental film, in many ways, has provoked and continues to provoke moments of crisis and instability in conventional modes of viewing. Analyses in this section will not necessarily note the visual similarity between those films and that of Abraham Zapruder, but the way in which they point towards the distance between what the apparatus of cinema is conventionally assumed to do to vision and how that relationship can be so much more.

The fourth section deals with fiction film's response to the Zapruder film, both as a narrative and real life event. Notable here will be the interesting ways that these films, while inhabiting the space of the conventional relationship between camera and eye, attempt to poke holes in the solidity of that relationship and prove how unstable it really is.

The fifth section looks at the enduring legacy of the Zapruder film in the digital era. In this multifarious environment where contexts are constantly changing and often contradictory, it is interesting to note the film's continued currency. Of note as well is the way in which many of these digital iterations of the Zapruder film re-inscribe its evidentiary validity without responding

to its more fundamental formal shocks. These uses of the digital often transparently fulfill the dream of perfect camera vision that the film indisputably breaks.

The reader may be surprised at the absence, in the above discussions, of a section dealing with documentary film. This absence does not indicate that the Zapruder film and its revelations had nothing to do with documentary film or its production, far from it. The impact of the Zapruder film on documentary has been discussed extensively elsewhere.[2] Its absence here is purely a matter of procedure. This research is preoccupied with the implications of the Zapruder film assimilated as a filmic text and a theoretical object. In the realm of documentary, the film had an immeasurable impact on the approach, process and filming of live events. While on-the-spot filmmaking is almost an everyday occurrence in current media, with people across the world filming and sharing events as mundane as what they have for lunch, the Zapruder film reconnected journalistic and documentary filmmakers with the power and importance of being in the right place at the right time. These considerations, along with deluge of documentary films that use the Zapruder film somehow as part of their evidence, are outside the boundaries of this work. Where considerations of the effect the Zapruder film has on the way filmmakers use the camera to bridge or otherwise aestheticize an epistemological gap are relevant, this work will respond. Where the Zapruder film is looked at as a piece of visual evidence, a record of an event, a piece of visual culture or of historical import, this work will direct the reader to many interesting and worthwhile investigations.[3] As such, this project is also not a work of film history. Though it deals with a variety of historical events, refers to filmic texts and their historical context, it does not seek to amend or add to that context. The historical sections that follow are an essential part of this work, but they provide a series of connections between films and concepts, viewing contexts and formal structures. They do not propose an essential restructuring of those events, but instead suggest looking them in a new light.

The main goal here, then, is to make a space for the Zapruder film, already acknowledged as one of the most important amateur and on-the-spot journalistic films of the twentieth century,

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[2] I would direct the reader here to the work of Stella Bruzzi in the introduction to *New Documentary,* Alan Rosenthal and John Corner in *New Challenges for Documentary*, and Joel Black's discussion of documentary style in fiction film in *The Reality Effect: Film Culture and the Graphic Imperative.* Most notable articles discussing the film in the context of documentary include Linda Williams' "Mirrors Without Memories" and Michael Chanan's "On Documentary: The Zapruder Quotient," among many others.

[3] Apart from the work of Art Simon and Øyvind Vågnes, a very detailed and extensive history of the film's production and distribution has been written by David R. Wrone: *The Zapruder Film: Reframing JFK's Assassination*. Please see the Works Cited for a complete list of references.

as a rich object for film studies. It deserves this space, not only by virtue of the qualities already mentioned, but because it has already been, for many, an invitation to the same sort of close reading and analysis so dear to the discipline as a whole. The Zapruder film is, to poach a concept from Dana Polan, a "scene of instruction."[4] It is a text that made film studies essential knowledge even though, as a formalized discipline, it was still very young in 1963. These close readings led many to an expanded political, legal and journalistic consciousness, but this work will chart its expanding of the aesthetic, and theoretical understanding of the gap between camera and world.

However, the most important place to start is in a solid base of historical fact. In what follows I will seek to lay out the essential elements in the production and distribution context of the film and the way that they influence the issues to be discussed. For those elements of note, though not necessarily connected directly with the thesis of this dissertation, an historical appendix will be added with more detail at the end of this document.

An Amateur Films a Murder

The story of Abraham Zapruder's filming of a president's assassination, the subsequent machinations around its production and distribution is by turns tragic, comic, tedious and tense. It is a story that is both familiar and alien, as full of gut-wrenching drama as it is legal fine-print. But fundamentally it is a story of the instability and near constant amendment to the validity of the document and its evidentiary value. If anyone can be said to have "written the book" on the film's creation, production and distribution, it is David R. Wrone, with his book *The Zapruder Film: Reframing JFK's Assassination* published in 2003. Wrone has written one of the most exhaustively researched and detailed discussion of the Zapruder film's history. He is the main source for most academic writing on the subject. I will not be breaking with tradition here, although I will make several important additions, footnoting the sources that support them.

Friday November 22, 1963, began as days usually did for Abraham Zapruder, a Russian-born dress manufacturer. He drove from his home seven miles outside of Dallas downtown to the Dal-Tex building where he was head of manufacturing at Jennifer Juniors, a women's dress

[4] The term from Polan's, *Scenes of Instruction: The Beginnings of the U.S. Study of Film,* is used here to indicate the educational opportunity associated with the widespread need to understand the film. It is not meant to imply my use of his detailed and very nuanced sense of that concept here.

factory. Like every citizen of Dallas, Zapruder was aware of the president's visit that day and read in the early papers that the president's motorcade would be passing in front of his building, taking a quick turn down Elm Street towards the freeway. Famously, Zapruder had left home that morning without his camera. An avid amateur cameraman, he had decided that the late fall rain and overcast conditions made the light unsuitable for filming the event, but at the urging of his secretary, he finally relented and drove back home.

After seeing little hope for a good shot out his window, Zapruder descended to the plaza and found that the best sightlines were from the grassy knoll north of Elm Street. He settled on a naked concrete plinth, part of the incomplete decorative pergola on that side of the plaza. He tested his camera, filming the associates that had joined him in the plaza, Marilyn Sitzman, Beatrice Hester and her husband, Charles. As the time of the President's arrival approached, Zapruder decided to get up onto the plinth but since he suffered from vertigo, Sitzman offered to stand behind him on the structure, holding onto his coat (Wrone 10).

At 12:30 pm, the events that would define this odd scene as historic began to materialize. The motorcade began to make its slow turn onto Elm Street. As the three motorcycle policemen turned the corner, Zapruder started filming, only to briefly stop when he saw that the president's car was some distance behind. He resumed filming, and amazingly in the chaos of the events that followed, continued to film, even though he was looking at the president's open wound from a gunshot that seemed to come from behind him.[5]After the tragedy occurred, Zapruder was lost in a state of shock and confusion. It was only after Harry McCormick of the *Dallas Morning News* took him aside to try and secure the footage that Zapruder came to his senses and retired to his office to negotiate. Secret service agent Forest Sorrells arrived as well and the group eventually decided what would happen next. They would head to the facilities of the *Dallas Morning News* to develop the film.

The succession of random events that could have equally lead to Zapruder not capturing the assassination at all as it did to the creation of the document, were matched by a succession of circumstances that conditioned the instability of the film's development. As the group arrived at the newspaper offices, it was revealed in short order that no one could process this awkward type of amateur film. One of the unique qualities of Zapruder's camera was the fact that it used 16mm

[5] This point is confirmed by the Zapruder and Sitzman accounts as cited in Wrone: 11-12. Presumably, like any amateur cameraman his effort was to save film.

film, but only exposed one half of the film strip during any given filming. The user then reversed the roll of film and exposed the other half. In production, this meant the film had to be precision slit down the middle, the halves cemented together, and the resulting double-length roll was returned to the consumer (Wrone 10). This unique kind of film stumped the lab at the television station WFAA-TV as well. A quick phone call to the Eastman Kodak Processing Laboratory near Love Field in Dallas finally was connected and reached a staff supervisor who agreed to rush the job through (Wrone 20).

While all this was taking place, a still shaken Zapruder did a live television interview with program director Jay Watson. In this interview, Zapruder famously pointed to the front right of his head to show where the fatal bullet had struck.[6]

Figure 1: Jay Watson interviewing Abraham Zapruder, WFAA-TV Dallas

Awaited at the lab, Zapruder and his film were taken directly through and the film was developed in the lab's darkroom. The film was then edge-printed with the development number D (for Dallas) 0183 and prepped with fresh leader for development. It was processed as an unslit roll of 16mm. Zapruder asked that three copies of the film be made, but the technicians could not comply. They didn't have the resources to duplicate the film. Another lab could perform the task, but required a special kind of film. The Kodak lab provided this piece of the puzzle, but they would have to return to the facility to develop the copies. With these assurances in place the group sat and watched the film in the lab. The image only appeared on half the screen, the film

[6] Though Zapruder would later dispute this earlier judgment as to the location of the bullet's impact, and adopt the Warren Commission's version of events, many researchers cite this gesture in the interview as the most honest description of what Zapruder saw as it tallies with what his associates saw and experienced on that day. See Wrone 12.

still being unslit, but the footage was "…needle point clear. And it stunned the viewers" (Wrone 23).

The Jamieson Film Company began duplicating the film in the evening. Zapruder asked for three copies of the original to be made, one for Schwartz and two for Agent Sorells, keeping the original for himself. The film provided by Kodak for the process proved difficult to work with, however, and in the end, each copy received a different degree of processing "one a notch below presumed optimum, one optimum and one a notch above optimum. Each copy carried its own number; in the end copy 2 was clearly the best." (Wrone 25) By the time all copies had been made, and Zapruder had cannily asked all to sign sworn affidavits to their legitimacy, he left with his partner Erwin Schwartz sometime after 7:45pm. The pair returned to the Kodak lab around 8 pm and developed the three 16mm copies. Accorded the numbers 0185, 0186, 0187, usually referred to Jamieson as copies 1, 2 and 3. After trying to reach Agent Sorrels, who had been called away to deal with the suspect arrested in the death of Police Officer J.D Tippit, Zapruder and Schwartz were asked to take the two copies to the Secret Service office in Dallas. The agents there received the film with little comment, although the copy sent to Washington D.C later that night would bear as part of its description "According to Mr. Zapruder, the position of the assassin was behind Mr. Zapruder" (Wrone 28).

So, even at this early stage, Zapruder clearly understands that very few people will trust the validity of the document without additional support. At each stage in the development process he feels the need to have sworn affidavits from all in the process. While this can be seen as a canny businessman protecting the value of his product, it is also an understanding of the instability of the evidence he has. With each layer of development Zapruder must prop up the legitimacy of his own eye-witnessing of the event, precisely as it took place through a camera.

In addition to the instability of its development, the way in which the Zapruder film was assimilated into the world of commodity, is also important as it defines many of the avenues of access, or lack of access, that defined the film's haphazard distribution.

Richard Stolley, head of *Life* magazine's West Coast office, called Zapruder around 11:00 pm on November 22. Though overwhelmed and exhausted, Zapruder agreed to see the magazine editor the next morning in his downtown offices at 9am. Stolley arrived at 8. With a combination of good manners, a business-like approach and the deep pockets of the nation's largest print corporation, Stolley eventually secured the film for the sum of $50,000 (Wrone 33).

What Stolley purchased was the world-wide print rights to the film, the master and the best quality copy. Their agreement required *Life* to return the master after printing, but they were permitted to retain the copy.

As of November 23, the master copy of the Zapruder film was in Chicago at the massive center of *Life's* commercial printing offices, and the copy was on its way to *Life*'s home office in New York City. In Chicago, scores of 8 x10 prints were made from the Zapruder film to be included in the special edition that would announce key information concerning the assassination.[7] *Life* also made a copy of the colour original for its reference, as it did not have the rights to release the film as a motion picture. Over the course of this process, a novice technician damaged that original, slitting through frames 208-211(Wrone 35). The technician then spliced frame 207 to frame 212, making two dark repair lines across the film. This would come to be a very important mistake for two reasons: first, the copies made from the Life versions (which would become the only available copies and the most widely available bootlegs) would bear this missing section and misaligned frame 212. This disruption has become a source of endless debate over whether the Zapruder film was doctored in some way. Secondly, the government's case for the evidentiary value of the film would end up hinging on the fact that Frame 210 (available in their versions, but not to the wider population) contained the all-important first shot around which the timing of the assassination was based.

Out of the hands of Zapruder, the stability of the film as a documentation of the event is again brought into question at this stage. This minute adjustment, the loss of several frames, is enough to cause a whole battery of assumptions and implications of conspiracy. The document is still questioned to this day as a result of this process.[8] There was likewise instability in the way the document was assimilated into government offices and the eventual investigation of the assassination. Through a combination of disinterest, lack of communication and blunder, the evidence available to investigators was almost as obscure as that which eventually became available to the public.

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[7] An edition that ended up being held off until November 25 for many reasons. Also, due to technical constraints these prints were only able to be made in black and white (Wrone 35).

[8] Wrone notes on pages 33 and 55 the questioning of both the Warren Commission's use of these copies and the important studies of conspiracy theories around the Zapruder film itself, of which the most prominent is James H. Fetzer's *The Great Zapruder Film Hoax: Deceit and Deception in the Death of JFK*. Open Court Publishing, 2013.

In the days after the assassination the Zapruder film began to make its way through the various branches of the law enforcement community. The CIA commissioned a photo interpretive expert to identify and validate the film and make still frames for a general briefing (Wrone 29). The FBI headquarters in Washington didn't receive a copy until three days after the assassination. The agency's office in Dallas was luckier, getting its copy much sooner, but a lack of supervision resulted in many agents surreptitiously taking a copy home to show friends and family.[9]

After the Warren Commission was convened by President Lyndon Johnson on November 29, 1963, they primarily used FBI sources for all of their information and analysis. Not gathering their own experts and depending on a single agency for information became a primary fault found with the investigation. Lead investigative agent Lyndal Shaneyfelt made several assumptions and decisions about the Zapruder film that defined the case. He determined that the sprocket hole areas of the film were not part of its evidence and determined the 486 frames that would be part of the government's case. Out of this count he developed a timetable of the event (Wrone 39). Tests determined that Zapruder's Bell and Howell ran at 18.3 frames per second, as such the Zapruder film rendered 486 frames for a film lasting about 26.5 seconds, each frame lasting 1/18.3 seconds. This was an inconvenient frame rate as it made timing calculations extremely difficult. However, the FBI determined that the shots that killed the president had to have been fired between Zapruder frames 210 and 313. This meant that 103 frames, about 5.9 seconds, were consumed by the assassin in discharging his rifle a presumed three times with each action on screen separated into slices of 1/18.3 seconds in real time.[10] It was later determined that this was humanly possible given ballistics tests.[11]

In another confusing move, the Warren Commission requested slides be provided by *Life Magazine* rather than copies of those made by the CIA or their own Zapruder copies. As mentioned previously, this was the copy damaged by *Life's* lab in Chicago, but was, for various reasons (Wrone 35, 55), the only one able to produce black and white frames. Assembled into a booklet for the commission, these copies were outstandingly poor. They were not only in black

[9] It is not clear whether this leak resulted in any of the bootleg copies that eventually made their way into the hands of citizens, but after a certain point so many copies began to proliferate, that they could only be traced by their relative quality to the original (Wrone 31).

[10] For a wider discussion of these details and how they affected the assassination and its investigation, see Wrone 39.

[11] See historical appendix for details. This math still astonishes many critics.

and white, but were missing many important details due to being fourth generation copies of the original. As such they were necessarily blurry and indistinct, causing many members of the Commission, after extensive "blur analysis," to discount them as concrete proof of anything. This confusion was further deepened by screening a poorer copy for the Commission given to the FBI which included the frames their booklets lacked. More baffling yet was the fact that the copy entered into evidence as part of the official report released to the public was an even more distant generation (Wrone 54).

The instability of the film as a document became married to the instability of the investigation, and as more and more people sifted through the extensive 26-volume collection released by the commission in late September of 1964, these points of disjuncture became apparent. In late 1966, on the third anniversary of the assassination, the release of several influential books critical of the Commission's findings found traction: Mark Lane's *Rush to Judgment* (1966), Penn Jones Jr.'s *Forgive My Grief* (1963), *Whitewash* by Harold Weisberg (1965) and *Accessories After the Fact* by Sylvia Meagher (1967).[12] Holding on to the film along with blocking its distribution started to look more like a mismanagement of a vital piece of evidence at least and at most a violation of public trust. Many called out for *Time/Life* to release the film to the public, so that private citizens could judge. The corporation was accused of altering the film so that it fell in with the official line, supporting the government position. In response, the magazine entered what Wrone calls a "brief spell of modified outlook." It publicly called for a reopening of the federal investigation, allowed critics and members of the press to view the film in private screenings and even hired an erstwhile critic to investigate the murder (Wrone 55-56). All of this jockeying, however, led to very little public access and the corporation would sporadically release hitherto unavailable frames in "John F. Kennedy Memorial" editions of *Life* in 1964 and 1966 causing continued unrest (Wrone 59)

Confronted with *Time/Life*'s sporadic and schizophrenic release policy, many Warren Commission critics sought copies of the Zapruder film through illegal means. Bootleg copies circulated from two primary sources, the first being the media corporation itself. Dan Rather, in his memoir about his time with the company, *The Camera Never Blinks* (1977), stated that security around the film was so lax that any official who wanted to screen the film for himself or an associate would have one or several copies made. "An underground industry soon

[12] See Wrone 55 for numerous other books, films and cultural objects.

developed," Rather states (Wrone 59). Harold Weisberg, the popular critic and author of the *Whitewash* series, released still images of the missing frames gleaned from an unofficial source within the *Time/Life* offices. He circulated these widely and released many to scholars, critics and lecturers over the years. When New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison subpoenaed *Life*'s version of the Zapruder film in his prosecution of suspected mobster and assassination accessory Clay Shaw in March 1967, the corporation made a special print of the film for him. This act was to ensure that if any copies were released they could be traced back to the D.A's office. Despite their explicit demand that he not make copies, he duplicated the film and distributed it widely to critics and universities (Wrone 60).

The New Orleans copies became yet another touchstone for public dissent as new sets of copies were printed from them. Here the exact tracing of which copies went where becomes hopelessly diffuse as versions of Garrison's film went across the country and around the world. Most notable presenters and distributors of the bootleg footage were Penn Jones Jr. of Midlothian Texas, an early dissenter from the official version of events. He showed the film at lectures and sold copies along with other assassination-related documents. The author Mark Lane showed the film in his many presentations at universities and town halls across the country. A group in Boston called the Assassination Information Bureau promoted the film widely on the college and university circuit. Other presenters did likewise, but with copies that were of poor quality, often several generations removed from the original and without the sprocket-hole images (Wrone 60).

Public screenings of the Zapruder film could be in such diverse places as the living rooms of the wealthy, the back rooms of taverns, small meeting halls or social clubs, but the most common were college lecture halls. These, depending on the presenter, would typically be gatherings of two to three hundred, including students, faculty, members of the public and representatives of the press. Student groups would sponsor a presenter and explain his or her significance to the audience along with "how important this subject was to America, often criticizing both the right wing and the liberals for permitting a cover-up. Often words would be added to remind listeners that in a democracy the people were the government (Wrone 60-61)." The presenter's speech would hammer at the evidence and suggest a cover-up, describe official lies and then ask for the lights to be dimmed. The Zapruder film would then be shown to the hushed audience, an explanation of what it shows and proves would be given, and then questions

would be taken. Afterwards books, copies of the film and slides were often sold. The presentations engendered discussions that often went late into the night and became social events for people of many different intellectual, political and social backgrounds.[13]

The final and most successful attempt to circumvent *Time/Life's* copyright on the Zapruder film was the New Jersey film technician, Robert Groden. As we will see in Chapter 4, it is his intervention upon which much of the assimilation of the Zapruder film into the public imagination will hinge. In 1969, unbeknownst to the media corporation, Groden had obtained a crystal-clear copy from one of the technicians working at the lab where *Life* magazine had had copies made (Wrone 65). Over the next four years, he worked on the film using a tele-cine process[14] to slow the speed of the original, isolating the president's head in crucial frames, stabilizing frames that tended to jerk and produced a clearer film version than any that had been seen on the lecture circuit, though Groden was unsure about releasing the film and screened it for a close friend and then the critic Harold Weisberg. Friends encouraged him to continue showing it and in November 1973 it was screened at a conference of the Committee to Investigate Assassinations held at Georgetown University for the 10th anniversary of the assassination. This screening was poorly attended and had little representation from the press.[15] Groden waited another year before presenting the film in public again, this time at the very well attended and publicized Politics of Conspiracy conference held by the Assassination Information Bureau in Boston on January 31, 1975 (Wrone 69). Present at the conference were journalist, comedian and public presenter Dick Gregory. This screening would start a series of events culminating in the broadcast of Groden's film on national television that would weaken *Time*'s resolve to retain its copyright and eventually result in its surrender of the film rights back to the Zapruder family later that year.[16] So just over 11 years after the original film was sold, and 5 years after the death of the man who created it, the footage was returned to its heirs, who were daunted by the legacy it had spawned. The next chapter in the copyright and ownership of the Zapruder film would be

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[13] Wrone speaks about these presentations from the position of having been a speaker himself many times. He includes the names and institutions of numerous supporters with whom he has had contact over the years (Wrone 60-61, endnote 66)

[14] This was an early process for converting film to an aspect ratio and frame-rate that allowed it to be broadcast on television. Tele-cine machines offered Groden the freedom of function-associated video reproductions with little degradation in quality.

[15] Wrone attributes this to the presumed involvement of the CIA and FBI (Wrone 68).

[16] The circumstances and effects of the broadcast will be discussed in Chapter 4.

no less contentious than the previous one and would involve back and forth negotiations that would only end in 1997 with the return of the original Zapruder negative to the National Archives. But this item's uniqueness would shortly be erased as well, after its digital scanning and a profusion of digital copies were made in the early part of the twenty-first century.

Conclusions: The Evidentiary Value of the Zapruder Film

This historical background is a significant and important part of the work in this dissertation. It forms the cornerstone on which much of the following research is based. But ultimately the conclusions reached here must include the incredible instability of the Zapruder film as a piece of material evidence, almost from its filming to its national broadcast. At each stage the film is so conditional that the author himself sought sworn affidavits to the work done, to its veracity and quality in order to shore up this value. As such this work will emphasize this instability, rather than the evidentiary value doggedly maintained by the scholars and critics that make the Zapruder film a key piece of visual evidence in support of the case for conspiracy. Through witness statements, the examination of physical evidence, and research into the background and motivations of those involved all take up far more space that the Zapruder film in the official account of the case, the segment of the public that suspect a government cover-up look at it for its key role in the dismantling of the state's case.

This project will not seek to argue point for point with assassination historians, or Warren commission supporters. The starting point for this work will be a simple statement of fact as to the Zapruder film's evidentiary value. It does not show, in frame or even by association, who murdered John Kennedy on November 22, 1963. No amount of technical wizardry can produce that visual evidence from the frames shot by Abraham Zapruder on that day. With all of the twists and turns, all the near misses and fortuitous events that permitted him to expose those particular frames, they ultimately fall short of what we would want them to show. And it is this element above all others that makes the Zapruder film so important. This shortfall in the face of exorbitant expectations emphasizes an instability that underpins the representational crisis in which the Zapruder film plays such a key role.

This investigation has no ambition to argue the case for or against a conspiracy. Instead, its analysis confines itself to the fallout from the critical lack, one ignored by both attackers and defender of the official version of events, of the kind of evidence the cinematic apparatus

purports to provide. The truth is that the Zapruder film is indeed evidence, but not exclusively visual evidence. It is material evidence of the broken relationships between representation and truth, between cinematic representation and the reality of the events it reproduces. And it is in this way that it will be so important for our understanding of that relationship and the instability that defines it.

To start, however, a theoretical framework will be necessary by which to understand the Zapruder film in its context, not as a genre-defying piece of film, but for the connections it makes to deeper undercurrents in cinema. Its structure and its effects must be understood with recourse to foundational concepts that define the medium: attraction, indexicality, contingency. This framework will raise more fruitful questions that link its impact far beyond the courtroom or arena of public debate, and show how its true shocks go the root of how we define representation as such.

Chapter 1: A Conceptual Introduction

INTRODUCTION

So far this discussion of the Zapruder film has presented it as a material object and its history of production, distribution and reception has returned to debates over what the film fundamentally *is:* documentary, reportage, home movie, evidence of a crime, a timer for the event, evidence of conspiracy, etc. Certainly discussing its "primitive" power or the way it refocuses filmmakers on what is "real" in representation, boiling down film to its purest state, speaks more to what the film *does.* However, these abstract notions of purity and power miss the deeper theoretical impact the film implies. Laying aside debates around the naïf "truth" of amateur film, it is important to acknowledge that Zapruder's film, without editing tricks, special effects or even solid camera work, captures and communicates something more than the sum of its parts.

It will be the contention of this chapter that the impact of the Zapruder film on the audiences discussed in the introduction (first the Secret Service and FBI agents, then members of the press and then, slowly, to the American people and then the world) is not simply one that can be engaged with in an historical, journalistic or political way. It will propose that the Zapruder film revealed, in the American image culture of the late 1960s, the limitations of what the cinematic apparatus is capable of revealing. This work will propose it as a filmic text that asks us to redraw the boundaries between the mechanical vision of the lens and the pro-filmic world it is meant to reveal. As such this chapter will define the Zapruder film as a *theoretical* object, one that opens discussions that connect to the fundamental impact of cinematic vision as such. In this way, the impact of the Zapruder film contributes to a moment of crisis in representation in a similar way to the very first films shown to audiences at the end of the nineteenth century. Using key concepts of theoretical investigations into this period, this chapter will show the Zapruder film as not simply a product of mid-to-late twentieth century image culture, confined to the historical and political implications that so tie it to that period, but further expand its impact to meet up with fundamental questions asked about the nature of film's relationships to truth, its ability to reproduce the real, and the contingent nature of mechanically reproduced vision that defined the films of the early twentieth century.

To start with then, understanding "attraction" as a critical concept often connected to early film that can also be used to better understand the power and impact of the Zapruder film will be important. Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault's original work on the "cinema of attractions" will be an essential starting point for defining this discussion. We will look into how the experience and viewing practices of early cinema audiences not only existed in a historical context, but define a whole way of experiencing cinema very relevant to the discussion of Zapruder's film. The definition of the attraction of cinema as essentially related to the attractions of late-nineteenth-century optical toys, to the thrill rides, circus acts and freak shows of the fairground, will lead to a discussion of cinema's enduring ability to produce shocks that carry with them an epistemological function. In conjunction with other theorizations of the concepts, we will see how this fundamental double function is not only fundamental to the attraction, but constitutes a baseline for cinematic experience as such.

Indexicality will be a second concept whose discussion links the Zapruder footage and early film; namely the ability to stage the cinematic experience of "being there" at a live and shocking event. Though essential to the attraction of early film, this concept will be used not as a historical category or as a value added to the burgeoning medium, but as the essential stuff out of which cinema is made. A variety of authors including Mary Ann Doane and Siegfried Kracauer offer readings of this concept in reference to film and its relationship to live events, the re-creation of the experience of "being there" not only as a simulation of presence, but as a separate order of experience that cushions the shock of the modern world. This model of indexicality will be at once challenged and developed by the Zapruder film as we look at it not only as an index of a particular time and place, but in a more distinct sense as a specific indication of a specific meaning. Thus its evidentiary value can be seen less in its status as a document, but rather more as an interpretive tool, an index that is used to make sense of the signs around it.

Contingency, already viewed as an essential concept for understanding cinema at the time of its very emergence, will be essential in establishing the influence of chance that links the discussion of Zapruder's inexplicable "one in a million" filming of the assassination and the way in which many theorists and audience members conceived of the chance encounters that seem inherent in the new medium. Mary Ann Doane's twinning of the influence of chance associations and events with indexicality in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* will be essential in

understanding the attraction of the Zapruder film and how its power and impact is so wide-ranging and linked to the power and impact of the medium as such. Kracauer will again make an appearance in his further narrowing down of contingency to the power of uncontrolled detail to define the cinematic experience. Like Doane, he too sees contingency and indexicality as complicit forces in the definition of cinematic time; even though he applies a more sinister light to the latter's influence on the cinematic experience. His perspective will be essential to define the shock of contingent details associated with the Zapruder film.

Flowing from these considerations will be the fourth critical concept, risk. Despite never being formalized in the literature as such, risk will connect significantly to the implications of the Zapruder film. The discussion of risk is an undercurrent in theoretical considerations of the fundamental attraction of film and also the thrill that defines its experience. Here it will be presented for its ability to define the alloyed thrill of attraction as necessarily including the threat of contingent detail that can turn exhilarating shock of the unexpected into enduring trauma. The Zapruder film will be proposed as not only documenting this kind of shock, but essentially re-presenting this more complicated viewing position to audiences long inured to the shocks of cinema.

Furthermore, any discussion of the agonies and ecstasies of cinematic attractions would be banal if not made in the context of film's relationship to death. This concept, one of the oldest relationships discussed in the theory and criticism of film if not representation itself, will serve here as an essential underpinning for the previous concepts. Time in life is dictated by the unknown time of its end, but control over cinematic time and its shaping of cinematic experience proposes a complicated kind of mechanical control that echoes its absence in real time. The control over cinematic time has always carried with it the whiff of the blasphemous and nowhere is film more sacrilegious than when it depicts death. André Bazin can be thanked for this insight in his article for *Cahiers du Cinéma* "La mort tous les après-midi" published in *Cahiers du cinéma*, 1951,[17] but if we take his point further than the documentation of the bullfight in *The Bullfight* (Braunberger, 1951) and look at it in the historical and political context of a political assassination, the implications become even more profound. The link between Zapruder's

[17] The most commonly cited translation of Bazin's article appears in *Rites of Realism*: *Essays on Corporeal Cinema.* I will be referring to that version here.

footage of the grisly death of President Kennedy will be again twinned with depictions of death in early film. Doane's work will be invoked here for its discussion of the cinematic 'event' in relation to death and to 'dead time' as early cinema attempted to assert and capitalize on the new medium's prospective re-packaging of shocking events. Bazin's essay on cinema and death mentioned above will be essential, not only for its portrayal of the link between cinema and death, but for the temporal crime of repeatability that was taken for granted by audiences, until Zapruder's footage made it an issue once more. Likewise, arguments from Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second* will be brought forward to flesh out the uncanny nature of cinema's relationship to time and its ultimate ending.

All of these concepts are challenged, enlarged or enlightened by considerations of the Zapruder film as a film text and as a theoretical object. It will ultimately be the contention of this chapter that the Zapruder footage needs to be taken seriously for the ways in which it links to a whole host of theoretical concepts fundamental to the relationship between audiences and cinematic representation. This re-animation of these foundational theoretical concepts in the wake of the Zapruder film will connect to a whole host of cinematic interventions we will see in further chapters. The discussion of these concepts below will establish the film not only as an important theoretical object, but will further explore the moment of crisis it participated in with regards to conventional viewing structures of the world into which it emerged.

ATTRACTION

It may seem a disingenuous understatement to introduce "attractive" qualities of a film so defined by its shocking content and the intense social, legal and political focus placed upon it during the years following the assassination. As we saw earlier, this focus was paradoxically defined by a lack of availability, which became crucial to its celebrity among inquisitive, political or conspiracy-minded critics of the official investigation. As a result it was given a feature role in the presentations of evidence that contradicted the Warren Report. Its role as crucial evidence, missing link, and *cause célèbre* in both political and artistic circles needn't distract us from a more prurient interest that might be linked to the shock of the famed frame 313. Though never fully a reality until perhaps the digital era, Zapruder's nightmare of Times Square barkers calling out to passersby to step into a dark theatre to watch the president's head explode, shows us the kind of incendiary material Zapruder knew he had, and how he believed

unscrupulous promoters could exploit it.[18] But his vision of this carnival approach to the shock of the president's death is not an idle anecdote. Zapruder's fear stems from a very real and foundational aspect of cinematic vision: its attractiveness, its need for attractions. Vital to this discussion will thus be the conception of the attraction as both sacred and profane revelation.

The Cinema of Attractions

Many aspects of the Zapruder film put into question the more noble reasons that might attract audiences to the screen, along with proposing a whole host of reasons why they might stay glued to it. This is nothing new about the conception of "attraction" from its earliest theorization. The landmark work of Tom Gunning and Andre Gaudreault[19] that established the mode of representation that defined the "cinema of attractions" acknowledges that the solicitation of spectatorship in the cinema of attractions rarely shied away from the shocking or down-right prurient as a means of attracting viewers. In the case of *The Bride Retires* (Albert Kirchner 1896), for instance, we are treated to a veritable strip-tease as a new bride disrobes coquettishly before her husband's eyes, which coincidentally become our eyes in a POV shot (Gunning and Gaudreault, 383). Echoing Noel Burch, they point out that this sort of exhibitionist display of the film was often in tension with narrative elements. The erotic display, for the purposes of the narrative, is for the husband, which somehow makes the crass exploitation more palatable, but the shot itself is pure exhibitionism, no different than filming a similar attraction as part of an erotic film or burlesque show.

Figure 2. Stills from *The Bride Retires* (Albert Kirchner 1896)

[18] Richard Stolley spoke of these fears expressed by Zapruder in a later interview (Stolley 134-135). However, neither could have anticipated its unrelenting availability in the digital age. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the digital afterlife of the Zapruder film.

[19] Gunning and Gaudreault first published this work in the journal *Wide Angle* (Fall 1986) but the concept has become foundational to the discipline. For its most recent iteration, see Strauven 381-388. I will be citing from this latest version.

Similar examples abound. Gunning and Gaudreault point out how Porter's *The Gay Shoe Clerk* (1903), and Biograph's *Hooligan in Jail* (1903) and *Photographing a Female Crook* (1904) all sneak in a flamboyant close-up under the guise of narrative. These enlargements do not perform a necessary function in the narrative but serve as a salacious attraction designed to glue our eyes to the screen, keep them there, and remind us to come back for more.

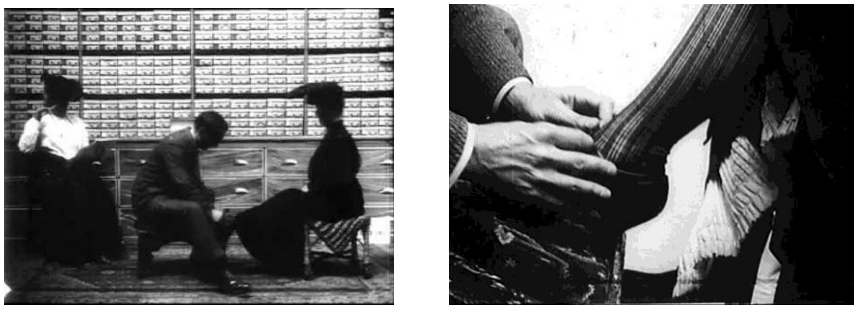

Figure 3. Stills from *The Gay Shoe Clerk* (Biograph Pictures 1903)

Far from a survey of the more salacious elements in early film, Gunning and Gaudreault were anxious to define this mode of filmmaking and spectatorship as a unique way of engaging with cinema, one that became somewhat less prominent as narrative form began to dominate. Furthermore they wanted to challenge the conception of early film as primitive, a stuttering precursor to modern style and narrative integration, and early audiences as enthralled and naïve. Their emphasis was on the formal aspects of a cinema devoted to 'showing something;' an exhibitionist cinema "contrasted to the voyeuristic aspect of narrative cinema analyzed by Christian Metz…"[20] The attraction is that quality in cinema which demands attention, much like the barker in the fairground who implores one and all to come and see with their own eyes, or the showman describing and illustrating the wonders on show under the big top.[21]

[20] See Gunning in Strauven 382. It should, however, be noted that Metz's description of these films did observe that they were not simply passive object of voyeurism, that they willingly participated in the process. See Metz 89-98.
[21] Many early films even have figures both on and off screen that would interpret and direct the view of the audience. André Gaudreault has called this a cinema "monstration" as opposed to the cinema of narration or "narrative integration" identified by Gunning. See Chapter 3 in Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction* 48-61. The point is brought up in detail by Gunning in *"An Aesthetic of Astonishment"* 114 -133.

Gunning asks us to consider the attraction not as a mere "special effect" of the film's structure, but more fundamentally as a cinematic mode of address. Recurring looks by the actors at the audience, or other elements that point towards the illusion of the screen, need not be considered as spoiling the experience. In fact, these attractions establish a connection with the audience: "From comedians smirking at the camera, to the constant bowing and gesturing of the conjurors in magic films, this is a cinema that *displays visibility*, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator" (Gunning and Gaudreault 382). This double life of narrative integration and pure spectacle is a continual tension in cinema that goes far beyond these early shorts. Gunning wants us to remark upon this tension as an essential element of cinema in general, noting that these early examples only reveal attraction more clearly as a relationship than in the narrative form of modern film.[22]

It is important to note, however, that this solicitation of attention can be both salacious and salubrious, appealing to desires for different kinds of "visibility." And it is just this point at which Gunning asks us to step outside the conventional assumption of the attraction as a simple directorial tool for good or ill intent, but as a fundamental element of the cinematic relationship between screen and viewer. Attractions can be created, but they are fundamentally based in the reaction of viewers. What defines a given cinematic event as "attractive" is fundamentally based on the visual desires it satisfies. While the voyeuristic gratification of sexual display reveals a foundational desire cinema taps into, Gunning and Gaudreault here give us a way of reading attractions backwards, so to speak, as examples and illustrations of what is "attractive" to viewers. In the more "educational" realms of attractions, where dialectical montage becomes a very clear voice of the author drawing attention to images that are designed to provoke a revelatory truth,[23] this is hardly possible. However, viewing attractions as defining a relationship between images captured by the camera and the reactions of an audience is fertile ground when considering the role they play in the implications of the Zapruder film.

Viewed through the lens of the relationship defined by Gunning above, the cinema of attractions can show us much about the influence and impact of the Zapruder film. Leaving aside its more gruesome revelations, the 26 seconds of footage indeed contain a plethora of

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[22] See Gunning in Strauven 382.

[23] See the discussion of attractions in the avant-garde in Chapter 3.

"attractive" material, beginning, of course, with the filmed event itself. Quite apart from Zapruder's filming of it, the presidential motorcade with its three open-topped luxury automobiles, a phalanx of the protective motorcycle police, fluttering flags and, of course, the eminent star-power of the president himself, was an attraction all on its own. This display of prestige in the passing of a ruler is not unknown in the history of politics and power. Indeed, the president's motorcade was merely a late twentieth century iteration of the kingly processions of old.[24] Attractions in and of themselves, these spectacles made visible the power and wealth of the leader. In the figure of that monarch and their entourage was a materialization of divine power and the affluence that went along with it. The importance of such spectacles was not limited to a display of power and prestige, but integral to the continued honour and respect for their power. The motorcade was thus an attraction by itself, but additionally one with its own sphere of meanings: social, political and cultural. One can conceive of the assassination, at the very least, to be a disruption of this spectacle, as a public display of a different kind of power.

At another step removed, we must also consider the document Zapruder originally intended to make—a home movie for himself, his friends and his family— its own kind of attraction. Perhaps echoing the prestige of the original event, perhaps staking a claim to its historical importance in an "I was there" sense, many cameras were brought to the scene. Professionals from most major US and international newspapers had representatives taking pictures alongside the profusions of still cameras in the hands of amateurs. Motion picture cameras from different national and local TV stations were present to document the event, along with amateur cameramen like Zapruder, Marie Muchmore and Orville Nix. They all intended to preserve the passing of the motorcade. Among this sea of recording devices, Zapruder's directorial intention seems only to have been creating his own personal attraction to share with a chosen group of viewers. Like any home moviemaker, he sought to create a document that would both provide the private thrill of a 'home theatre showing,' but also act as a souvenir of his presence, however small, at an important political event in his home town.

Despite this modest intention, what Zapruder captured that day implied a whole host of relationships for which he was not prepared. As we saw earlier, the shock of seeing the president's head explode in his viewfinder, followed by its proliferation through the film's

[24] For more on this type of spectacle see Wagner and Vaillancourt, Introduction.

development and then first screenings, was only the beginning. These primarily physical reactions to murderous violence of the bullet's impact cannot however be fully separated from the political shock of seeing the death of a head of state, no more than it can be fully separated from the shock of seeing a crime committed on screen. Thus the "attractions" presented by the Zapruder film begins to pose questions of a different order of magnitude than those exclusively linked to its value as evidence or purely as a document. As a text, and in the context of a discussion of attractions, the Zapruder film offers an understanding of the incredible lattice of interconnections with which attractions interact.

As such, the film reveals a multitude of disparate powers being exerted on and through the event it records, not least of which is that of camera operator himself. As much as everyday onlookers might have thought about capturing a "souvenir" in the form of a photograph or film, they are also exerting a measure of control and creating a personal object out of a public spectacle. The disruption caused by the assassin's bullet was thus not merely a disruptive act of political violence, but a revelation of the limits of the control exerted by the camera of the meaning of the record it creates. A brutal reminder that the camera only records, rather than creating the perfect memory of an event. The apparatus itself does not infuse the images with meaning; what may strike them as a filmable "attraction" will be overshadowed by events over which the camera has no control. Thus the Zapruder film is not merely a documentation of an assassination but a documentation of the layered and interconnected nature of attraction. Rather than an abstracted critical concept or modal category, it is implicitly linked with an entire web of social, cultural, historical and political strands to which moving images give meaning. Disrupting that link between camera and world in this way caused an enduring ripple effect throughout all of those systems of meaning. The trauma captured on screen was not just a trauma for those involved or for the viewer, but re-introduces a rupture, a crisis in the moving image, to which the Zapruder film is, as we shall see, an essential guide.

Gunning: Temporal Rupture of Attraction

In order to understand the shape of this ongoing and iterative crisis, if not its origins, it is important to return to Gunning and Gaudreault for a deeper understanding of effect attractions had on early audiences and the disruptive presentation of vision itself as a spectacle, and the

disruption such a spectacle presented to the conventional modes of viewing that defined the image culture of the late nineteenth century. The most central of these was the cinema of attractions' shaping of cinematic time. Gunning suggests that the attraction solicits viewer attention not merely which *what* it shows, but *how* it shows it, creating a parallel event in the display of vision. The temporality of attraction-based films is essential to their very nature. In a later essay, "Now You See It, Now You Don't" as the flashy title admirably shows, the cinema of attractions is defined by "a…discontinuous succession of instants… [stressing] both the spectator awareness of the act of seeing and the punctual succession of instants…" (Gunning, "Now You See It" 49) The binary of tension and resolution created in films such as those depicting scenes from everyday life, slapstick gags, performances or events, have less to do with the resolution of any narrative events, or character development, and more to do with the immediacy of a revelation:

> Attractions…do not build up incidents into the configuration with which a story makes its individual moments cohere. In effect, attractions have one basic temporality, that of the alteration of presence/absence that is embodied in the act of display. In this intense form of present tense, the attraction is displayed with the immediacy of a "Here it is! Look at it." (44)

As such, attractions operate as "…sudden bursts of presence…staccato jolts of surprise…" (45) that limit the assembling of narrative information and encourage an immediacy of reception.

The Zapruder film's form is narrative only in the broadest of terms. Its structure is inherently determined by the structure of the event that defines it. This fact is indeed one of the shocks of the film as a whole. Just as the abrupt cut at the end of a Lumière short such as *Carmaux: Drawing Out the Coke* (1896) may leave the modern viewer wondering if they missed the event, the Zapruder film's fragmentary nature forecloses on any classically narrative integration inside the frame.[25] The formal shock of this screened temporality might be of little concern to viewers in the context of early film. In the context of other films built around

[25] Home movies are, by their very nature, fragmentary. The nature of filming and of display necessarily presents as a succession of events. See Zimmerman and Ishizuka 2007.

attractions, its form would likely be of little note. Beyond the obvious shock of its more gruesome content, the Zapruder film is a simple panorama. An isolated pan shot which is maintained doggedly by Zapruder, as we see him keep the horrible event in frame even to the point of the limo's disappearance under the highway overpass. In the context of narrative form, the Zapruder film is an isolated and misnamed pan shot, fragmentary by its very nature. But through the lens of this reading of attraction, its meaning is dynamic, profuse and multi-layered. As such we can see how narrative form, paradoxically through fiction, bridges the gap between camera and world. The conventional techniques of the narrative paradigm, and the attendant cause and effect logic of the mode of narrative integration, drain the attraction of formal rupture and confines it to the realm of surface "effects." The formal shock of the Zapruder film is based in this contrast of temporalities. It portrays an astonishing event without explanation or resolution. And through this mode of cinematic address, it dissolves the bridge created by narrative, revealing to the contemporary audience the gap between camera and world to be a yawning chasm.

Continuing from these thoughts, attraction will form a central hub around which other concepts that theoretically ground the Zapruder film in the revelations of early cinema will turn. Proceeding with two more key concepts, indexicality and contingency, we will see what roles they play in the destabilization of representation that the film provokes. In addition, we will return to the above considerations to see how these factors can deepen our understanding of the concept of attraction.

INDEXICALITY

As Gunning emphasizes in his discussion of the logic of attractions above, it is not so much *what* the film shows, but *how* it shows it that matters. This "how" is actually quite complicated in that it draws us into a discussion of how film represents the reality of a place and a time without actually being that reality. Already an important concept in the consideration of the cinema of attractions, indexicality will be useful as a way of understanding not only the Zapruder film's usefulness as material evidence (the connection to the place and time of a crime) but its disruption of the links between past and present, camera and event.

The concept of indexicality is certainly not indigenous to the field of film studies. It originated in the semiotic writings of Charles Sanders Peirce, the brilliant philosopher, logician, mathematician and semiotician. It was the function of this kind of sign to designate an individual existent, by being affected — directly or indirectly — by its existence. As such, rather than a sign indicating the form of an object that may or may not exist, the index is a sign that links to a specific instantiation as its object. Either the sign is directly determined or affected by its object (as in the case of smoke standing for fire) or else only indirectly so (as in the case of a finger pointing to something). In some cases, moreover, the connection between sign and object is established through what Peirce called "collateral knowledge" of the object: seeing a painted portrait of someone I know independently of the portrait, and recognizing that person, I will immediately see the portrait's indexical function: its representing of an individual by being determined by it. Film studies has somewhat reduced the initial specificity of the term and applied it much more broadly to cinematic images' link to the event that they depict. As a group of signs, they are discussed by many theorists as a vague collection of temporal markers indicating cinema's recording of the "once-present." This rather poetic language misses the complexity of the sign's indexical determinations. This work will use the film studies version of the term with caution then, emphasizing its broad goal of connecting cinematic images to events of the past, while pointing out shortcomings that will be important for understanding the crisis of representation in which the Zapruder film played such a key role. Bridging this gap will be an interpreter of cinematic indexicality who broadly accepts it as a fundamental component of cinema, while emphasizing it as a relationship that the medium often breaks. The work of Siegfried Kracauer will empower an understanding of indexicality as both an interpretive strategy and an avenue for visceral shock.

Kracauer's View of Indexicality

Revealing Kracauer's perspective on indexicality is, at least in part, a job of reconstruction. His *Theory of Film*, first begun in the dying days of peace before the Second World War, was largely a casualty of that conflict. In 1960, this book was, in the end, published in English by the author, now living in the United States, as a radically reworked and reconstituted version of the previous one. The roots of Kracauer's thought have been painstaking investigated and reconnected to his later work by the dedicated and brilliant work of Miriam

Hansen.[26] Through this work, Hansen reveals how Kracauer's early revelatory, politically engaged and fundamentally utopian vision of film became reduced in response to the war and to the new context into which the book emerged in 1960s America. In the light of her reconstruction, Kracauer's perspective gives us an essential tool to explore the inherent relationship the filmic image creates between the camera and the world, and furthermore how that relationship must be viewed as fundamentally unstable and productively so.

The medium's relationship with the mechanical, and furthermore cultural, apparatus that gave birth to it is never absent from Kracauer's thoughts. While cinema can create connections between disparate spaces and times, he emphasizes the limitations of this experience. Hansen states:

> "…his love of cinema pivots on the aesthetic possibilities of film to stage, in a sensory and imaginative form, a fundamental experience of the twentieth century—an experience that has been variously described in terms of reification and alienation, fragmentation and loss, but that for Kracauer no less held a significant share of exhilarating and liberatory impulses" (Kracauer, 1997 xvii).

Thus indexicality, for Kracauer, is not a simple explanatory device in the interpretation of cinematic text, but evidence of a fundamental, and fundamentally misunderstood connection between cinema and the world. Not just the physical world, but the social, political and historical world as well. In this way, cinema became an essential space for confrontations between people and screened images. While films could exploit this relationship purely for economic gain, they were at their best when their manipulations distorted, broke and then rebuilt it in new ways.

Understanding indexicality as a relationship and, what is more, part of the foundation upon which cinema functions is essential to making the most of these "exhilarating and liberatory impulses." Hansen links this idea explicitly to the medium's basis in the photographic

[26] Hansen devoted most of the latter part of her life to Kracauer's writing between his German and American periods. She has written extensively on the subject. The most concise demonstration of these transitions is in the introduction Hansen wrote for the 1997 edition of Kracauer's *Theory of Film.* See Kracauer, 1997, vii-xlvii.

mechanism: the way in which a machine stands in for human methods of vision and reproduction.

> "…by insisting on film's 'photographic nature,' Kracauer stresses the *indexical* dimension of film, the trace of the material bond with the world represented…this linkage is key to—but also qualifies and circumscribes—the *iconic* dimension of film, its ability to represent something as "real" through a relation of resemblance or analogy" (Kracauer, 1997 viii).[27]

Here we see Hansen's use of film studies' limited view of indexicality again, but in a revealing way. Kracauer's portrayal of indexicality as a relationship and Peirce's more specific conception of its legibility are not so exclusive. If we consider collateral knowledge having sometimes a role to play in its proper functioning, and that the index necessarily connects sign (signifier) and object (signified) through an existential link, the cinematic image must fall short. Kracauer portrays this missed connection as an essential instability between cinema and world, the lack of a consistent base of knowledge that underpins the legibility of such signs. These necessarily shifting sands are deceptive in that they oftentimes look like solid ground, when the camera replicates vision and stays within the boundaries of conventional forms. But it is readily revealed to be a mirage when the relationship breaks down. These are the shocks that define the power of cinema for Kracauer; the ability of the material world to break and make illegible the forms used to explain it. Thus cinema engages the viewer as a "corporeal being" with "skin and hair" and then exposes them to the temporal, existential and epistemological shocks, making for a "human subject assigned to film [being] subject to *permanent dissolution…*incessantly exploded by material phenomena."[28]

This unstable relationship, between cinema and the world, is the exact site of intervention for the Zapruder film as a text and theoretical object. With one hand, the Zapruder film offers much to define the event it depicts. Investigators were able to trace the precise and discrete moment where the president was killed. By extension the film became a critical stopwatch from which to create a timeline of events. Its exaggerated significance for both the Warren

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[27] Her italics, my underline.

[28] Two oft-repeated characterizations in Kracauer manuscripts for the *Theory of Film* and in Hansen's discussion of them. See Hansen (quoting Kracauer M: 123) 459.

Commission and assassination scholars of any stripe emphasize this factor. However, with the other hand, the Zapruder film taketh away. It reveals no assassin crouched behind a grassy knoll or otherwise. Its indexical signs, the twisting of the stricken bodies in the car, the explosive impact of the assassin's bullet, do not readily offer up a single conclusion. Moreover, many different conclusions can be inferred from them. This communication breakdown is frustrating for investigators and scholars; it may stymie a productive resolution to the case, but it is par for the course in Kracauer's view of film. The relationship between viewer and screen is always in danger of dissolving; no contract between the camera and humanity binds the former to respect or to make the world explicable to the latter.

As Hansen explains, in quoting Kracauer's "With Skin and Hair": "...the extent that the material world does figure as a representational object, is an object without telos, a virtually endless, open field—an object that may exist on a real or an imaginary plane. "In contrast with the Theater...film mixes the *whole world* into play, be that world real or imagined." The elements of what may be considered bourgeois reality are put into a series of often free-associations by film; whereby any element of that reality can act as a double agent, supporting its' holistic illusion or chipping away at its integrity. (Hansen 452) Kracauer's assertion of the "photographic" quality of film should thus not be read as any technological or stylistic relationship, but a reminder that, like photography, its iconic relationship to the object it represents is less important that its temporality. These chance associations are meaningful because of "...the arbitrary moment of the snapshot and the deferred action status of all its meanings. For Kracauer, the politico-philosophical significance of photography does not rest with its ability to reflect its object as real but rather with the ability to render it strange." (Hansen 453)

Kracauer's approach reminds us that, despite being defined by its explosive content in its production and distribution, the images captured by Zapruder should be remembered for the way in which they shift the ground for understanding what cinema can do. Understanding indexicality's role over and above that of iconicity in the Zapruder film emphasizes and makes meaningful its ruptures in legibility as a piece of visual evidence and a cultural document. The film is thus as important, perhaps more important, for what meaning it interrupts than for what it makes clear. Once this instability is acknowledged, it empowers a whole host of reconsiderations

of films where indexicality plays a major role. Kracauer reminds us that film's gesture towards the real is a gamble and should *by no means be taken for granted.*

CONTINGENCY

Chance, at a basic level, conditions much of what happens before the camera. From the most sterile studio setting to on-the-spot filmmaking in a war zone, random events and chance associations are a fundamental part of the live filmmaking process. Nowhere is this more present than in the Zapruder film, where the chance event kills the subject of the shot. Flowing from the discussion of indexicality above, contingency can be considered one of the film's central attractions. Twinned with the visibility of an intensified focus on the present, the effect of chance associations and random non-narrative occurrences define the "liveness" of the cinema of attractions as a mode. However, it is too simple to consider contingency as a commercial value that is added to the cinematic experience, without acknowledging the way in which it destabilizes the events on screen. This lack of stability, as seen above, is embraced in the work of Siegfried Kracauer as an essential part of the cinematic experience. Read through the implications of the Zapruder film, a wider sense of the concept will reveal it as a threat as well as a boon.

In order to understand what contingency is meant to disrupt, it is best to start by considering what a cinematic event is and how it is constructed. Jean-François Lyotard's portrayal of modernity as "a way of shaping a sequence of moments in such a way that it accepts a high rate of contingency"[29] may be instructive in the way it defines an essential tension at the heart of this shaping. The apparatus of cinema has the power to select out and rearrange moments to make a form of sense, but this process necessarily displaces the notion of the cinematic event as fortuitous, accidental, transient and unpredictable. Rather it communicates a high degree of constructedness, in the sense of a media or social event. The ambivalence in the terminology around what makes a cinematic "event" is thus not idle nomenclature, but defines the relationships it builds between people and the world.

[29] See Lyotard 68.

Film's ability to communicate "event-ness" results from its representation of time passing in more or less the same way we see it passing before our eyes. Cinema, in doing this, seems to be a machine that traps events in their flow, with all their unpredictability and factualness intact. The cinema of attractions would capitalize on this faculty of the camera. However, this "event-ness" implies an understandable basis for the legibility of that time. And this context constitutes a structural frame. Early-film scholar and theorist Thomas Elsaesser qualifies this connection in his discussion of actualité filmmaking. "Actualités obliged the film-maker to create, even as he records the event, a specific sequential or spatial logic, which becomes in some sense the event's (intensified) abstracted representation, as opposed to reproducing its (extensive) duration" [30] Though these films contained no montage approach to editing, they did draw temporal boundaries around live events that established them as such. Dividing out and removing "un-eventful time" was as important as selecting out the event at hand. So while not having any narrative or pre-narrative qualities, the mere selecting out and apportioning of time necessarily drains the contingency from that time. It is an interpretive statement akin to framing the composition of the shot. Paradoxically, film extracts contingency from the event in order it more legible as "real."

This relationship is turned on its head when considering the Zapruder film. The intention of the original event's recorders, professional and amateur alike, was to capture the attraction of the original event: the president's motorcade. However they were unaware that they had a front row seat to one of the most infamous assassinations of the twentieth century, or indeed in the entirety of American history. Thus the film captured by Zapruder and others documents not merely a "what-happened" in the sense of a representation of events, but the reversal of the conventional role of contingency as what must be drained away in order to make sense. The appearance of the possible into an already planned and staged event takes center stage. The immediate attraction of what is seen before the eyes, rather than the anticipation and then satisfaction of narrative desires, is the Zapruder film's whole orientation. This point is crucial, because it illustrates how contingency does not simply concern how the course of a film is changed because of the influence of contingent details, but how the relationship between film and world is like an open wound; one where exposure to irritants can aggravate and make one

[30] Elsaesser 17.

painfully aware of its existence. For an understanding of this relationship, a closer look at Kracauer's conception of the visceral impact of contingency is empowering.

Kracauer, contingency and the "contingent detail"

Kracauer's understanding of film is bound as irreversibly to contingency as it is to indexicality. But his conception of the contingent and its disruptions begins in a very practical way. By contending that film has a fundamentally "photographic base," Kracauer implies that it is determined by the same limitations. In essence, this limitation is linked to the fact that the camera always captures more than the person using it intends. This unintentional surplus of detail is in fundamental contradiction to the representational action of the painter, for whom detail is applied by an intentional hand. In his original 1927 essay on photography, Kracauer shows how in contrast to memory images, which link to meaning on the basis of personal and communal significance, images produced by the camera always "consist partly of garbage" (Kracauer 51). But, in a very important way, this fact does not make the surplus detail irrelevant. This contingent detail is perhaps even more meaningful in that it can challenge personal and communal significance. The dross taken in by the camera lens, like the discarded waste in rubbish bins, says a lot about the people who divide treasure from trash:

> Film brings the whole material world into play; reaching beyond theatre and painting, it for the first time sets that which exists into motion. It does not aim upward, toward intention, but pushes toward the bottom, to gather and carry along even the dregs. It is interested in the refuse, in what is just there. (Kracauer in Hansen, "With Skin" 447) [31]

This highly important idea of Kracauer's describes not only film's crass scooping up of details in the material world, but also the way in which it puts these elements into play. Hansen explains how this ludic function is important for Kracauer, not so much as a game, but as a kind of anarchic motion, suffused with potential relationships. It is in this free play of details, beyond those clearly intended by the formative hand of the creator, that Kracauer sees the potential of

[31] Hansen has translated this passage from Kracauer's first summary of his *Theory of Film* (1949), thus his first formulation of the theory as a whole. See Hansen, "With Skin and Hair" 447.

the medium for all manner of radical impulses: “a materialist view of history, a critique of the bourgeois subject on the basis of film's affinity with a world alienated from intention, with human physiology and contingency, nothingness and death” (445). However, important these radical or emancipatory inclinations were, they were by no means pleasant parts of the filmic experience. The unease of contingency is expressed in the continuation of the earlier quote:

> … [film] is interested in the refuse, in what is simply there—both in and outside the human being. The face counts for nothing in film unless it includes the death's-head beneath. (447)

The sinister implications of the “death’s-head” beneath the surface of the star’s face here imply that this game is not only for fun, but that the viewer very much plays it for keeps. The implication of the essential and material “beneath” of filmic images, the implication that these images bring along with them contingent details that we may not want to see, is at the center of the power of contingency in film for Kracauer.

In other words, Kracauer’s view of contingency undercuts any notion of it as a “value-added” portion of the filmic image, understanding it as one of cinema’s attractions. Contingency for him does not simply imply the happy surprise result of a live football match or the wardrobe malfunction on an attractive celebrity, it also gathers with it the traumatic: the acrobat falling from the high wire, the race car crash and the explosion of a president’s head. What is more, it includes along with these definite events, titillating or shocking, all manner of happenings that hold only a vague “event-ness,” details that may mean something or may mean nothing: A girl holding a balloon in the crowd, a pair of lovers kissing, a police officer polishing his badge. All these things are captured by the lens whether the filmmaker intends or not. We will see how this view of contingency empowers many readings of the Zapruder film, as the profusion of background detail becomes a basis for the profusion of interpretations.

This metaphor of the death’s head beneath the face in cinema is perhaps given its most disturbingly literal embodiment in the Zapruder film. The alliance between film and “…the refuse, in what is just there—both in and outside the human being” takes on shocking implications when related to what the viewer sees of the inside of the president’s body as part of

the film's viewing. The power of this one violent detail notwithstanding, in pouring over the footage again and again investigators, reporters and critics would seek out, and in sometimes ridiculous ways, interpret unintentional contingent details captured by Zapruder on that day. The profusion of contingent detail captured by Zapruder's Bell & Howell Zoomatic camera form a kind of bewildering miasma in both judicial, scholarly and popular investigations. Some of which are soberly considered essential while others merely pathways for potential conspiracy theories. Consider the placement of the Stemmons Freeway sign in relationship to Zapruder's filming position, blocking out the crucial sight of the impact of the first bullet at frame 210. Consider also the jerky magnified frame of Zapruder's telephoto lens, almost missing the crucial bullet impact as he was held onto from behind, balancing precariously on an unfinished concrete post. These were key factors in promoting or discounting the film's evidentiary value. But consider also the details picked out of this film (and so many other photographic and filmic images taken on the day of the shooting) that have been "promoted" from the background to being of key evidentiary value.[32] The power of the Zapruder film flows from the power of its contingent details to continually spark possible implications in the event that defines it. The analysis of these contingent details becomes essential practice to anyone working with the film and cuts across professional, judicial and political lines. Film scholars were not asked to comment on the film in its original use as evidence; forensic experts and video technicians were given that job. However, the Zapruder film spawned a hundred close-readings by many who never took so much as a single film course. The film asks us to reconsider contingency from a simply formal aspect and follow its implications through the visceral and often risky avenues through which it pleases, fascinates and traumatizes us.

Risk

What the above relationships between attraction, indexicality and contingency necessarily imply is that watching film involves an essential element of risk. They are not mere attendant concepts, but represent the very real power of film to affect broad systems of meaning. Nowhere

[32] Here I am referring to several conspiracy theories that imply sinister implications to "Umbrella Man" and the "Babushka Lady," onlookers promoted to members of the conspiracy by assassination scholars and Warren Commission critics.

is this more clearly expressed than in Kracauer's reading of contingency as threat, a return of the repressed whose tension is fundamental to cinematic representation.

Separating risk out as its own critical concept is new to this investigation. Kracauer never expressed it as such. However, the concept encapsulates the threat of emergence of the "death's head" beneath the face; the essential "beneath" of what is represented. While Kracauer saw emancipatory possibilities of political, historical or psychological awakening inherent in these revelations, the way in which those ends were achieved was seldom pleasant. So although seeing Charlie Chaplin emerging, unmangled, from the factory machinery in *Modern Times*, may lead to the realization of a political consciousness that the worker that must resist the grinding monotony of modern industrial processes, the audience must still watch a man passing through the gears of the machine. Nowhere is this possibility more apparent than in the Zapruder film, where the shock is the very real death, this "beneath" of the cinematic image became an upheaval in the entire way viewers related to politics, government and the nation. In their dogged determination to know how and why what they saw before them had happened, many investigators developed a political consciousness that questioned, sometimes in very elaborate and fantastical ways, the entire structure of American life. The Zapruder film was that flash point for many, but Kracauer's ideas remind us that it is not unique in this capacity. Whenever we sit before a screen to watch something (kaleidoscopically variable since the digital revolution), we are essentially taking a risk. The "attraction" or "gain" of cinematic representation is nothing if something is not at stake; a game of chance that can be lost.[33]

The flip side of attraction, the risk of trauma, has been part of the discussion of film since the very beginning. The commonalities between the literal rollercoasters of the midway and the cinematic attractions that often accompanied them at ground level were identified even at the time. It is important to go further however, and to really consider risk as central to the viewing context for many early film audiences. Gunning and Gaudreault acknowledge the link between film and the attractions of the midway in their illustration of the difference between later narrative-guided viewing and the ideal spectators of the cinema of attractions. While narrative film presents the spectator with a form of "mastery," an understanding of form that helps them anticipate future action and be satisfied with that foreknowledge, the spectator of these early

[33] It should be said that Kracauer really did believe, by the time of publishing his *Theory of Film* in 1960, that this gamble really had been lost. See below.

films is more "like the devotee of thrill rides at Coney Island" experiencing "the thrill of intense and suddenly changing sensations" (Gunning, "Now You See It" 49). The comparable thrill discussed here is not only the lack of ability to anticipate the changing of these sensations, but the possibility that those sensations could become negative, or even dangerous at any point. Surely the thrill of the ride is empowered by the possibility, however slight, that something might go horribly wrong. The adrenaline rush one experiences in the thrill-ride is the activation of the body's fight or flight system, an extreme experience that provokes an anticipation of disaster. Thus the anticipation and thrill of the ride is also the chill of one's own possible demise. Of the attractions available to the early midway-goer, among which cinema was so much a part, the "beneath" of the spectacle almost always carried with it the threat of experiencing something that could not be forgotten, something that was included in the promotional material around many of those early midways.[34] Kracauer's notion of contingency builds on this relationship and takes seriously the threat of images and the risk of viewership, not as specific to certain genres or formal strategies but essential to the relationship between film and viewer.

As alluded to above, Kracauer's discussion of the importance of contingency and chance began with the anarchic action and narrative structure of American slapstick comedy. It was not just the aimless jiggery-pokery of Hal Roach or Mack Sennett shorts that seems to have impressed Kracauer, but the way in which these films affected the viewer with a "… 'shock-like,' 'discontinuous' sequence of gags, which Kracauer compares to the 'spluttering of a machine gun.' Slapstick comedy not only affects the viewer "with skin and hair," permeating fictions of an integral, identical subject with the involuntary mechanics of laughter; it also counters the protocols of narrative development and closure with patterns of seriality and a potentially 'endless action'"[35] (Kracauer xxii) It was this disinterested attitude to narrative closure in the arbitrary ending, a tacked-on solution to the action that Kracauer picked out as so important. The last-minute rescue that so defines the resolution of tension in slapstick, is not brought about by divine intervention or melodramatic coincidence, but simply by chance or accident. "…the same principle that sets into play the anarchic transactions between people and things in the first place" (xxii). The ending is no ending at all, but more constitutes a realistic,

[34] For more on the structure of these spectacles, see Bogdan 2014.
[35] The original Kracauer manuscript reference is MN 2:2-3

and potentially lethal ending "under erasure," [36] a last-minute rescue of its own from the let-down of narrative closure.

Kracauer submits that the games of slapstick are 'for keeps' in the sense that they take place "on the brink of the abyss… The leitmotif of slapstick comedy [is] in the play with danger, with catastrophe and its prevention in the nick of time" (xxii). This comment is no mere piece of genre analysis. Kracauer here draws our attention to an "innate affinity" between film and chance. He suggests that the last-minute rescue, the moment where the laws of physics seem to bend in the hero's favour, is where the film's protective relationship with the audience is paper-thin. The deliverance of the hero is not something deserved, or merited by the character through any quality or act of will. Slapstick's impish wink to narrative convention reminds the viewer that in a world without cinematic intervention, things would have gone quite a different way.[37] Just as the roller-coaster seems to be sending us crashing to our death and then, at the last minute, sends us soaring into air as if floating, we must conceive of Kracauer's idea of 'chance' as including both the positive connotation in the fun of winning, but also the negative in the pain of loss. Our responses to cinematic attractions are always alloyed in this sense. The thrill of chance must also always include an element of risk. For just as slapstick films may dance on the brink of the abyss, some films take us over the edge. This end may not be their intent, by mechanics or formal structure, but the risk of the contingent detail to puncture and "deflate"[38] the illusion they are trying to carefully maintain is inherent to the process. Like the loose screw on the rollercoaster's track, the horror of the infinitely small and its power to take over the cinematic image remains a constant and necessary potential. However, Kracauer reminds us that this deflation must not be considered a loss, as it is really the deflation of our pompous notion of complete control over the world and our desire to bend it to serve our desires and needs only. Kracauer's interest is cinema's ability to stage "masochistic self-abandonment and dissociation" in the viewer and provoke "encounters with contingency, lack of control and otherness" (xxi), no matter its narrative or formal intent. The edge of risk is, after all, what gives the game of chance its thrill.

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[36] However, happy or sad, the point here is that slapstick negates any narrative resolution by impishly providing one that is so nakedly mechanical. See Hansen "With Skin and Hair" 447.

[37] For Hansen's discussion of Kracauer's thoughts on the relation between slapstick endings and those of fairy tales, see Kracauer xxii.

[38] Kracauer has used the French term *dégonflage*.

In a very concrete way, the Zapruder film stages Kracauer's "encounter with contingency, lack of control and otherness." Both as a cinematic experience and as a piece of visual evidence, its instability forms the cornerstone of its interpretation. There are no narrative cinematic forms that can help us put the experience of the film in context. Its disruption of conventional viewing structures is more similar to the fragmentary sensory manipulations of the avant-garde.[39] Likewise as visual evidence, the film's interpretation is characterized by a lack of control or mastery over the outcome. A dozen implications lead outwards from the Zapruder film to explanations that may connect to the assassination, but none lead directly to the killer.

It is in just this way that the Zapruder film's tragic conclusion constitutes a cinematic game of chance lost. No ersatz narrative imposed by viewers can alter the events. What is eminently displayed in the film is a confrontation between a national figure and the material reality of an assassin's bullet; the narrative and representation that sustained and empowered that figure resolutely fails. The rules of the universe reimpose themselves. The laws of physics do not bend to save our hero. The assassin's bullet does what bullets were designed to do. And thus the erasure of the sad ending is removed. The mechanics of the story are revealed to be just that. "The fairy tale does not last, the world is the world, and that home [and homeland] are not home." (xxii). These last words, obviously deeply felt by Kracauer in his own loss of homeland, echo quite profoundly for those who view the president's assassination as an end of innocence for America and for its people. But this loss is not the end as long as we realize that it reveals what is at stake in the encounter between film and world. Though mechanistically designed to achieve the same result every time no matter what the situation, the camera often captures images that radically alter our relationship with it and what it produces. The machine itself does not change, but through our relationship to it, we are changed. Kracauer's perspective on risk shows us that the relationship between film, spectator and world is by no means as stable and rule-bound as we believe. We profit from this instability, yet still want to retain control. His ideas remind us to be continually attentive for the small detail, trope, or gesture that covers up cinema's or our own inadequacy. For it is underneath this whitewash that the "Danse macabre"[40] of cinema can truly be observed.

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[39] This will be amply demonstrated in Chapter 3 and its discussion of the Zapruder film's influence on the avant-garde and avant-garde filmmaking.

[40] See Kracauer vii.

CINEMA AND DEATH

This "Danse macabre" would seem to be materially evident in the Zapruder film's depiction of the president's death on-screen, but the previous discussions ask us to look beyond the content of the film, to what it reveals beneath the image. Gut-wrenching as it is to watch someone die on screen, the theory of death and its representation in film has much more to do with time. An encounter with death on screen is most evidently felt in the body; however, as film makes time a material duration before us, it also structures an encounter with time and change. And it is how the Zapruder film asks viewers to question the conventional representation of death that this section will address. Though the relationship between death and cinema is hardly casual, its being featured as almost throw-away narrative device in every summer block-buster is a relatively recent phenomenon. For a more profound understanding of its foundational relationship to cinema, we must look back to the earliest encounters staged between the camera and death.

It should not be surprising that death features as one of cinema's foundational, if morbid, attractions. From fictionalized murder to dare-devil performances to executions real or imaginary, cinema's depiction of death started early.[41] Though the creation of death as a cinematic event is not death itself, we saw earlier how the creation of a secondary event with its "intensified" re-arrangement of time imbued the latter with significance. Fundamental to the notion of attraction is its second-handness; insulated from the threat of the actual experience, the audience can enjoy it as a thrill. But more than an articulation of how film's fairground origins have stuck with it through its history, we need to recognize cinema's treatment of time around death as a structuring and foundational attribute.

Death and the contingent have something in common insofar as both are often situated as that which is unassimilable to meaning. Death would seem to mark the insistence and intractability of the real in representation (Doane 145).

Doane here identifies the crux of death's popularity as a cinematic attraction. Though it appears to be a limit for representation, a part of the world in which the new technology of

[41] Doane refers to a whole host of these types of films from actualités to execution films in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time.* See Doane 144-64 for execution films in particular.

cinema would have no power, this exact insufficiency defines its success. The impossibility of experiencing death through the screen makes watching it a scopophilic drive rather than a need assuaged through exposure. This drive that keeps audiences coming back can be illustrated with recourse to Gunning's discussion of a kind of "astonishment" early film had for its audience:

> In its double nature, its transformation of still image into moving illusion, it expresses an attitude in which astonishment and knowledge perform a vertiginous dance, and pleasure derives from the energy released by the play between the shock caused by this illusion of danger and delight in its pure illusion. The jolt experience becomes a shock of recognition. Far from fulfilling a dream of total replication of reality—the apophatic of the myth of total cinema—the experience of the first projections exposes the hollow center of the cinematic illusion (Gunning, "Aesthetic of Astonishment" 129).

This "hollow" at the center of the cinematic image is no Machiavellian deception, but the hub around which the magic of cinema turns. The dream of the total replication of reality, in conjunction with the cinematic experience, is what keeps it hidden. We see echoed in Gunning here the same ideas that led Kracauer to his preference for chance associations that can cause just such "jolt experiences" that become a "shock of recognition" in the audience. In these moments, the death on the screen becomes all the more real for the fact that it has been under erasure in so many other settings.

It is just such a jolt that accompanies viewing the impact of the bullet in Frame 313 of the Zapruder film. The shock of the very real death of the president notwithstanding, the viewer receives a jolt of recognition that this is indeed real, not some crass special effect, and that someone has shot him, more than once and (apparently) from very near where the film was taken. The "vertiginous dance" that Gunning identifies between "astonishment and knowledge" that takes place in the Zapruder film automatically leads outside the frame to political, historical and legal implications. The initial physical shock of seeing blood and brain spray all over the First Lady's impeccable pink ensemble gives way to a possibly endless string of political, historical, legal and cultural shocks. As such, the Zapruder film proves that Gunning's "dance" is not a static thing, but a relationship that evolves and progresses with further revelations. While the initial shock fades, repeated viewings confirm that the Zapruder film shows little more. It

does not construct death as a closed text, but as a starting point for further connections. As such, it illustrates another key element in the circularity of attractions.

Gaudreault on circularity and repetition

While the Zapruder film spawned a legion of true-believers, who watched the film again and again to find clues to the conspiracy behind the assassination, they couldn't have known that their search for understanding was so essential to the cinema as a medium. As we have already seen, a dialectic can be identified at the center of the attraction in this conception of astonishment intertwined with, but never dominated by, a sense of knowledge. This lack of resolution can be seen as the heart of the attraction, and essential to the illusory mastery it proposes over what is seen. It is exactly this quality that the Zapruder film, when looked at as a filmic text, can show us. But considerations of repetition, circularity and attraction are not new. In a discussion of early optical toys, André Gaudreault and Nicolas Dulac make a case for understanding repetition and circularity as essential to the attraction of early film.[42]

The authors set up an interesting continuity in cinematic temporality between the pre-history of "cultural series"[43] of optical toys, such as the phenakistoscope, the zoetrope, praxinoscope and later more cinematic developments like Emile Reynaud's "Optical Theatre" and the kinetoscope. This connection centers on the practice of repetition as "recurring metamorphosis of the figure" and "reiterated following of the action" (Gaudreault 236). Repetition is contrasted to circularity in Gaudreault's account for very good reason, in that the repetition of an earlier optical toy like the phenakistoscope sometimes implied a jump from the beginning of the image to the end, whereas toys emphasizing circularity sinuously connected the first image with the last creating a kind of circuit. While these developments might tempt us to read them as a nascent narrative tendency, Gaudreault warns us away from this assessment. He wants to propose, rather, that these image machines represent a dual nature of "attraction" in a discursive sense. It represents a particular historical period, but also a particular form and function:

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[42] Dulac and Gaudreault. "Circularity and Repetition" 227-244.

[43] This term refers primarily to series of still images animated by the device, more "moving pictures" or "animation" than cinema.

Attraction has a dual personality, so to speak: it is a function of both technological prerogatives and historically precise socio-cultural factors…. While the concept of the "cinema of attractions" was initially used to distinguish early films from the later products of institutional cinema, we must nevertheless acknowledge that the very idea of attraction cannot be limited to a question of periodization alone. It is a structuring principle resurfacing with every new phase of diachronic development of the cultural series of animated images" (Gaudreault 242-243).

Thus in regard to death and its relationships to film, we can see a connection in the above ideas. Doane asserts that cinema necessarily creates an abstraction of the experience of death with its own temporality that removes it from its temporal flow and creates it as a separate secondary event. In Gunning we see how this secondary event is furthermore a complex dialectic between astonishment and knowledge, and that these two responses drive the attraction and give it an enduring effect. And through Dulac and Gaudreault we can see that the inherent circularity and repetition at the heart of the cinematic experience of time empowers the attraction as a structuring principle that reemerges through cinema's ongoing development.

The theorizations above all point to aspects of early cinema structure and spectatorship that eerily echo the effects of the Zapruder film. In addition, they can give us an idea about its lasting impact and currency. Each of these aspects speaks to an uncomfortable familiarity between the "attractions" of those early films (particularly those involving the death of a subject) and the attraction of seeing the president murdered before our eyes. The film is thus not simply footage of an event, but illustrates perfectly many fundamental concepts associated with film spectatorship itself. Indeed it is hard to ignore the affiliation of attractions listed by Gunning with features of the Zapruder film:

> A fascination with visual experiences that seem to fold back onto the pleasure of looking (colours, forms of motion…) an interest in novelty (current events to freaks and oddities…) an often sexualized fascination with socially taboo subject matter to do with the body (female nudity or revealing clothing, decay and death); a peculiarly modern obsession with violent and aggressive sensations (such as speed or the threat of injury) (Gunning, "Now You See It" 44).

In addition, we may cautiously add to the discussion of film as a secondary, more masterable event, the context of circularity and repetition. In repeated watching, the astonishment (i.e., the shock) lessens, so knowledge begins to dominate the experience, bringing with it its own illusory sense of mastery. As with the risk of the thrill ride discussed above, Gunning asserts that mastery of the experience of the thrill is quite different than mastery of its form. This is in contrast to the kind of mastery offered by narrative, an understanding of form and structure that offers the pleasure of foreknowledge: the accurate anticipation of future action. The kind of mastery alluded to within the cinema of attractions has no such permanent formal strategy. Inside this logic, it is repetition (going back on the roller coaster again and again) that offers not only repeated thrills, but a sense of anticipation and of mastery over the experience.[44] It is just this reinscription of the experience that becomes essential to the "survival" of the attraction, as Gaudreault mentions above. However, whether it is a mastery of experience or a mastery of form, both are elusive in that the possibility of contingent detail to rupture both remains. The elusive mastery of the images we see may keep us coming back, but the shock of death on screen, indeed the death of a president, continually disrupts and confounds full resolution. Perhaps this lack is defined by the endless political, historical or cultural implications; however, the above theories ask us to look deeper into the structure of film and viewing experience itself to find a lack of resolution "baked into" the process. In the case of the Zapruder film, this lack of resolution becomes its central discursive impact.

André Bazin: Death Every Afternoon

The Zapruder film's discursive impact is more, though it must be said advisedly, than the sum of its parts. We have seen so far how the theorization of attraction, indexicality, contingency and risk all play a role in the discussion of death in cinema and furthermore to the death of

[44] For example, my five-year-old daughter, who has not yet developed a cohesive and iterable understanding of narrative structure, repeatedly watches the same episodes of her favourite shows again and again. This repetition is hardly devoted to the understanding of the characters, their intentions or of any narrative resolution, but is related to developing a familiarity with the shape of the events. She is developing an understanding of where the scary parts are, like on a thrill ride where she can find the places she can rest and laugh, and as such she develops her reactions to the narrative based on these repeated exposures.

President Kennedy and its cinematic representation. As important as it is to note how the Zapruder film echoes and disrupts these foundational concepts, it is also important to acknowledge the ongoing and barely describable "unease" the film causes. However well these theorists define the place and role of death and time in cinema, there remains something left over; something that though undefined has a significant effect. Both André Bazin and Laura Mulvey speak to this quality of death on screen and to its continuing power to stay just outside the limits of representation.

One of Bazin's most influential works, "Death Every Afternoon," speaks to the various crimes of film in the arena of the "unfilmable" and the uneasy boundary between knowledge and its limits.[45] With its intentional reworking of the title of Hemingway's famous novel, we are treated not only to a thematic similarity between the subject of Bazin's article, Pierre Braunberger's film *The Bullfight* (1951), but an implication of the mechanical reproducibility that defines the medium in contrast to the printed word. In reviewing Braunberger's lyrical documentary on the cultural phenomenon of bullfighting, Bazin becomes preoccupied with the camera's relationship to death and its anticipation. In the category of live spectacles that may be understood, like theater, to be "emptied of its psychological reality" without "the reciprocal presence [of the audience]…that defines the performance as such" (Bazin 29), one would expect the cinematic depiction of bullfighting to be equally bereft. Bazin states that such is not the case in *The Bullfight* because of the very presence of death. "The tragic ballet of the bullfight turns around the presence and permanent possibility of death…that is what makes the ring into something more than a theatre stage" (30). At the risk of eulogizing, death is the interlocutor of the performers in this case. The Bull and the Matador are both engaged with it as they engage each other. Death is thus a "live" participant in the display. Its "permanent possibility" is exactly the point of death's attraction in the film and this attraction hinges on the mechanical reproducibility of the cinematic image. Bazin continues:

> Art of time, cinema has the exorbitant privilege of repeating it, a privilege common to all mechanical arts but one that it can use with infinitely greater potential…Cinema only

[45] See Bazin 27-31.

> attains and constructs its aesthetic time based on lived time, Bergsonian "durée," which is in essence irreversible and qualitative (30).

Thus, echoing Doane above, Bazin recapitulates that cinema creates a parallel experience to the one which it films. Cinema does not transmogrify time into an aesthetically-different re-imagining (as in music, Bazin asserts) but recalls it in the dimensions in which we are most familiar with it, through our primary senses. Pursuant to this point he also echoes the sentiment that this reproduction can do damage to our experience of lived time as such. Though all moments in film can be repeated, that are some that resist, some that remain unique, no matter how much they are reproduced:

> If it is true that for consciousness, no moment is equal to any other, there is one on which this fundamental difference converges, and that is the moment of death… It marks the frontier between the duration of consciousness and the objective time of things. (30)

In this case, death extracted from the flow of time and played over and over again can, in extreme cases, be taken to the point of obscenity. This pornographic element is exactly what charges of obscenity seek to stamp out in film. But Bazin asks us to consider the limitations of the medium in order to fully understand the offense. What cinema represents is, of course, not the experience of death, it only replicates the experience of watching the same, the "being there" of an indexical link. Since such experiences are only truly unique to those experiencing them directly, the crime is thus one of forgery: passing off the representation of the thing as the thing itself. However, Bazin has not come to bury cinema, but to praise it. He wants to add that this second-hand experience, the death of the bull in *The Bullfight* for example, is rendered more eerie and affecting precisely because this most unique of moments can be experienced again and again. As such, it is "in principle as moving as the spectacle of the real instant that it reproduces [and] even more moving because it magnifies the quality of the original moment through the contrast of its repetition. It confers on it an additional solemnity" (31). In a context where unique moments can be repeated over and over again, new temporal relationships are created. As such, cinema's ability to decontextualize time, as much as it profanes the wholeness of the original

event, creates not a mere imitation, but a new event that is automatically profuse with possible associations.

We can see here a position similar to Kracauer's in the way Bazin details the bountiful rewards of film's "crime" against the wholeness of lived time. As we saw above, Kracauer too notes the way that the apparatus of film indiscriminately reproduces the abundance of the physical world, only to make its most profound connections in the "dregs" of what is peripheral to the goals of exhibition or narrative. Thus the profanity the censor sees in watching death "every afternoon" is misread as a violation of moral or cultural norms, when it is actually the puncturing and "dégonflage" of the power and control cinema exerts over time. Film is at its best when it acknowledges and highlights our insufficiencies through its own boundaries, and death on film is just such a boundary. The uniqueness of such an event is indeed evacuated in its extraction from the flow of life; however, this extraction inherently implies a recontextualization, a re-recontextualization and on and on ad infinitum. Rather than killing this moment, cinema "reanimates" it into new life, not as something un-dead but laden with possibilities for new connections and relationships.

And so while death on screen should give us pause, should challenge our own personal limits, it is how the representation challenges the limits of the medium that is most important. *The Bullfight* is unique, not because it shows death on screen, but because it acknowledges the inability of the camera to do more than frame that unique moment. In the Zapruder film, this limitation was not a directorial choice, but the result of the director's shock and the immediate commandeering of his film. However, it is the form the film takes, rather than the circumstances of its production that Bazin wants us to pay attention to. Film does not replicate time in just one way. It is how it parcels out time with its own unique beginnings and endings that makes of cinema a parallel and equally eventful experience. Death passing across our screens in conventional temporal sequence, be they in narrative films or on television news, all take part in long-standing structures of viewership, consistent from the birth of the medium. But death seen in a jarring way, in an unconventional organization, reminds us that film in not a reproduced time, but a whole new order in its experience. Thus the event is not experienced *again*, but experienced *anew*.

As mentioned above, the repetition and circularity in the reading of the Zapruder film for its primary consideration as visible evidence was central. However, these repetitions were dedicated to finding ever more minute pieces of information that could retroactively reconstitute the event.[46] The death of the president became a central point in the timing of this reconstruction, its unique moment in the film, frame 313, being the point from which many temporal trajectories were judged.[47] But this more prosaic interpretation misses exactly the point Bazin is making about death on film. Rather than satisfying our desire to understand death, film only creates a new dimension of its experience. They are using the wrong tool to understand who killed Kennedy, but the right one to find its meaning. Bazin reminds us that death is not so much invoked by its mechanical representation in the Zapruder film but *evoked*. And it is exactly this second-order of experience that makes the death of the president seem immediate yet far away, eerie yet familiar. This "uncanny" temporality is noted in its relationship to death by another scholar, Laura Mulvey.

Laura Mulvey and the "Uncanny" Nature of Cinematic Time

This approach to cinematic temporality is qualified by Mulvey in *Death 24x a Second*, using the "uncanny" in its explicitly psychological sense. Mulvey speaks to the fact even though viewers have a profusion of different digital controls over current and past media, in this new digital context, "dead" films are given new life. Being able, to slow down, run back and most importantly for Mulvey, freeze the temporality of these films makes their uncanny qualities come to the fore. "Once time is 'embalmed'… it persists, carrying the past across to innumerable futures as they become the present" (56). The gap between past and present is thus bridged by the digital, however in a way that necessarily makes visible that fissure.

Mulvey reminds us how early films dedicated to the everyday events of life, like the Lumière Brothers' actualités, became banal as everyday life became interpenetrated by cinematic images. As such, the temporal shocks these films provided became lost in the "banal world of

[46] See the introduction for way the Zapruder film's temporality and circularity influenced the search for the assassin, both officially and unofficially.

[47] Here I am referring to the use of the Zapruder film as a stopwatch for the event. In conjunction with sound recordings and other amateur films a timeline for the event was created. See introduction.

realism" (36). But in the new age of digital manipulability, their uncanny and ethereal nature once again comes to the fore:

> It is impossible to see the Lumières' films as a simple demonstration of a new technology; every gesture, expression, movement of the wind or water is touched with mystery. This is not the mystery of the magic trick but the more disturbing, uncanny sensation of seeing movement fossilized for the first time. (36)

Mulvey invokes Sigmund Freud to remind us of early cinema's link to both magic and death. While cinema's animation of the dead may or may not frighten an audience with the possibility of actual spectres haunting the world of the living, the possibility of encountering death and the inevitability of one's own death is not so easily dismissed. Cinema's magic tricks can offer an antidote to these ruminations. Naked manipulation of the senses through the substitution cut "disappearing trick," (Méliès' *Cinderella* 1899) or execution victims replaced by dummies, (Alfred Clark's Edison short *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* 1895) offers the audience an existential out; the plausible deniability of "it was all just a dream" or "it's only a movie." The rational and the irrational are thus pitted against each other as much as they interpenetrate each other. "The threshold between life and death becomes a space of uncertainty in which boundaries blur between the rational and the supernatural, the animate and the inanimate" (37). This mingling of uncertainties Mulvey identifies as the hallmark of the uncanny.

This gap, then, between present and past is made uncomfortably present through film's representation of death. Freud himself, though, was suspicious of uncanny entertainments of "the new" such as waxworks or automata for calling up these conflicted feelings, as they were not living presences. Live events such as spirit walks or séances, for him, were the quintessential expressions of encounters with the uncanny. It was an immediate experience of a living body's passage from an animate to an inanimate state that prefigured their influence on the present that Freud deemed worthy of the term (37). But the power of the technologies of modernity to create space for the past in the present was indeed possible. Mulvey notes that a contemporary of Freud's, Wilhelm Jentsch, believed that new technologies, such as the magic lantern, the

phantasmagoria and eventually cinema itself, could call up these same reactions. Mulvey discusses these contrasting positions around the central point of uncertainty:

> The most rational mind experiences uncertainty when faced with an illusion that is, if only momentarily, inexplicable ... This kind of *frisson* can be located in the moment itself, the sudden moment of doubt, an involuntary and bewildered loss of certainty (42).

So the stability of the present moment is challenged by the illusion on the screen. Here we see echoed the complex "astonishment" Gunning identifies in the attraction. The moment of shock where the erstwhile relationship cinema builds in relation to indexicality and contingency thins to the point of breaking, is here articulated as a hybridized experience of past and present, one that necessarily involves new technology, yet implies its insufficiency. Mulvey's use of the uncanny here applies to cinema's creation of a "stable" instability between knowing and the unknown, the animate and inanimate, living and dead, which pervades the emergence of cinema:

> It is…with the blurring of these boundaries, that the uncanny nature of the cinematic image returns most forcefully and, with it, the conceptual space of uncertainty: that is, the difficulty of understanding time and the presence of death in life…. The presence of the past in the cinema is also the presence of the body resurrected and these images can trigger, if only by association, questions that still seem imponderable: the nature of time, the fragility of human life and the boundary between life and death. (52-53)

Echoing many of the ideas discussed previously, Mulvey comes to the uneasy definition of the shifting sands that make up cinema's image of the past. As we saw with Bazin, the second-hand temporality created by film is not a limited or dead object, but profuse with possible connection to a multitude of current and past contexts. However, Mulvey asserts above that the kind of associations those images gather as they pass through time are not necessarily joyous, clear and gratifying. Indeed, they are far more often murky, mysterious and incomplete. These conditions should remind us of those by which we can understand the role and impact of the Zapruder film in 1963 and beyond. The "uncanny" nature of the film and its recurring ghostly presence in past and current media landscapes will be a running theme in the following chapters.

The power of the old, the power of the past, to call up conflicted emotions in the present is as much the definition of the uncanny, as it is the definition of the power of the Zapruder film. Mulvey shows us that the control over cinematic time is less a mastery of its effects, and more the creation of a parallel experience of the uncanny in a profusion of contexts. This Zapruder film is both an illustration and an instantiation of this idea. Thus, here and throughout this discussion, it will be noted for the way it proliferates the shock and trauma associated with the president's death, but also disrupts conventional structures of film to the point of crisis.

Conclusions

The power of the Zapruder film is uncanny precisely because of how well it connects the world of pre-cinematic "cultural series," the world of the cinema of attractions, the cultural and political context of America in the 1960s, and beyond. The persistent iterability of the Zapruder film and its ability to influence all of these contexts is not due to its violent or shocking content alone, but to the way it calls into question the familiar and dependable relationship between spectators and the apparatus of cinema. Its shocks echo those caused by the medium itself and the tremendous changes in vision and visuality at the end of the nineteenth century.

While only a few of the theorists above are able to touch on the film itself, each lays part of a solid framework for theorizing the Zapruder film's cinematic effect through the lens of several concepts. 1) The Zapruder film is revealed by and reveals much about the logic of the cinema of attractions, both in the early film period and later. 2) Indexicality both defines and is defined by the film. It reveals indexicality not as a function of film, but as an unstable interpretive relationship that can easily break down. 3) The Zapruder film is equally illustrative of contingency and its effects in cinema, while casting the concept as another relationship that involves a distinct component of risk. 4) While the Zapruder film contains a death, it also connects to a relationship between death and cinema that goes back to the medium's beginning. Death in this sense, presents itself as an uncanny "underneath" of the cinematic image that eludes formal theorization.

The theorists mentioned in this chapter all help draw attention to and elucidate the Zapruder film's slippery implications as amateur film, home movie, documentary, journalism, horrific snuff film and archival clip. No matter what context it is viewed in, the film remains a

liminal case, never clearly part of any standard by which we may classify it. The interstitial space it occupies both exemplifies and embodies the moment of representational crisis to which it is most closely related, but also to other moments of similar crisis that uncover a barely acknowledged malaise around the neat categories and conventional boundaries around film, evidence, witnessing and proof. This indecision or unease with the film's place in the discipline is further proof of this unsettled issue. Discussed for too long as visual evidence or aesthetic approach, the way it straddles cinematic genres and formal features, will be overshadowed in this work by the borders it crosses between being a film, an attraction, an encounter with time, and encounter with death and an experience of camera-vision in conjunction with all of these.

What will follow are four organized analytic interventions into existing films that speak to or somehow interact with this crisis. Along the way, more theorists will step in to help us elucidate some of the finer points of genre, form, or historical context that will help us understand the impact of Zapruder's film on cinematic representation and its enduring influence. Chapter 2 will further investigate the film's uncanny relationship with early cinema. This period's attractions, temporal shocks and powerful indexical and contingent effects will here illustrate the uncertainty and instability of cinematic relationships alluded to by the Zapruder film. Chapter 3 will connect a discussion of early film and its attractions to the interventions and attractions of the avant-garde, particularly the ways in which these filmmakers echoed those interventions in response to the crisis in which the Zapruder film played such a unique role. Likewise, Chapter 4 will deal with the Zapruder film's revelation of this crisis in the background of fiction film from 1964 onward. It will look at the ways in which, in similarity and contrast to the interventions of the avant-garde, fiction film responded to this crisis. Some use cinematic tools to patch over the gaps in representation proposed by the Zapruder film, while others use them to more productively illustrate cinema's instability. In Chapter 5 we will approach the new world of digital iterations of the Zapruder film and how different digital tools have made investigations and interventions into its legacy. The digital revolution has indeed introduced new technology into the understanding and reproduction of the film. However, as Mulvey notes, it is interesting how these new tools reveal many of the same old problems when used to the same old ends. The eerie and "undead" nature of the Zapruder film in this context is perhaps more prominent, and more interesting, than ever.

Chapter 2: The Zapruder Film, Early Film and Attractions

It must be clearly understood from the outset that a film made on a portable 8mm movie camera from the 1960s can hardly be compared to the earliest cinematic output on any sort of technological or mechanical level. However, when we look closely at the concepts discussed above and their relationships to the Zapruder film, a comparison to the structure and style of early film becomes clearer. This project takes as its core argument that the crisis in cinematic representation, which finds such a potent example in the Zapruder Film is intimately linked to the fundamental disruption of vision by the filmic experience as such. Thus the earliest impact of the medium and discussions of its earliest effects are essential to this investigation.

In what follows, not only will structural similarities between Zapruder's footage and early film be taken seriously, but we will also look at the possibility of the visual tropes of early cinema to be echoed and shared between many cinematic styles, time periods and genres. This chapter will address elements in early cinema that can be seen to act as intertexts for the Zapruder film. As previously stated, the stylistic themes of attraction, narrative integration and circularity, along with the theoretical preoccupations of index, contingency, risk and death, seem to apply to the Zapruder film in the same way they do to many early films. These themes were a preoccupation for early filmmakers and audiences and those early films and their reception bears investigation for the links that make these tropes so meaningful.

This chapter will proceed by analyzing three films that illustrate three different kinds of foundational attractions in early cinema: eroticism, physical threat and death. Each stages its attraction as an "event," whether that series of actions is planned or not. These attractions will reveal the preoccupation of early film with making visible the unseen. While by no means an exhaustive list of the films that deal with these subjects, the analyses below will discuss the films as examples of a series of interventions in this field. To begin, it will be important to establish what makes an "event" film, and how that structure is communicated to the viewer.

Framing the Event

Many of the earliest films were "occasional" films, dealing in a documentary fashion with an incident, a place, an activity or in some way displaying the stuff of everyday life. While film history would subsequently construct a false teleology where these films were hierarchized for their anticipation of a narrative function, more recent histories have established that the dominant form of early silent film was the actualité or topical film. (Doane 141-142) As we have seen above, they are ostensibly governed by the exhibitionism common to the logic of attractions. Like the Lumière actualités, on which the form was largely based, they are films *of something*: a concrete event bracketed by a beginning and an end. Though, by today's standards, they may seem only slightly more structured than setting up one's camera in the garden, "event" films entailed an object of focus, some attraction that would draw the focus of the viewer.

From demolitions and fires to work scenes to prizefights, movie-going audiences were fascinated with the camera's extraordinary ability to faithfully record and display them. The 'being there' of the camera was its most celebrated quality as it could stand in for the 'being there' of the spectator. In a modern sense, we could read this experience as the anything-could-happen feeling associated later with live televised events, although these later broadcasts eliminate the temporal distance completely. While the photographic camera represents a 'having-been-there,' the motion-picture camera communicates "the inexorable appeal of the present tense" (Doane 143). Although this "present tense" in early films was always a canned experience, the appeal would be better expressed as that of an intensified experience of the present moment.

This intensification comes not only through the pleasure of looking, but the way the camera rewarded close attention to the event by the fixing of contingent detail. Whereas the play of light on water, the wind in the trees, the half-expression between frowning and smiling could be experienced in the flow of time, in the recorded event, these details were fixed, repeatable, and ripe for close examination by the spectator. Thus the camera's recording of events turned them into an intensified analog of human vision. In this intensified attention to the event, the attraction of contingent detail proliferates to include the spontaneous and unexpected. "What was intended as the "event" could, at least theoretically, be overshadowed...[by]…a look at the camera, a shadowy figure passing in front of the lens." (Doane 144). This interplay between what

happened and what might happen is key to the appeal of the actualité and shows its inherent importance to cinematic syntax.

However, this intensification of time was not simply the camera's, but also the intentional structuring of the director. The construction of the cinematic event in a particular temporal and spatial location necessarily focuses attention by bracketing the event with a concrete beginning and end in a single shot. Though these films contained no narrative approach to editing, they did draw temporal boundaries around live events that established them as such. "Actualités obliged the film-maker to create, even as he records the event, a specific sequential or spatial logic, which becomes in some sense the event's (intensified) abstracted representation, as opposed to reproducing its (extensive) duration" (Elsaesser 17). Thomas Elsaesser points out here that despite not having any narrative or even pre-narrative qualities, the mere selecting out and apportioning of time necessarily confers a special quality to that time. In addition to this structural aspect, the short duration gives an impression of remembered wholeness. As with the earlier actualités and chronophotographs of Marey and Muybridge, the short duration combined with the timing of the event speak to the possibility that one can hold the first shot in mind when reaching the final one, thus giving the impression that one has witnessed a whole event, rather than selected moments of a duration.[48] These factors, together with other technologies of modernity, were instrumental in producing and corroborating an *investment* in events, dividing temporality into eventful and uneventful time (Doane 144).

In this sense, the intensified structure of the cinematic experience of the event seems to stand in for the spectator at the live event. Along with the thrill of witnessing the new technology in action, the cinema spectator is positioned with a stable view point, a comfortable seat, not jostling with crowds or obstructed in any way. The privileged view of the filmmaker and the view of the spectator coincide to create an "ideal" view of the event. However the camera can be said to substitute for the spectator, the thoughts above remind us that the camera is a spectator of a very particular kind. The film spectator sees both less and more. They are limited by the frame and the access it allows. When the camera pans, that vision shifts. When the shot cuts, where the

[48] For further discussion, see Elsaesser 17.

camera is stopped, the viewer sees the ellipsis (Doane 159). The structure of the camera's recording gives, but it also takes away.

Such breaks are telling as they form a considerable statement as to what time is considered "cinematic" and what is not. The cut in the event film often elides "uneventful" time, an 'in-camera' edit to eliminate the repositioning the camera, the preparatory actions of the participants, or the elimination of off-camera distractions. Through the elimination of the waiting that spectators at the live event inevitably experience, this elision is more than just a value added to the cinematic experience. This "value" is a far more profound statement about the nature of vision, however. By selecting out "uneventful" or "dead" time to create the cinematic event, the filmmaker assumes to be grasping the live event's clear-cut and inherent structure (Doane 160). Instead of the essential charge of anticipation coming from the "uneventful" time waiting for the live event, the cinematic event is characterized by the up-front delivery of thrills.

What solidifies the event as attraction in such cases is thus the dead time the camera leaves behind. Thus the "event-ness" of the cinematic double is defined by the not, or never cinematic. Such deletions are what create its meaning. As with the saying applied to early films and later popularized, cinema already "cuts to the chase" by boiling down the lived experience of the event, liberating it of extraneous elements in order to condense and consolidate its meaning. Thus it is that filmed events are always both an abstraction and a condensation.

This level of control would become a matter of course in the creation of narrative cinema. To decrease dependence on an unpredictable world, cinema sought out the controllable, mute setting of stage sets and trained actors. Contingency was thus drained from the image in the pursuit of narrative structure. However, what the dominance of that mode of filmmaking eventually created was a false binary. The minutely controlled and sterile environment where films would largely come from the great studios made these earlier cinematic experiences seem unstructured and "wild" by comparison. The cracks in their cinematic experience—shaking camera movement, jump cuts, improperly placed spectators—were thus misread as an imperfect version of what would come later. These elements actually display the disjunct, foundational to the medium, between camera and live vision. They are not structured by narrative per se, but are structured more by the kind of vision the camera makes possible and seeks to provide. Thus these gaps show the incompleteness of cinematic vision, and gesture towards the limits of its

powers of representation. By creating, not a series of cinematic events, but an entire world in which those events took place, cinema began to refer to itself more than to the world outside. This had the effect of halting the "centrifugal momentum of film exhibition—in which the spectator was thrown outward from the viewing situation to other texts, other sources of knowledge…" (Doane 161).

Through its structure and different viewing contexts, the Zapruder film can be seen to disrupt the self-referential interiority of this cinematic world, the solipsistic pleasure of structured and iterable events. In the place of a privileged unrolling of events within the diegesis of conventional narrative, it confronts viewers with one that, arguably, they should wish they had seen with their own eyes. This event presents cinematic shock and attraction not as coherent and legible aspects of the internal space and temporality of the frame, it throws the viewer outward to other texts and sources of knowledge. The film is insufficient in itself, and such is its challenge to accepted notions of what the camera can do. These factors intimately link the impact of the Zapruder film to these early event films, and echo a crisis at the heart of cinematic representation to which they also contribute.

THE ZAPRUDER FILM AS "EVENT"

By its formal structure the Zapruder film bears many striking similarities to the early "event" films, picking up from the original actualités of the Lumière Brothers in France and similar Biograph products in America. Leaving aside the gruesome violence it contains for a moment, its structure and subject echo these earliest forays into the cinematic representation of live events. Firstly, its visual similarity to the actualité style must be acknowledged. It is a single shot in terms of length, meaning that the main subject of the film is shot from beginning to end.[49] In framing and composition it remains a single shot as well. Zapruder follows the president's car as it passes in front of him without changing his position from the stone plinth on which he stands. The film is also silent, as the Bell and Howell 16mm camera had no external microphone and Zapruder had no way to record external sound, let alone sync it to on-screen action. Though

[49] The short jump cut at the beginning of the film, where Zapruder starts and then stops his camera realizing that the president's car has not yet arrived, is discussed in Chapter 1. The second is of course the damage done to film in its duplication by *Time/Life* in Chicago. These issues will be further discussed below.

perhaps not by intention, the film is very short, only 26 seconds in length, shorter even than the length of some of the earliest films.[50] These factors may seem arbitrary, but they have a concrete effect on the film's structure and its impact.

In addition to these similarities, we can see Zapruder's choice of filming location was considered carefully. Standing on the unfinished plinth just to the south of the unfinished pergola on Dealey Plaza gave him a very good view of not only the motorcade's approach, but of the green behind it. As we can see in the footage, potential filming positions at the bend in the road where Houston turns into Elm Street were packed with spectators and well-wishers. The green space on the south side of Elm Street was clear, but that position provided only the Dallas rail yards as a background and a low slope to film from.[51] Zapruder found a position somewhat removed from the road and up at a significant height, enough to help him film over his only obstruction, the Stemmons freeway sign. From this precarious perch[52] he sought to create a privileged view of the event, even more so as his position removes him from physical proximity to the president, something the other positions do not. As a filmmaker then, Zapruder knew that to create a truly cinematic record of the event, he would have to provide a view that very few people had on that day. In fact, many proponents of conspiracy have quipped that the only person to have a better view of the motorcade was the assassin himself.

But more than anything, like the early actualités, the Zapruder film is *of something*: a concrete event exposed in a single run of the camera. As we have seen in earlier discussions, construction of the cinematic event in a particular temporal and spatial location necessarily focuses attention by bracketing the event with a concrete beginning and end in a single shot. What is more we can see a short jump at the beginning of the film,[53] where the motorcade begins the turn onto Elm. The shot jumps forward to the president's car rounding the corner onto Elm

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[50] Here we could include the work of chronophotographers like Marey and shorts by the Lumières and Edison's Biograph Company.

[51] These two filming positions accord with those of the relevant sequences from Orville Nix and Marie Muchmore, respectively.

[52] As he suffered from vertigo, this was a dangerous situation. He had to ask his secretary to stand on the narrow plinth with him to hold onto his coat so he would not fall. As a result of his condition, he revealed he did not remove his eyes from the camera throughout the entire filming and focused completely on what he saw through the viewfinder. See Introduction for details.

[53] This should be contrasted with the second break in the film cause by the damaging and subsequent removal of frames 208-211 in the process of its original development. The first is intentional, the second not.

Street, revealing an elision of "uneventful" time. As seen above, in order to save film and make his film more exciting, Zapruder avoids the part of "being there" that was less exciting. This selection is far from arbitrary as its shows the conscious creation of a true cinematic event.

Read with the thoughts above, though, this comparison is more than simply identifying the link between Zapruder's choices and the logic of attractions. Far from indicating the mode in which the Zapruder film was made, this comparison reveals the limitations that mark the film's deeper impact. The superficial similarities should not distract us from the fact that, in its echoing of the structure of these early films, the Zapruder film recalls the limits and instability of their cinematic vision. As Doane gestured towards above, the spectatorial position we are put in by the Zapruder film, like those early films, shows us both more and less (Doane 159). Zapruder's choice of vantage point provides us with a unique view of the event far superior to any other chosen to film from on that day, and yet we are locked into this vantage point. One can imagine investigator, not to mention the public, desperately hoping for Zapruder to turn the camera, even slightly, to possibly see the source of the shot, a muzzle flash or a puff of smoke. The camera records the effect as its central event, and not its cause. The Zapruder film, like the event films of early cinema, is *of something*, but his is indisputably of the wrong thing.

What is more, our view of the central event is blocked at numerous points. The first, already noted, is the time elided by Zapruder himself in-camera. We will never know what the camera could have caught had it been on. The second is the jump caused by the damage to frames to 208 to 211. As we saw earlier, these were damaged in the film's original processing and those copies, from which many of the widely distributed bootlegs were made, bear this gap. However unintentional, these missing frames were considered by many assassination critics to be the proof of whitewash and cover-up by the administration. This second jump, just before the first shot injures the president, were presumed to carry the weight of proof upon which the case for conspiracy rested.[54] After this break, the Stemmons freeway sign comes into play and hides the impact of the first bullet. The president disappears behind the sign in good health and emerges stricken, holding his hands awkwardly to his throat. Add to these concerns the fact that

[54] See the introduction and Wrone 35for a discussion of these readings.

Zapruder almost loses the car out of the frame as he follows its progress down Elm Street and the scene the film sets is far from ideal.

These are not mistakes in the classical sense, however, and frustration with Zapruder or with the team that printed the original film is misplaced. The cracks in the cinematic space, shocks to the smooth cinematic rendering of the event, necessarily remind us of the gaps between the camera and world. They are essential in their falsification of the dream of total representation cinema has built. As such they are misread as guarantees of its authenticity,[55] or further as proofs of conspiracy or cover-up. The Zapruder film is flawed in these senses, but is profuse with meaning in others. The fact that the Zapruder film does not prove who killed Kennedy, its limited frame of vision and its obstructions enact an instability of cinematic experience in the 1960s and 70s that echo that of the early part of the century.

For this reason, this analysis should not stop at the Zapruder film itself, but establish points of comparison between it and other actualités films that reveal similar visual and structural instability. Though the assassination of a president was never caught on film by any actualité filmmaker in the same way as Zapruder, capturing of death on camera, the creation of parallel cinematic timing of an event and the importance and influence of exhibitionist logic of attractions, makes these early films important intertexts. In the analyses that follow, the primary connections of attraction and shock that defined the complicated visual experience of early cinema goers will be explicitly linked to the revelations of the Zapruder film.

Attraction and Eros: What Happened on 23rd Street (1901)

Although it might be considered a strange intertext for films containing death, the Edison Company's risqué *What Happened on 23rd Street,* can tell us much about how an event constructed around the display of the seldom visible shows the gap between desire and the medium. The connection between sex and death notwithstanding, the theme and content of this film is less important to this project than the construction of "live-ness" in a perhaps unexpected event, and how that event is shaped as a cinematic attraction.

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[55] This use of grain, shaky camerawork and editing to convey the "realness" of the image has been elsewhere called the "Zapruder quotient." See Chanan.

In New York City around the turn of the century, 23rd Street had a reputation. Aside from being one of the windiest streets in the growing metropolis, it was also a stop on the new subway system and very close to the city's tenderloin district. The windiness of the street was notorious for its effect on ladies' dresses, and historians have noted it as a focal point for peeping toms[56] who would wander up and down the thoroughfare, waiting for a glimpse of ankle, or even… calf. As such, we can imagine the titular event, which gestures at unnamable erotic content, was what Edison's cameramen hoped to capture.

At first glimpse, we can see the film's portrayal of the setting. The principal attraction of the film is a streetscape of 23rd Street in New York City. Historically speaking, this is interesting in its own right, but the static shot of the city street is the classic actualité spectacle: exciting the attraction of contingency in the simple act of representing the daily life of a busy city street. People walk by, a street car passes, a horse and carriage waits at the curb. The sidewalk clears for a moment and a couple walks towards the camera center frame. They stroll nonchalantly down the street and seem part of the general action, until the woman passes over a grating in the sidewalk. As one might imagine, her long Victorian skirts fly up almost to her knees as men stop and stare at the impromptu burlesque show. The woman bravely pats down her skirts, smiles and turns her head to her left, as if to answer some catcall from the other side of the street. She and her companion stroll on, arm in arm.

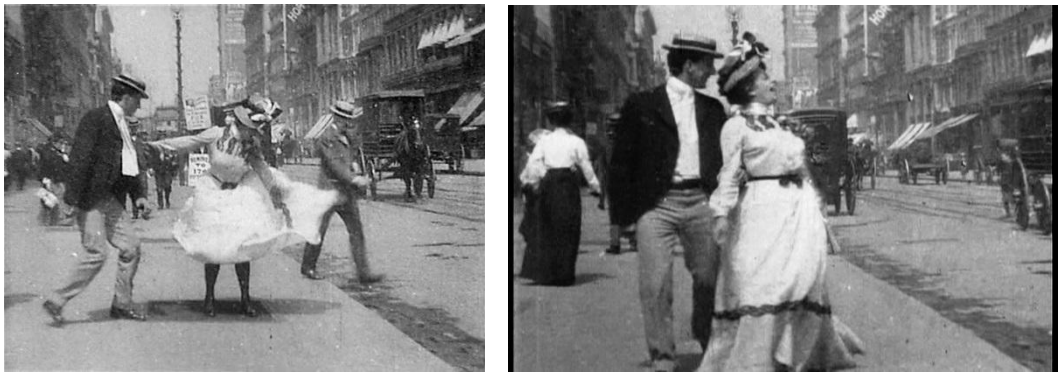

Figure 4: Stills from *What Happened on 23rd Street* (Edwin S. Porter 1901)

Though the event was produced for the camera, the staging and marketing of the film is designed to subvert the expectation of the actualité structure. A short panorama of the New York

[56] Lauren. "Past Imperfect: Feminism and Social Histories of Silent Film." Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies 16.1 (2005): 24.

City Street with daily actions of people involved is supplemented with actors, one of which is dressed in such a way as to maximize the effect of the gust from below. [57] Though categorized by Edison's marketers as "humorous" (Balides 24), this perspective of the "actualité gone wrong" hides both the exploitative element of the sexual content and the actor herself, but also mis-categorizes the film's form. The framing and the composition of the shot imply the style of both documentary and fiction films. The erotic/exploitative "surprise" of the film depends on the viewers' anticipation of the actualité form.

The attraction of *What Happened on 23rd Street* may not be obvious from its first few frames. The length of the static shot before the arrival of the event for which the film is named, may seem unmotivated to the modern viewer. It seems to lack any concrete focus; nothing seems to be happening. However, like in conventional panoramas or any of the static shots in the actualité, there would have been much to attract the interest of early cinema viewers. The couple that arrives center frame to mark the start of the climax emerges out of a riot of detail that would have fascinated audiences: the costumes of the people passing by, the street car moving up the street, the horse stomping its hooves at the corner, the wind blowing the dust around. All of these elements could have been attractions in and of themselves without the inclusion of an impromptu striptease.

However, these attractions pale in comparison to the display of the young lady's underthings, both in its structural role and interpretive implications. This event, after which the film is ostensibly named, provides a technical and stylistic linchpin around which the rest of the film's timing and editing are based. The opening streetscape is the preamble, the approach of the couple the rising action, the gust of wind the climax and the woman's laugh and casual saunter off-screen the denouement. This framework of the cinematic event, as we saw above is fundamentally driven by the bracketing off of time to create a legible structure. The thrill here is not only defined by the contingent detail of the subway grates' fortuitous gust of wind, but by contingent detail that suffuses the time on either side of that event. This time, though perhaps

[57] Cinstance Balides goes into further detail and evaluates the film and its performances from a feminist perspective in "Scenarios of exposure in the practice of everyday life: women in the cinema of attractions," *Screen*, Volume 34, Issue 1, (March 1993), Pages 23-24.

uneventful to modern viewers, is thickened by a wealth of details that informed the early spectatorial experience, thus creating it as a separate event in its own right.

So the attraction of *What Happened on 23rd Street* is often misread as purely the erotic display, when it is more truly a cinematic thrill of anticipation and satisfaction. The temptation to create out of these details some sort of narrative predisposition must be mitigated to the extent that subsequent viewings act primarily as a logical extension of the attraction structure and exhibition conditions of the films, especially for early cinema spectators.[58] The power of such attractions is not spent after a single viewing. Thus subsequent viewings must be considered for the stability they bring to the experience of the event. This is not a narrative structure as much as it is the structured experience of the attraction.

Upon re-viewing *What Happened on 23rd Street*, the focus of our attention is drawn to the couple when it is clear what we are waiting for. Once it is known that the woman's skirt will fly up once she reaches the grating, the viewing of the film becomes a watchful anticipation of the couple's approach. Each event ramping up to that central appearance of the woman's ankles becomes part of a spatial and temporal map that anticipates the couple by their absence. The street car passes by, a horse cart pulls away and proceeds up the street, a man in a flashy suit passes by. This anticipation is hard work, considering there is a full minute of static shot before the couple even appears. The piquancy is no longer a surprise, nor is it the result of any narrative prefiguring but the culmination of a process of suspense akin to the lecherous waiting on the corner of the real peeping toms of 23rd Street, a satisfying reward for navigating the anticipatory material.

What is essential here is the way in which Edison sets up the central event of *What Happened on 23rd Street* as a distinctly cinematic thrill. Although it echoes the voyeuristic thrill such an experience might have given in the flesh, the film sets the conditions for a certain relationship between screen and viewer in its construction of the event. The film reveals itself thus not merely as a hybrid of documentary and fiction styles but a mingling of voyeurisms, making peeping toms of us all. The film, one among many that structures the attraction of their

[58] For more on this subject see Dulac and Gaudreault, "Circularity and Repetition" 227-244.

event similarly,[59] goes about teaching the audience how to desire visually. The structure of the event stands in for the sexual act, just as the act of looking becomes sexual in the voyeuristic impulse. Rather than directing the audience towards the satisfaction in the world outside, the attraction returns to them to the screen. So again, the incompleteness of the medium's vision is here its strength rather than weakness. Cinematic vision is the cause and the solution to the problem.

It cannot be disputed that the central event of the Zapruder film is more shocking and stomach-turning than this vaguely risqué piece of turn-of-the-century film. But the two can be compared to meaningful ends by examining the relationship both films build between the staging of events and the desires they purport to satisfy. Stepping away from the violence and gore of the central event in Zapruder's film for a moment, it is the framing of the event in time that undergirds that shock. Following the logic of the cinema of attractions, to which both films have been compared, we see the event of the president's death emerge out of a series of contingent details. As Doane states, the event in both actualité and early fiction film is "where time coagulates and where the contingent can be readily imbued with meaning through its very framing as event." (Doane 169) The "coagulation of contingency" in Zapruder's case is the stunning revelation of the bullet's impact. This event is obviously more important than the wind in the trees on the other side of Elm Street, the woman adjusting her hat or sun glistening on the chrome of the president's car. Attention is drawn to the president's murder, not just because it is the ending of a man's life, but because it bears the weight of meaning for every image that came before. It is functionally what the Zapruder film is about. Though no one had to see the film twice to know what it was about, the collateral knowledge of the president's death, its location in the space and the time in the film did not stop viewers from obsessively poring over the film for minute contingent details that might somehow point toward the guilty party.

Unstructured by scripted narrative conventions, the temporal shock of the event could be misread as its suddenness, an impression that it strikes out of a clear blue sky. One minute the president is waving to the crowd, the next minute his head is gone in a haze of blood and brain. However, in the context of repeated viewings, it becomes clear that this too is a cinematic shock.

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[59] As pointed out earlier, Gunning mentions Edwin S. Porter's *The Gay Shoe Clerk* (1903), Biograph's *Photographing a Female Crook* (1904) and *Hooligan in Jail* (1903) among others. See Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions" 63-70.

Though not by directorial intention, the film operates within the conventional structure of that logic. The attraction is functionally the result of not only shock, but the spatial and temporal reference points around it. Though not narrative, both films crystalize meaning around the revelation of a particular event. The incongruity of the attractions notwithstanding, the events in both films focus anticipation on the revelation of the unseen as payoff. Even before a frame of the Zapruder film was seen, this structure of anticipation was well in place. Whether it is the unexpected gust of wind from below or an assassin's bullet, this anticipation, the primary component of surprise and suspense in cinema, prefigures the attraction's intensity.

With repeated viewings, both films reveal the more fundamental relationship on which their attractions draw. In the case of the Zapruder film, repeated viewings weaken the centrality of the murder and contingent details begin to be elevated to central causes for the effects on screen. For those who watch the Zapruder film again and again, it is the placement of objects and people, the angle of the sun, the vague and blurry forms hidden behind fences or trees that now become essential to its meaning. With the central event established as reference point, new relationships can be formed between other visual elements.[60] It is these ancillary details in which the mystery and the controversy around the film take place. The fundamental limit of cinematic representation, its ability to merely deliver more images in response to the desires it creates, necessarily frustrates those looking for links to the outside world from inside the Zapruder film.

In Chapter 1, we saw how this form of contingency shaped the reception and function of the film throughout its various iterations. In the context of our discussion of attractions then, the attraction of the president's death, the revelation of the unseen, gives way to the attraction of the film's details to prove or disprove the culpable parties.[61] Doane shows us how the meaning of films depending in such a great way on their contingency is inherently unstable. They can be broken apart, dislodged from their structure very easily.[62] But this breaking need not be thought of as a bad thing. Such breaks, particularly those not placed there by the director, but part of the

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[60] That Zapruder and the assassin have relatively similar vantage points, as discussed in Chapter 1, should not be considered coincidental as a primary "thrill."

[61] This pull to the ancillary details of the film, the promotion, so to speak, of background details to become as important as the central event itself, should be familiar to the reader. It is essentially the disposition of the film scholar. In Chapter 3, we will see how this relationship to film was solicited and encouraged by the avant-garde; one of its key pedagogical "attractions."

[62] For Doane's discussion of the event as rupture in the face of structured narrative, see 164.

riot of contingent details that the camera collects, are more important for "curiositas"[63] they arouse in the viewer. In the case of the Zapruder film, such elisions and missing frames have created more than their fair share of controversy. As we saw earlier, the damaging and subsequent removal of frames 208-211, considered by many assassination critics to be the crucial frames upon which the case for conspiracy rested before their revelation in Groden's composite,[64] were seen as a proof of whitewash and cover-up by the administration. Though eventually these frames were seen as not quite as crucial as they seemed, the attraction of these elements did not take the form of idle conjecture, but formed the cornerstone of a political critique. Gunning's "curiositas" is here stimulated by the mechanics of the device itself rather than by the act of the director, providing an avenue for viewers to see connections to the world outside the film.

Attraction and Threat: Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat *(1896)*

The next kind of early film relevant to our discussion is exemplified by the famous Lumière Brothers' actualité *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*. At the outset the comparison may seem superficial. The film's subject matter only tangentially relates through the arrival of a manner of transport. No deaths were recorded in either its making or viewing, as much as some sensationalists would have us believe so.[65] Indeed, even its framing and composition allow for the movement of the train from the upper center of the frame to the lower left corner, as a opposed to the Zapruder film which follows the president's car from left right and then out of frame. But looked at with an eye to its attractions, its reported and misreported effect on audiences, and furthermore the cinematic impact of its representation, the film establishes a meaningful relationship to similar features in the Zapruder film.

The Lumières' film is just what it professes to be. A train station platform appears in the foreground with a number of people waiting for its arrival. The beautiful mountain range around

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[63] Here I am using Gunning's term. See "An Aesthetic of Astonishment" 124.

[64] See Introduction

[65] I refer here of course to the rather sensational accounts of the first showing of the films to French audiences around the late 1890s. Tom Gunning, whom I quote at length above, cites Georges Sadoul in his 1948 *Histoire du Cinéma* as the originator of these tales, with many repeating them as fact. See Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment" 130.

La Ciotat in the south of France appears in the background with some outbuildings across the field of railway lines. The amassed crowd steps away to the right, we see a puff of white smoke and the train, travelling at a brisk pace, pulls into the station. The engine and several cars pass and a railway attendant runs down the platform, presumably to open his assigned carriage. The train stops and the crowds move to take their place. Many pass before the camera, tradesmen, middle-class functionaries, ladies with their long dresses. The film ends with little fanfare as the passengers exchange places, some getting off the train, others looking to capture their seats. It is the movement of the train and its approach to the screen that is believed to have caused the most shock and comment. Crossing of the screen at a diagonal, the several hundred tons of steel seems to be travelling directly towards the audience; it is no wonder that the films as been signposted as one of the earliest examples of cinematic thrills.

However, Tom Gunning reminds us that the incredible furor that the film is said to have caused has less to do with the actual reaction of audiences and more to do with what we want to believe about early spectatorship practices. In "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In) Credulous Spectator," he wants to dispel the notion of the child-like early-film spectators, who interpret the cinematic image as a literal train approaching, and instead give us an understanding of their complex and nuanced reaction to the new medium that is instructive about the nature of attraction as a concept (121) When taken in context with the long tradition of magic lantern and phantasmagoria spectacles, he says we cannot look at early audiences as uninformed, uninitiated or naive. Theirs was a particular kind of experience, one Gunning describes as being defined by a particular relationship to the screen:

> The spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfillment. The on-rushing train did not simply produce the negative experience of fear but the particularly modern entertainment form of the thrill… embodied elsewhere in the recently appearing attractions of the amusement parks…which combined sensations of acceleration and falling with a security guaranteed by modern industrial technology (Gunning, "Aesthetic of Astonishment" 121-122)

Gunning reminds us here that the pleasure involved is not linked to the satisfaction of curiosity alone, but to the fun of the rollercoaster. This connection is important because it links the thrill of such attractions with the risk of trauma, whether physical or mental. At the heart of the spectatorial relationship defined by cinema is this tension, which is no more clearly present than when life and death are at stake. Gunning here wants to propose that audiences are *already* on the edge of their seats by nature of the exhibitionist mode of display, their interaction with that mode, and the medium more generally. As such, the sensation caused by the film is not the result of some kind of ignorance about the nature of film, or any childlike misunderstanding about it all being "just a movie;" Gunning wants to propose that early audiences were invested in their spectatorial experience in a way today's narrative-based viewers are not.

This investment in cinematic events, the openness to their shock and its implications, characterized this mode of spectatorship. But it could equally define the shock that accompanied the Zapruder film. The disconnect between seeing the events on screen as a "movie" and seeing them as real events happening before our eyes is not a difference in genre or subversion of narrative expectation; the Zapruder film interacted with the spectatorial logic of the cinema of attractions in a way that threatened the conventions of camera vision developed in the intervening years.[66] It reactivated this kind of consciousness of the spectatorial experience as being a thin veil between the images on screen and the world. It represented in a very material way, the experience of those early audiences, treading the fine line between thrill, shock and trauma.

Gunning presents a model for the kind of spectator that looked beyond the cinema of attractions to reveal how thin the veil it proposed really was. For Russian critic Maxim Gorky, the first experience of film at the Nizhny-Novgorod Fair in 1896 lacked the thrill others attested to, and was replaced by the ennui of the insubstantial nature of the medium:

> …before you a life is surging, a life deprived of words and shorn of the living spectrum of colours—the grey, soundless, the bleak and dismal life…" [And of the Lumières' train] It seems as though it will plunge into the darkness in which you sit, turning you

[66] Here I am alluding to the form cinema took after the turn to narrative integration. These factors include formal and repeatable plot structure, a firmly constructed and coherent cinematic space and time, firmly established star system with concomitant character development, genre structure, etc., in sum the structure that came to define the cinema as narrative spectacle.

> into a ripped sack of lacerated flesh and splintered bones…this too is but a train of shadows.[67]

These remarks are not noteworthy merely for their negativity, which Gunning acknowledges was quite rare, but on the necessary contradiction Gorky sees in the new medium. His "recognition that the film image combined realistic effects with a conscious awareness of artifice…" (118) is the nuanced understanding of the combinatory nature of the cinematic image. However, reading accounts like Gorky's alongside Gunning's theories provokes the understanding of a deeper and perhaps darker thrill associated with the cinema of attractions. Taking both at their word, it seems apparent that we must also add to the "roller coaster" thrill of the cinema the pleasure of survival. What Gorky acknowledges literally above is the *risk* associated with the viewing of film. The scopic thrill of the train travelling straight at us is necessarily completed in the understanding it was a ride in a sigh of relief; the triumphant feeling associated with leaving of the House of Horrors or stepping off the roller coaster.

The combinatory thrill of intertwining shock and understanding; of "accelerating and falling with the security guaranteed by modern industrial technology," (122) must be given its full due. However, Gorky's words remind us that the *curiositas* aroused by the attraction is as much an anxiety about and mistrust of that security, as it is the relief of certainty. A more complex pleasure must thus be acknowledged, along the lines drawn up by Kracauer earlier. The relationship built through attraction is underpinned by the instability of cinema's apparatus. The introduction of more repeatable structures, the jagged anxieties and the acknowledgment of risk became smoothed into the simpler pleasure of narrative totality. It is the breakdown in this relationship that Kracauer looks to as a moment of crisis, and the exact site where the Zapruder film reveals the "death's head" underneath the cinematic image that Gorky intuits above.

Death as Attraction: Electrocuting an Elephant *(1903)*

[67] See Leda 407-8.

As a final set of tropes and structures that link with the Zapruder film, early film's treatment of death, more specifically with the documentation or reenactment of the event of death, must be discussed. Early on, the filming of death and its implications can be seen as a preoccupation of the burgeoning medium. Although scientific forms of documentation, photographic and otherwise, could capture the state of living and the state of death, filmmakers were excited by the possibility of depicting the transition between the two states. As we saw in Chapter 1, however, something about this transition escapes representation in its filming. As a result filmmakers rapidly responded by creating an *event* out of the filming of death, in essence a parallel fiction that could deliver what the genuine article could not. It is in this staging and particularly in giving it its own cinematic temporality, that death functions as a particular kind of cinematic experience.

The execution film was a particularly popular subgenre of actualité-style filmmaking where death, sometimes real, sometimes fictional, was represented. In the years that opened the twentieth century, a whole host of these films were made. *Execution by Hanging* (Mutoscope/Bioscope, 1905) *Reading the Death Sentence* (Mutoscope/Bioscope 1905) *Execution of a Spy* (Mutoscope/Bioscope 1902) *Beheading of a Chinese Prisoner* (Lubin, 1900), *Execution of Czolgosz* (Edison/Porter, 1901) are just a few.[68] What makes each unique is the link it makes between death and the desire to witness modernity and current events.

Edison's morbid *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903) capitalized on the dual novelty of the cinema and of electricity, public executions having been a spectacle for much longer. Filmed in 1903 at the public execution of Topsy the elephant, deemed dangerous and untamable by its owners at the Forebaugh Circus,[69] Edison cameramen sought to capture not just the event of the execution, but the public spectacle as a whole. For weeks before the construction of the high electrical tower that would carry the voltage to the unfortunate pachyderm, the site was bedecked with banners and posters advertising the opening of Luna Park and the amusements it would contain. Frederick Thompson and Elmer Dundy, the speculators who were re-building the area

[68] See Doane 145 for more films and analysis.

[69] It should be noted that Forebaugh's mismanagement and cruelty in regard to this case have been well documented. For more information, see Daly.

into the luxurious Luna Park, would make this event into a publicity extravaganza, making the electrical tower central to the park as a whole.

The beginning of the film shows the elephant approaching the camera, led by a trainer. This shot fulfills the dual purpose of presenting the setting of still unfinished Luna Park, as well as a mock "march of the condemned" to the scene of the execution. Topsy passes by the camera in close-up as we see lines of spectators on a boardwalk far behind the subject.

Figure 5. Stills from *Electrocuting an Elephant* (Edwin S. Porter 1903)

The shot shifts then to Topsy, standing on what are copper plates that will conduct the killing charge of electricity into her body. The break in the film has been attributed to the fact that the elephant, with the intelligence of her species, refused to cross the bridge over the lagoon to the site of her execution. In the end much time was spent re-rigging the apparatus that would deliver the killing blow. The film re-commences with Topsy in position, chained in place and to the apparatus that would electrocute then strangle her. A few seconds pass as Topsy pulls against her restraints, unable to get free, and then her body noticeably stiffens; her knees and back lock in place and smoke beings to rise from the points where her feet touch the copper plates. Her body still rigidly frozen, Topsy crumbles forward, seemingly in slow motion, her hind leg still stiff and awkwardly raised behind her. Smoke wreaths the body, almost obscuring it. A worker in a jumpsuit then passes by the camera almost casually, perhaps to attend the apparatus. The smoke blows away in seconds and we see the body of the elephant, now in a full view extreme long shot.

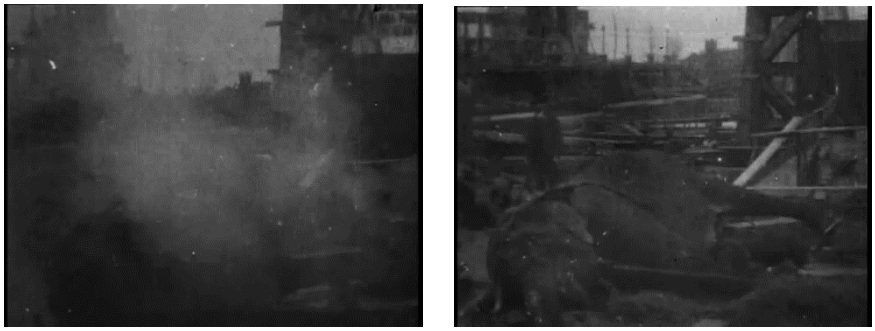

Figure 6. Stills from *Electrocuting an Elephant* (Edwin S. Porter 1903)

The immense body quivers slightly as though still under the effects of the electricity. There is another slight break in the film, this one caused by damage to the film, signposted by some restoration markings. A black-coated figure comes to stand behind the body, looking on. He looks up at the camera and slowly moves away, perhaps guided by some directorial orders from behind the camera.

There is not, nor should there be, any effort here to minimize the impact of what we see on screen in this film. The film is shocking, the act is cruel, the film is squarely implicated in an entire history of the mistreatment of animals, but even more so, for that mistreatment being pitched as spectacle for paying audiences.[70] For Frederick Thompson and Elmer Dundy, the owners of Luna Park, the spectacle was huge publicity stunt for their still unfinished addition to America's playground Coney Island. The film is thus cruelty dressed up as spectacle, dressed up as advertisement. In the photo below, advertisements for Luna Park and the banner for the 200 foot electric tower can be seen in the background as Topsy is receiving the lethal shock.

[70] Incidentally, the ASPCA was involved in the execution, and forbade the Forebaugh circus from making any money off of the live spectacle of the execution. The tenants and owners of the surrounding businesses had no problem charging admission to their balconies and roofs, however, and though the film was not as popular as some other Edison "actualities," Edison did see profit from a limited Kinetoscope run. See Daly.

Figure 7. Press photograph of Topsy's execution (1903)

This pedigree of attraction in publicity should not be merely a footnote to any kind of analysis. The Forebaugh Circus, Thompson, Dundy and Edison, all used this snuff film as advertising capital; Edison twice over as it was his device that recorded the event, and his electricity that delivered the result.[71] For this investigation, however, what we will be interrogating is what makes the death of Topsy reveals about cinema and attraction.

Fundamentally, to those witnessing the event, this is a spectacle of power. Not just of electricity, but the use of machines to alter the physical world. For Topsy this meant death. But for those watching the secondary event on screen, it was also the demonstration of the camera's ability to alter time. Attendant to any shock or ghoulish thrill the audience may have received by watching this death or marveling at the awesome power of Edison's new technologies was a disturbing sense of their danger. The physical danger of electricity is made manifest, but the representation of death, no matter how fictional or real it may be, connects with something equally primal. In her discussion of this film among other execution films of the time, Mary Ann Doane notes that the reproduction of images unmoored from the flow of life, affects our notion of time. The time removed from the event, in camera or by edit, to make the event more "cinematic," necessarily eliminated the time lag essential to the wholism of lived time. As such, the instantaneity with which the voltage begins to take Topsy's life, and the instantaneity with

[71] It has been falsely reported that this display of alternating current was part of the "war of the currents" that took place at the end of the eighteenth century between industrialists support this or direct current. The electrocuting of Topsy took place sometime after this "war" had been won by Edison's more mobile and malleable technology. As a result the film is not necessarily an advertisement for ac as such, but for electricity more generally, as I argue here.

which it is recorded and projected constitute a kind of temporal shock. As instantaneity of film overcomes the time lag in other forms of representation, cinema is literally *killing* time. [72]

As such, death in these early execution films exposes a double charade at the heart of cinematic representation. Whether taking an actual life or not, they first seek to convince us that a series of still pictures is in fact an uninterrupted "duration." This is imperfectly communicated in the jumps and jolts of the elided time and the contingent appearance of unwanted detail. Secondly, the time the apparatus leaves behind in the form of "dead" or "uneventful" frames has nothing to do with our own time and our own death. Thus, this machine of preservation, what should be the most rock-solid assurance of time's eternal flow, becomes the central mode of reproducing the shock of its death eternally.

Cinema, Death and the Myth of Visibility

Inherent to the attraction of death on screen is a gap between what is possible for the camera to accomplish and what is not. Notably, these early execution films are unable to render death as a fully coherent and structured cinematic experience. In a medium ostensibly formed out of a desire to make the invisible visible, to capture and freeze time in order to create certainty where there was doubt, its representation of death seems to be the perfect expression of uncertainty. "Perhaps the execution film circulates around the phenomenon of death, striving to capture the moment of death, in order to celebrate the contingency of the cinematic image, a celebration that is always already too late…" (Doane 163) The possibly high-minded fascination with film's ability to capture and freeze time in these films mingles with the profane attraction of seeing death.

As Gunning states above, the attraction as articulation of astonishing thrill and drive for knowledge is perfectly expressed in these depictions of death. But the process's iterability depends precisely on the denial of closure. Seeing the transition between life and death, capturing the exact moment that death robs a body of life, seems to be within the grasp of the cinematic apparatus. Responding to this lack of visibility, where our own eyes can only see flow

[72] See Doane 151 for a further explanation of her term "dead time" and its implications beyond those mentioned here.

or transition, the camera can freeze time, roll back and repeat. Ideally, its functions of stopwatch, motion capture and archive should blend into the production of a 4-dimensional panorama. But this is quickly revealed to be a carnival-ground promise of seeing the unseen or, more precisely the un-seeable.[73]

These expectations and their lack of fulfillment is exactly the intervention of the Zapruder film in this case. Looking at it in the context of the execution film, while understandably not the director's intention, reveals a whole host of desires to "see the unseen" through its frames. The Zapruder film fails in this capacity, not because the filmmaker was standing in the wrong place, but because it has been used to see the wrong thing. The visibility of death on screen paradoxically further reveals what we cannot see. Cinematic death operates in two different registers: one as an immediate attraction or shock of seeing something often hidden, either by cinematic convention or cultural taboo, the second a recognition of the event as taking place as a circumscribed piece of cinematic time. But undergirding these realizations is the fundamental disconnect that while this death is represented by cinema, death itself is not a product of representation. Doane calls this death an "Ur-event…the zero level of meaning: pure event, pure contingency…" (Doane 164).

Thus plumbing the depths of what is inside the frame of the Zapruder film misreads the fundamental connection between death and cinema. The camera cannot reproduce the event in a satisfying way by dint of the very nature of representation. Though narrative and documentary approaches may structure the event of death differently, this discussion of execution films shows us that they both seek unachievable ends. The shock and trauma of death and its effect on our actual lives connects to a set of anxieties so profound that cinematic representation can only shape, not end them.

CONCLUSIONS

By now the comparison of the Zapruder film to early representations of events in cinema should not seem a spurious one. There are many grounds upon which discussion of the Zapruder film may be informed by a comparison with early film. These comparisons of course do not

[73] Doane begins with the former on page163 but argues her way to claiming the latter on page 164.

equate the films in theme or in content necessarily, but speak to their structure and the spectatorial interactions that that structure calls into being. Though separated by more than seventy years of film history and technology, their mode of filmmaking can be paralleled. All these filmmakers are, to some degree, amateurs. They film what seems important, what people would want to see, they make up their techniques as they go along.[74] Zapruder, Edison and the Lumières were discovering film language for themselves, the latter for the first time. For this reason, the Zapruder film resembles an actualité, but it also re-introduces their conveyance of anticipation, risk, and shock into the system of cinematic attractions.

As mentioned earlier, the conditions that shaped the production and reception of the Zapruder film make it difficult to categorize by any genre or mode available to the study of film at the time. Though perhaps as much by circumstance, as by intention, it is not legible as part of the discourse of objective documentary, cinema vérité, nor direct cinema or straight reportage. However, in comparing the film to earlier cinematic works we can see commonalities that speak to a kind of zero level of cinematic artifice. It is a subjective view, the camera held by an enthusiastic amateur, not a professional. As a result the vision that it captures is shaped by the most fundamental of controls upon time and space the medium offers. Though the attractions of the films mentioned here are arranged in a pattern of increasing intensity of content, moving from a teasing thrill in *What Happened on 23rd Street* to the threat of physical danger in *Arrival of a Train*, to the actual taking of a life on screen in *Executing the Elephant*, it is what they leave out that is most important for our purposes. The shock of actual death on screen, as intense as it is, is informed by the gap between seeing *through* the on-screen experience, and seeing the event through our own eyes. Where the medium seems insufficient to capture the magnitude of the event, the impoverished nature of the cinematic experience is more obvious.

Maxim Gorky's response is important to return to as he notes how accepting the cinematic experience as a stable relationship necessarily misdirects the viewer back to the world of images rather than the world of the living. Instead of shocking the spectator out of the disconnect between their eyes and their bodily presence in the event, the structure of the film mitigates and forestalls engagement with that disconnect and creates a parallel and more

[74] For a discussion of the multitude of decisions made by amateurs and their implications for social and historical interpretation, see Patricia Zimmermann 1-28.

palatable cinematic shock.[75] Thus the spectator believes what they should disbelieve: the realness of the event and they disbelieve what they should believe: the insufficiency of the medium to entirely capture the implications of the experience. In Gorky's view, the realm of cinema is one where the man who enjoys as an aesthetic pleasure an on-rushing train is not a madman, the man who waits on a street corner to watch a lady's skirt get blown up is not a peeping tom, and the spectator at the scene of the execution is not a morbid ghoul. As a result, he found this realm twisted indeed. Though not enjoyed by any but the most prurient and disaffected viewers, the Zapruder film offers up the president's assassination as an aesthetic experience. What we do with that experience, following Gorky, will be defining the kind of world in which we want to live.

Germane to our discussion in the following chapters will be the way in which the Zapruder film changed the way people made and watched films. For many Americans and viewers all around the world, it introduced them to what close reading of the various layers of a filmic text really is. In this sense it re-introduced the originating structure of film to a mass audience in a way that had not been as consciously visible since the structure itself was invented nearly 70 years before. Confronting an audience today with the magnificent shock to which audiences responded to the Lumières' films, using simple single camera set-up and no edits to produce that effect, is something most Hollywood blockbusters would envy. The fascination and anxiety first introduced by the motion-picture camera itself at the turn of the century, is to a certain extent re-revealed with the appearance of the Zapruder film in the mid twentieth. Thus in what follows, we will see how the shock of this text has not simply come from the representation of a shocking event, but is intimately linked to a cinematic sense of time, space and being. That cinematic shock is the flashpoint for a crisis that will spark many of the changes in filmmaking and visual culture discussed in this project.

We will see how this crisis was encountered and engaged with in a variety of styles, modes and genres. These approaches will be divided into two groups. The avant-garde will primarily concern itself with the gaps the Zapruder film reminds us of in the fabric of cinematic representation. Experimental filmmakers will use various manipulations and recreations focused on drawing attention to the insufficiency of film and revealing what it lacks by removing the

[75] The inverse of this has elsewhere been called the *bystander effect*: the treatment of an actual event with the disembodied spectatorship of a cinematic experience.

conventional structures of narrative film. Fiction film will be considered for its divergent use of visual and narrative techniques to either productively engage with these gaps in representation, or fill them. Through a wide variety of techniques, filmmakers will draw attention to the way representation changed in the wake of the Zapruder film, and posit new strategies of dealing with that transition.

Both of these cinematic approaches, however, make use of the Zapruder film as a foundational shock and also its ability to disrupt conventional and stable modes of spectatorship. They draw on or confront its ability to reconnect viewers with the act of looking and the cinematic event as an echo of the real. At times, these manipulations are a reinscription of the faith in the cinematic apparatus as a conduit for lived experience. Some will propose a version of the Zapruder film or a visual analog as a solution to this very fundamental insufficiency, while others will eschew visual analogs and attempt to depict Kracauer's "death's head," the sinister "beneath" of cinematic representation. As such, the following investigations will empower both a deeper understanding of the Zapruder film and its implications and its echoes through the past and present of cinema.

Chapter 3: Cinematic Time Reloaded: Zapruder and the Avant-garde

This chapter will look at the shock and trauma of the Zapruder film both as an astonishing revelation of violence, but more precisely as a formal cinematic shock. The way in which the film reveals the limits of the cinematic apparatus as a total representation of reality, was easily overshadowed by its more concrete political and historical implications. However, the broad challenge the film presents at the level of form, aesthetics and epistemology became a touchstone for experimental and avant-gardist film.

The chapter will propose that, from the very beginning of avant-garde film practice, artists identified this fundamental challenge along the lines presented in previous chapters. The efforts they made in their films to radically disrupt conventional notions of attraction and its attendant shaping of indexicality and contingency are echoed in the Zapruder film's revelation of the gap between the filmable, the perceivable and the real. Although almost diametrically opposed in intention and production, the implications of the Zapruder film dovetail with many threads being explored by filmmakers experimenting with the limits of the medium around the time of the assassination and later.

Necessary to this similarity is the way in which the Zapruder film reanimated many discussions about how to *see* cinema. In Chapter 2 we saw how the "fascination and anxiety" first introduced by the cinematic device at the turn of the century was engaged with in numerous different ways and the productive forces these initiatives unleashed. The fascination and anxiety brought about by this key 26 seconds of footage will be no less, nor will the productive forces it released lessen either. Zapruder's film reconnected artists with the disruptive power of cinematic technology from its inception. Through their investment in the "cinema of attractions" and the formative stages of cinema's power to shock the senses and astonish viewers, many experimental filmmakers could see and engage with the Zapruder film's impact.

While not claiming the Zapruder film as a central cause for what is ultimately an undercurrent that stretches throughout the history of cinema as such, what follows will include as its objects experimental interventions that engage with representations of the assassination of the president and the crisis that representation implied. Many artists, in some cases with access to those representations or through reconstruction, represent the limitations of the medium that necessarily challenge the concept of its attraction. Through this discussion of attraction, this

chapter will also deal with the attendant modalities of indexicality and contingency along with connections to death and to risk raised in previous chapters. Above all, the films discussed are chosen for the way they echo and build upon reconsiderations of the sensorial and epistemological dimensions of shock connected with the Zapruder film and how those factors productively disrupt conventional modes of viewing.

The chapter is divided into sections determined by the kind of intervention involved and how it disrupts and deepens our understanding of the concept of attraction and its implications. In Ken Jacobs *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (1969), we will have an explicit close reading of a text from the early period. This investigation is taken to such extremes that it begins to dissolve the entire notion of the film's indexical link to the past. Keith Sanborn's *The Zapruder Footage: A Consensual Hallucination* (1999) is another investigation that pushes the boundaries of film, this time with manipulations of the Zapruder film itself. Through its near abstract renderings of the footage, Sanborn tests the borders of the film's evidentiary and nationalistic value. The Ant Farm Collective's *Eternal Frame* (1976), intends to similarly disrupt the qualities of attraction that define the president's life and death. The alienation of that representation, through the collective's own brand of performance art, is interestingly stymied, however, by not questioning the boundaries of the medium itself. Santiago Alvarez's *LBJ* (1968) is just such an appropriation of the medium of film to question its structure. Through his own montage of attractions, Alvarez performatively creates the revolutionary kind of vision the camera can provide when not tied to a nationalist and capitalist logic. Bruce Conner's *Report* (1967) will create, in terms of form, a very similar type of montage. However, the attractions he puts in place will articulate a very personal and almost desperate vision of risk and loss. All of these interventions are connected in the two-fold gesture they make towards the nature of the cinematic apparatus. At once they seek to celebrate the camera as an interpretive tool, but also to divest its products of meaning. They propose it as a conduit for understanding, but not of the world it proposes to reproduce. While they may have a visual similarity to way investigators of many stripes manipulated the flow of the Zapruder film in order to find incontrovertible visual evidence, they will divert that revelation in the direction of the medium itself. The resulting divestment of any isolated evidentiary value of the image enforces the gap between the physical world and the camera, and infuse the attractions they propose with the possibility to disrupt conventional viewing on both a physical and epistemological level.

This support for certain aspects of the medium and rejection of others, has prescribed a set of priorities that has guided the camera's use for experimental purposes. The line drawn between manipulations created to stage thrills and chills for narrative purposes, and more genuinely transformative shock, defined the shape of those priorities. The conception of attraction, in either mode, constituted a fulcrum around which revolved discussions of how to affect audiences. It is thus essential to start by historicizing and further deepening the concept of attraction in the way that it conditioned the assimilation of the Zapruder film's less obvious shocks.

THE AVANT-GARDE(S): A HISTORY OF ATTRACTIONS

The link between avant-garde or experimental film and the cinema of attractions is more than a passing one. The link is as essential to the study of film as it is to the foundational contribution of the original text published by Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault in 1986. Their postulation was that the logic of attractions, though born in the language of spectacle and showmanship, was curiously influential to members of the avant-garde. The cinema of attractions was an "exhibitionist" cinema, contrary to the voyeuristic mode that would dominate narrative viewership in years to come.[76] It was a cinema based around "exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption" (Gunning 66). This enthusiasm for the adversarial possibilities in cinematic attractions was closely linked to the enthusiasm for the new mass culture that, having already defined the new world, was beginning to do the same for Western Europe.[77] The emancipatory qualities of this new technology and its means for representation was readily embraced by certain sectors of the European avant-garde and a material embodiment of the factors that seemed to define modern life.[78]

The most prominent member of the avant-garde to seize on the attraction's liberatory potential was Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein. In his essays "The Montage of Attractions" (1923) and "The Montage of Film Attractions" (1924),[79] he laid out his ideas for an approach to film

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[76] Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction[s]." See Strauven 384.

[77] This at least in part echoed in my discussion of Kracauer, Benjamin and the thoughts of Mary Ann Doane and Miriam Hansen on the subject in Chapter 1.

[78] See Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses" 59-77.

[79] See Eisenstein *Selected Works. vol. 1, writings,* 1922-34, edited by Richard Taylor, British Film Institute, 1998. 33-58

based in attractions that have become paradigmatic for the understanding of cinema in general. Below are two separate definitions from these essays that define Eisenstein's conception of the attraction and how it connected with an audience. In his work on theatre in "The Montage of Attractions" he states:

> An attraction…is any aggressive moment, i.e., any element of it that subjects the audience to emotional or psychological influence, verified by experience and mathematically calculated to produce emotional shocks in the spectator in their proper order within the whole. These shocks provide the only opportunity of perceiving the ideological aspect of what is being shown, the final ideological conclusions. (Eisenstein 34)

And as he writes in "The Montage of Film Attractions":

> An attraction… is, in our understanding, any demonstrable fact (an action, an object, a phenomenon, a conscious combination, and so on) that is known and proven to exercise a definite effect on the attention and emotions of the audience and that, combined with others, possesses the characteristic of concentrating the audience's emotions in any direction dictated by the production's purpose. (Eisenstein 40)

While talking here about attractions for use in politically charged art of the stage and screen, Eisenstein borrows the term from distinctly less political venues. Music hall and circus performances were genres where the attraction took a primary structural role. They were tied intimately tied to the "come one, come all" appeal of spectacle. However, Eisenstein wished to turn away from the employment of mere "tricks" to capture and hold the audience's attention. His vision was of a mathematically behaviouristic, organized and calculable system of specifically targeted attractions that were directly linked to the psyche and emotions of an audience. The shaping of the audience's experience was thus related in a reflexive way to the shaping of the attractions laid before them. The responsibility for the politically committed artist

was to create a montage of these attractions that did not lead back to the thrills and entertainment of the midway, but to an ideological conclusion and call to action.[80]

Though live performance harnessed the power of the "direct reality" of a human being taking action in front of an audience, filmic shocks were valuable for their comparative qualities. Eisenstein called cinema the "art of comparisons," because its power lay in the relationships between images rather than their direct presentation.[81] Its disruption of the conventional dramatic relationship between artist, performer and audience entailed a deeper disruption of conventional ways of seeing the world. The "definite effect on attention and emotion" mentioned above was not an abstracted intellectual engagement, but held a quantifiably physical dimension. It is just this quality that Gunning remarks on in his discussion of Eisenstein in relation to attractions as thrills. He notes Eisenstein was hardly disengaged from popular entertainment. Roller coasters, or "American Mountains" as they were known in Russia, were favourites of Eisenstein and his friend Yutkevich.[82] This understanding of a duality in attractions: the politically disengaged thrill and purposeful enlightening comparison was not unique to Eisenstein. It points towards an overlap in the early twentieth-century avant-garde's technique and that of the new modern world of spectacle.

Avant-gardistes from across Europe were fascinated with this new popular culture in the form of art, entertainment and products that flooded the continent after the First World War. These objects were truly revelatory as they proposed a whole new set of relationships between people and things:

> …it [is] difficult to understand the liberation that popular entertainment offered at the beginning of the century… it was precisely the exhibitionist quality of turn-of-the-century popular art that made it attractive to the avant-garde—its freedom from the creation of a diegesis, its accent on direct stimulation. (Gunning: 385)

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[80] In this way, shocks were not simply a technique by which to shape audience attention and interpretation, but a primary way of *reading* a visual text. The quality and the organization of shocks were determinative of the quality of the film. This approach will become more important as I continue to research how shock is interpreted as representation and experience.

[81] "I should call cinema 'the art of comparisons' because it shows not facts but conventional (photographic) representations (in contrast to 'real action' in theatre…) For the exposition of even the simplest phenomena cinema needs comparison…" for the full quote see Eisenstein 41.

[82] Gunning "The Cinema of Attraction[s]" 385.

What the avant-garde wanted as a direct line between their art and the spectator was similar to the stimulation that attractions provided. Exhibitionism became a key element, not only in the culture of the movement, but in actual artistic techniques employed by artists. Cinema became primary among these modes of expression, being a new, plastic, malleable and industrial art.

This aesthetic freedom presented itself in many different ways on screen, but it was the camera's ability to reformulate time and space that became key to these new forms of attraction. Early cinema avant-gardistes resisted narrative function, by emphasizing the new technology as an emancipatory "vision machine." Viva Paci, in her work on early film theory, has outlined the possibilities non-narrative attractions afforded to this kind of experimentation. Rather than an "act of showing" created for "the pleasure of a fleeting and immediate vision-apparition," attractions with their own temporality offer up "a tension of the present by erupting on a monstrative level...by alternating between revealing and concealing in a way that is not dependent on the object or time that [proceeds] in a cause and effect relationship (Paci 121-122). The perspective of this type of attraction formulated by Eisenstein was a way to "grab hold of the viewers and push them toward reflection, preventing them above all from losing themselves in the *opium* of bourgeois narrative form," while others proposed the camera as a shattering of all forms of automatic perception "by enabling viewers truly to see." (Paci 123). The clarity of the machine's perception in this account is a curious mix of objective and dissociative. The camera amplifies vision in same way as devices such as the telescope or microscope, offering the promise of sight into the realm of what could be seen along with its concrete representation, measurement and revelation. The camera also, however, seemed somehow independent of the eye. The gaze of the camera was not the gaze of the eye but gaze of an object. It thus destroyed "subjectivity and personal engagement," enabling it to "penetrate people and objects."[83] It gave the world a view of itself from the perspective of an object.

As we have seen previously, the dissociation of camera vision from the human eye was an important tool in revealing the liberatory qualities of the new medium. While thinkers such as

[83] Quoting Luigi Pirandello--see Paci 127.

Siegfried Kracauer believed that narrative film could equally show this disconnect, it was in a different way. He pointed to techniques that thinned the veil between the world in all its incomprehensibility, and the fiction on screen. These revelatory moments were all the more shocking as they took place within the warm confines of the film's diegesis.[84] Where narrative would allude to this gap, avant-garde film would intend to put it on screen. There are a variety of ways filmmakers attempted to do this, but the most common were the naked manipulation of the frame as a disruption of the cinematic event. In these disruptions we can hear echoed the earlier discussion of attraction's dual shock, both as thrill and realization. The view of the world reflected by the camera was, in this perspective, a thrilling extension of the possibilities of vision, but that vision carried with it the threat of dissociation, the dissolution of the viewing subject in the inhuman gaze of the camera.

So the boundary was not necessarily between genre and style, avant-garde and fiction film, but between their treatments of vision. The pleasures of narrative film applied to the cohesion of subject-centered vision and where that vision was not connected to a subject it was the "magic eye" flitting about as the extension of the spectator's eye in the film. The other would devote itself to subverting narrative wholeness and embrace visual techniques that would dissociate and shape vision into novel forms and rhythms.

However, it is important to not confuse this dissociation with abstraction as it was the immediacy of the camera's vision that these attractions depended on. These revelations were staged for an audience in the same way as a performer or presenter would deliver them in a theater, however with the immediacy of cinematic vision. No second-degree staging came into effect, as the cinema screen mimics the retina and the darkened theater focuses attention on the images. As such, audiences were presented with images, as if they were occurring naturally in front of them. As a result, as Paci notes, early avant-garde filmmakers praised its ability to connect the viewer to the image in such a primary and physical way. This immediacy must be considered an attraction because "…it divides up an automated series of elements and presents us with discontinuous samples in order to create a direct and aggressive confrontation" (Paci 131).

[84] See the discussion of contingency as threat in Kracauer, Chapter 1.

This confrontation is exactly the point of intervention for avant-garde filmmakers within the first three decades of cinema's birth.

By the time Gunning released his work on attractions and the avant-garde in the mid-1980s, these debates over specific techniques and transformations had lost their importance. Nor was there a coherent sense of the "avant-garde" as a single aesthetic, much less an attitude towards camera vision. In response to the hermetically sealed and antiseptic studio environments of the twentieth century that produced cinematic shock as subversion of narrative rather than sensory expectation, experimental filmmakers in the U.S had applied themselves to wholesale rejection of that model. The years after JFK's assassination and its lengthy imprint on the media landscape were dominated by an almost ascetic relationship with the fictive dimension of the medium. The engagement that such films set up with "pure cinema" involved techniques that celebrated aspects of the medium not tied to narrative or anything outside of the apparatus. These interventions sought to drain the attraction of any suspicion of narrative collusion. Its comparisons were not between images and the world, but bent on alienating camera vision from the cozy and familiar conventions of the popular. Into this polarized environment around notions of attraction, the Zapruder film emerged as something of an anomaly.

The Zapruder film filtered into the experimental film community in the way any underground film would. The film was first clipped and released to the public by *Time/Life* as a photomontage with key frames missing, notably the sensational frame 313. Copies made in Dallas were shipped to Chicago, New York and Washington DC, where they went through a variety of subsidiaries around the country. So too did it circulate, through a series of bootleg copies, amongst the cognoscenti of college, community and university groups that invited presenters to show the film and dissect its meaning.[85] The Zapruder film was sporadically seen by major experimental filmmakers throughout the 1960s, but its impact on the surging avant-garde scene of the later 1960s and early 1970s was significant. The praise and critical acclaim it received from such filmmakers as Stan Brackhage, Jonas Mekas, Bruce Conner and Ken Jacobs is truly impressive. Among the elites, it became one of the most important movies to have seen,

[85] Wrone speaks about these presentations from the position of being a speaker himself many times. He includes the names and institutions of numerous supporters with whom he has had contact over the years. See Wrone 60-61, his endnote 66 on p.308.

though finding a clear print inside or outside the avant-garde community was a rare thing.[86] Their attitude could largely be described by a positive view of amateurism and the "truth" embodied by the obliviousness of the author.[87] However, this praise belied the danger proposed by the Zapruder film to conventional notions of what was and what was not an experimental intervention. The discourse around mastery of the medium, the engagement with the elements of cinema in their purest forms that defined the binary between narrative and experimental cinema, seemed to have been short-circuited by the Dallas dressmaker. Neither narrative, nor experimental nor documentary, the undeniable power of the film seemed fundamentally connected to the world outside the apparatus; furthermore, as a fundamental disruption. Most specifically, it potentially disrupted the official narrative of the assassination as a shocking revelation of hidden corrupt machinations inside law and government. At the same time, it disrupted the cozy nationalist fable of the American Golden Boy, right down to showing his brains splattered all over his wife's pink suit. This collection of shocks, constituted the kind of *détournement* of the Kennedy myth that an artist might stage. Truth here was stranger than fiction, and in fact, seemed to undercut the whole distinction in the first place. Avant-gardists were forced to confront the idea that the gap between narrative, experimental and documentary film was a lot thinner than they might have imagined.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ANALYSIS

This reconception of the way in which attractions that create a realistic representation of the world while, at the same time, undercutting the camera's relationship to the world, emerged into an environment already profuse with possible connections. Where the dialogue between early cinema and avant-garde practice met a more general popular interest in new cinemas and new cinematic languages in the context of a near-fever pitch surrounding the truth-value of the image, the stage was set for a cinema that reinvested in the complicated relationship between attraction and repulsion. The currents already discussed in the capacity of the camera to stage

[86] Here I refer to the generations of the film discussed in Chapter 1 and the great difficulty small screening groups had, particularly in the 1960s, at getting a passable print of the Zapruder film.

[87] The quotation marks around "truth" indicate that this relationship was seen in rather uncomplicated terms. This investigation, as a whole, will seek to complicate the idea of the "truth" provided by the Zapruder film; Brakhage and company seem to have assimilated Zapruder as an attitude to film style. See Brakhage 142-150.

revelatory encounters with the limitations of cinematic vision developed into a series of experimental interventions that continue to shape our understanding of the medium. Filmmakers took part in a marked rediscovery of the potency of these earlier techniques, but with an important amendment. This recapitulation would focus not just on the extension of vision these earlier filmmakers had held dear, but on its limitations. As a result, the Zapruder film and its limitations became both the subject and the object of many experimental cinematic interventions.

To begin, it will be important to look at the experimental use of the camera that focuses on attractions that bridge the divide between old and new, between the logic of the cinema of attractions and the logic of the avant-garde. In this case, we will see the use of the camera for the close study of a cinematic text as a radical act of revelation. Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* not only embodies an investigatory vision consistent with the manipulations of the Zapruder film as a form of visual evidence at the hands of official and amateur investigators, but pushes that investigation far enough to reveal the camera's limitations as a vision device as well as our own.

Although Jacob's film does not appear to directly concern itself with the assassination, there is, I believe, an important connection. Indeed, Jacob's treatment of Billy Bitzer's 1905 film, his investigation of every movement, sometimes down to the frame, reproduces the fate of the Zapruder film at the hand of its "analysts," and in the process raises a number of similar questions with regards to film's revelatory powers and limitations. Whether or not this connection was clearly in Jacob's mind at the time is not a matter of great concern for us, since the connection is there to be seen and it attests to changes in film culture concurrent with the appearance of the Zapruder film and its treatment more so than to any individual filmmaker's intentions.

ATTRACTION AND REVELATION: KEN JACOBS' *TOM, TOM, THE PIPER'S SON* (1969)

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the key attractions that film provided for early viewers was its ability to present a wealth of contingent details to the human eye. Along with the thrills and chills of the cinematic events taking place on screen, this wealth of details was an attraction on its own. These two elements waxing and waning in prominence on screen determined an

entirely separate logic of spectatorship defined by the cinema of attractions. Though narrative and exhibitionist elements might later be seen as opposed, the capacity for the cinematic frame to hold a profusion of possibly meaningful connections became essential to experimental filmmakers. So too did the exegesis done by investigators of the fine detail in the background of the Zapruder film hope to pull out ancillary details that would explain the central event; such explorations proved ineffective. Ken Jacobs' film, *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (1969), however, suggests that such techniques reveal much more when not stopped too soon.

Though with a marked visual similarity to the manipulations we saw earlier being applied to the Zapruder film in order to find proof that lay hidden,[88] Jacobs' exploratory 'close reading' of Billy Bitzer's 1905 Biograph film, from which the experimental film gets its title, experiments with the camera as a device which proposes itself as an interpretive tool while also obscuring interpretation. His microscopic study of the early film's attractions leads to attractions of its own where the "astonishment" of the film's cinematic events give way to revelations of the limits of legibility and educated doubt as to the absolute record proposed by the device.
Jacobs' film takes as its base the 'found footage' of collaboration of the same name, reviving the old nursery rhyme.

> Tom, Tom, the piper's son,
> Stole a pig, and away did run;
> The pig was eat
> And Tom was beat,
> And Tom went crying down the street.

The original film begins with a static shot of a hectic crowd scene, taking place in a staged set representing a town square of the early 1800s. Musicians, merchants, an acrobat, food vendors, all vie for the viewer's attention as they mix and mingle on screen, animatedly talking, arguing or conversing in some way. Out of the crowd emerges a young boy with a pig on a short rope. This is obviously Tom, of the rhyme, with the pig he has stolen. The small boy subtly takes center stage and begins to observe the crowd; he seems particularly interested in the man selling food on the far right-hand corner of the screen. Suddenly a fight breaks out in that very same location, as a dispute boils over into violence. The combatants struggle on rather comically until they are bundled off screen, perhaps by a justice of the peace. The crowd seems to follow that

[88] These would include slow motion, freeze frame, blow-up stills, etc. See Chapter 1.

procession, when a juggler complete with face-paint emerges from the throng and begins to perform. As the juggler drops one of his balls and the crowd is distracted, a bandit runs over to Tom, grabs his pig, and makes a quick getaway.

Figure 8. Stills from *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (Billy Bitzer 1905)

The film then proceeds in parallel action showing us the progress of the escaping crooks and Tom and the crowd in hot pursuit. The thieves are chased into a rural cottage, where they ridiculously escape up the chimney; the crowd enters and searches confusedly. As the thieves emerge onto the roof and jump down to the ground to make their getaway, the crowd follows them up the chimney and files down the side some of them collapsing in the heap to the great delight of some onlookers.

The same action is recapitulated in a barn as the thief hides in a small side closet while the frantic crowd streams up the ladder to the loft. He then ingeniously knocks over the ladder trapping his pursuers and absconding with the rancheros swine. One after another, the crowd makes a flying leap into view center-screen as they drop on the hay mow and pursue him.

Figure 9. Stills from *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (Billy Bitzer 1905)

A third building is invaded by the miscreant, with the crowd banging at the door. He struggles to keep the door shut, eventually losing control and unceremoniously tossing the unfortunate porcine through a window, while the now familiar heap of humanity rumbles

through onto the floor. As if drawn by an irresistibly force, follow through the tiny window shoving each other through.

The final shot is of a crowded barnyard scene complete with unruly ducks and geese and a prominent well in the foreground. The shot goes on for some time until Tom and the thief emerge screen right. After a short confrontation, Tom throws the pig into the well and disappears screen-left. The thief plunges in after the pig and the crowd thunders in from screen right and gathers around the well. They pull up the draw-arm and the villain, holding onto the bucket for dear life, is hoisted up for all to see. The film ends rather abruptly with pilfered pig all but forgotten with the mob cheering, jeering and making merry at the unfortunate's expense.

Jacobs' film takes the form, as mentioned above, of a close reading of the original text; a framing or staging of material in a way that asks us to take a second look. Bitzer's original film is shown in its entirety (7 minutes 35 seconds) at the beginning and the end, with the majority of the film devoted to a minute examination of the film in extreme close-up. The analogy for this close reading is his use of the zoom lens to magnify out vision. The structure of his retelling is based on the ability to bring the viewer closer to the screen, so to speak. Characters are examined each in turn including their background setting. The boy and his pig both receive a significant amount of screen time as well as the acrobat walking the high-wire performing a number of tricks with a series of steel rings. Jacobs freeze-frames the footage and then advances the footage by frames, making the motion very clear by inserting white-frames between each creating a shutter effect reminiscent of the investigation of a contact page of photographs.

Figure 10. Stills from *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (Ken Jacobs 1969)

This examination of the film's surface reveals many interesting features. The merchants buying and selling at the front are examined with expressions clearly indicating an intense negotiation. The wonder on Tom's face as he regards the juggler is clearly visible as is the concentration of the tight-rope walker, and the rage of the pursuing horde. At several points

Jacobs also reframes the image to capture actions, such as one of the mob coming through the door of the cottage with an axe. These reframings make peripheral characters central, elevating the role of extras to principals, as if they had some important role in the narrative. This simple act of showing us something that previously passed unseen through the flow of contingent details across the screen is significant. It reminds us first of how much detail there actually is inside these frames, and how much we have missed in the first viewing. It also shows us how the framing and composition of the shot determines much of our reaction to the characters. The original having no close ups to isolate faces and actions, the characters are rendered more human, their actions less exaggerated.

But deeper than these revelations, Jacobs' work shows us a gap between what we see and what we think we see. Inculcated, as most viewers are, in the conventions of narrative filmmaking, the emergence of the central event is most important as it provides a framework to explain the actions we see. Thus the long establishing shots of the street or barnyard, the near stultifying repetition of action, may seem inane or aimless. Jacobs' tour of the contingent details in the film is immediately striking for what it reveals, but even more so for what it leaves behind. The simple plot and repetitive structure, when looked at closely, reveal a riot of details, the same details that might have entranced early audiences. In these sequences, Jacobs uses the zoom lens on the camera to show us the sensibilities modern cinema viewers have lost.

This first set of reframings and zooms gives way to another phase, where the images become more magnified to the point of being indistinct. Small blurs bleed into larger blurs and the shapes suddenly resolve themselves into a character's hand or foot, the fringe of a dress, or the brim of a hat. For a moment we are looking at a familiar face or group from the crowd, then we are suddenly so close that their features are indistinguishable. The blurs begin to take on the indiscernibility of clouds, and then resolve into extreme close-ups of objects. A group of octopus tendrils resolve themselves into three or four pairs of legs, a looming raincloud turns into the shoulder of a man's coat. These reframings harken back to Jean Painlevé's investigation of all manner of natural phenomena, particularly marine life. Celebrated by the avant-garde, the French filmmaker worked through the late 1920s and into the 30s specializing in filming familiar creatures so close, their shapes and behaviours became strange and almost monstrous. Through cinema, Painlevé, and Jacobs here, make the familiar unfamiliar; the comforting, uncomfortable; the narrative viewing experience a jumble of disconnected hands, feet and errant facial

expressions, disrupting the easy and neat explanation one could have for the events that make up the plot.

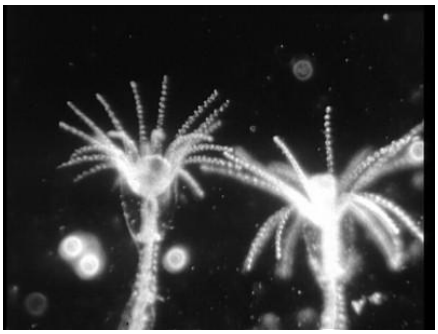

Figure 11. Still from *Oursins* (Sea Urchins), Jean Painlevé 1928)

Figure 12. Still from *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (Ken Jacobs 1969)

As mentioned before, there is a similarity in these manipulations with the ways the Zapruder film was examined and reexamined in both formal and informal ways. The key element in those manipulations, of course, was to slow down the 26 seconds of film, to examine it as a series of frames or still photographs and to blow-up those frames expressly to find the location of people and objects important to the case.[89] These transformations of the original were essential to the early investigations to see what had taken place in Dealey Plaza and who was involved. Afterwards they became essential to the state's case as evidence that proved their single-bullet theory. At first Jacobs' approach seems to mimic that of the investigators, but as we see above this mimicry soon becomes a parody of itself, as his investigations get closer to the image. His close-ups become more and more extreme, past the point of recognizability. We begin to see details of the child's pants, the face-paint on the juggler, the frilly hats of the middle class ladies in the crowd. These images are frozen and blown-up in a way that allows to us see their

[89] See the introduction for details on how these manipulations proceeded in the Warren Commission's investigations. The Zapruder stills were not the only ones considered important, but they were valued for their depiction of the crime itself.

contribution to the whole. However, at several points, Jacobs' investigations are so minute they bring the viewer right down to shapes so blurry one actually sees the grain of the film.

Rather than merely earnest investigation of contingent details, these blurred minute examinations reveal a deeper point, but here Jacobs is materializing the boundaries of the medium as an extension of vision. At the level of the close-up and extreme close-up, at first there is more meaning to the narrative; we are able to make connections within the diegesis by what we see. However, the extreme zoom blurs the image to the point of incoherence. Here the diegesis of the film can no longer be used as an interpretive framework; each viewer must make meaning for themselves. The camera stops revealing what the images show, and introduces a hermeneutic gap into which we must put our educated guesses. These blurs are a material evidence of the limitations of the apparatus to explain and make clear. The film is still the film, the camera still the camera, but we can no longer rely on either to understand what we see.

During his investigations, Jacobs even proposes a zero-level for the examination of the footage. The surface onto which the film is projected becomes part of the exploration, showing a glimpse of modern day bodies holding a thin sheet. At one point the gate is opened and the film freely whizzes by in a blur, other times the projector light shines directly into the camera lens. Split screens and inversions give us partial images from the film against pure white and black, so as to only marginally suggest their space or location. Some of these more abstract aesthetic choices are consistent with many of the avant-garde films of the time,[90] but the obsessive close focus also links Jacobs' work to the dogged pursuit of truth at the images' greatest magnification. As with the Warren Commission, *Time/Life*'s photomontage and countless counter-culture presenters who believed the truth of the film was at the zoom level where the film grain showed up the size of cantaloupes, Jacobs also studies this closely but comes up with different answers. Whereas the others came back with more blurs, convinced the truth value of the image was still intact, Jacobs shows that by dissolving the evidentiary value of the images and eroding the base by which the iconic link between images and any event or identifiable shape, they can no longer be used as tools to understand any cohesive framework. Though they remain indexical in a basic sense, still bearing a link to the subject or event they depict, they are no longer legible in any

[90] Consider the multitude of such choices in the films associated with the "structural" film movement like Stan Brackhage's *Loving* (1957), *Mothlight* (1963) *Dog Star Man* series (1962-64), the "flicker effect" associated with films like T*he Flicker* by Tony Conrad (1965), *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* by Paul Sharits (1968), the dissociative close ups of *Zorns Lemma* by Hollis Frampton (1970) or any combination in the work of Michael Snow and Ernie Gehr.

proper sense.[91] This gap directs our attention to how we use the camera to do the seeing and remembering in place of human senses. This disruption points towards our own failings in the face of flawed extensions of vision.

ATTRACTION AND DESECRATION: *THE ZAPRUDER FOOTAGE: AN INVESTIGATION OF CONSENSUAL HALLUCINATION* (1999)

Keith Sanborn's 1999 film takes Zapruder's film through a number of other manipulations, this time using the actual footage itself. [92] Sanborn uses a variety of frame manipulations as in *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, but with a list expanded with recourse to video technology, Sanborn quickly moves from the realm of close examination into the shifting sands of psychedelic reimagining. Reverse and slow motion, inverted frames, a censor bar, and overlapping the film onto itself as a visual palimpsest— his interventions have numerous effects on the Zapruder film. However, each one destabilizes, in a different way, the erstwhile central event of the film: Frame 313, the impact of the assassin's bullet. In fact, Sanborn forces us to look beyond this point of focus, both in space and time, to consider different aspects of our framed interaction with the event.

The film begins with the Zapruder film shown twice in its entirety with a frame-counter in the upper right hand corner. Then Sanborn slows the film down, once at half speed and then again in extreme slow motion. The frame counter remains in place as he plays the film in fast reverse twice and then again in slow motion reverse. Sanborn then introduces a censor bar that follows the vehicles the length of Elm Street and down through the overpass. The lead motorcycles, the president's car and all the others in the procession are hidden from view. The censor bar stays in place as Sanborn runs the film twice at regular speed, once in slow motion and once at high speed in reverse. He then inverts the film so that Kennedy's car rides down Elm Street at the top of the screen. This inversion lasts through fast and slow motion takes concluding

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[91] Peirce called these types of indexes "Rhematic." Charles S. Peirce, "Nomenclature and Divisions of Triadic Relations, as Far as they Are Determined (1903)" in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, Edited by the Peirce Edition Project, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. 289-299.

[92] Keith Sanborn is a New York-based theorist and media artist. He defines himself as an artist committed to "investigating the field of tension between public image and personal perception with film, photography, video and digital media." His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions and has been included in many art biennials and festivals. Sanborn has also taught at Princeton University and The New School in New York City. Much of the information for this section came from an interview I conducted with the author in 2013.

with a fast reverse. Then Sanborn does what some Zapruder devotees might find sacrilegious. By flipping the image on its left-right axis at very high speed, he creates a psychedelic dreamscape where the motorcycles seems to crash into one another at the center of the screen, Kennedy's car passes through itself on the way to the underpass, and two Jackie Kennedy's crawl over the trunk of the Lincoln.

Figure 13. *The Zapruder Footage: An investigation of Consensual Hallucination*

This jittery, disorienting organization of the image continues as Sanborn runs the film in reverse using the same rapid flipping. The film finishes with a double exposure, one half running forward superimposed over another running backward. Two presidential cars depart from opposite ends of Elm Street, meet in the middle at the place of assassination and then depart to their mutual corners. The film ends with a serious and sober series of titles, white on black, describing the film as an "investigation by Keith Sanborn."[93]

The film is experimental by definition in that Sanborn seems to use video technology to literally experiment with the footage to gain some further insight. Each transformation appears to ask the question "what would the film look like if I…" The video techniques used are typical of the television format, although the way they are used is not. This analysis of the film will look at each of the techniques he uses, as a different kind of "attraction," using them to transform the visual field in often vertiginous ways. Ultimately however, they propose a literally different

[93] A list of techniques used by Sanborn: 2x: regular speed, 1x: slow-motion, 1x: extreme slow motion (like photomontage), 2x: fast reverse, 1x: slower reverse, 2x: regular speed with a censor bar, 1x: slow motion with censor bar, 1x: fast reverse with censor bar. 1x: inverted and in fast forward, 1x: inverted normal motion, 1x: inverted slow motion, 1x: inverted, fast rewind, no sound. 1x: dual plane flipping from right to left, fast forward with music from the beginning, 1x: same in reverse 2x: double exposure, one layer from beginning forward, the other from the end backwards. End credits "investigation by…"

"way of seeing" the footage that alludes to the fundamental gap between the Zapruder film as evidence and what it reveals about vision.

First, the use of slow motion, as in *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* above, creates a possibility for deeper investigation. Not only does Sanborn provide this service, but eventually takes it to an extreme, slowing the 26 second clip to a full eight minutes. Anyone waiting for the central event of the film at Frame 313 must wait for more than five minutes. In the original, it takes a mere ten seconds. Though hardly an attraction by traditional definitions, this exaggeration of the function becomes its own revelatory exploration of the limits of viewing conventions. Sanborn, in stages, moves past the slow-motion so often used to create nostalgia in documentary or eulogistic archival films,[94] past the diligent slowing down that might inform the assassination scholar, past the point that would make his film an aesthetic study of movement, to a creeping pace that mimics the minute granular close-ups discussed in relation to Jacobs. Sanborn makes a similar point in that the camera functions to freeze time, which when taken to its logical extreme alienates it from a human scale. The image is thus divorced from its former human scale and no longer serves our ends. This alienation of camera vision has a powerful dissociative effect on the film's meaning. By the time we have seen it slowed down to such a degree, any framework by which we could understand it is gone.

Sanborn's use of the censor bar, that blocky black rectangle used in TV and video to block out the eyes and thus the identity of sensitive actants on screen, is a key element in the film. Firstly, one can assume some dry humour in the use of such a typically tacky and camp video technique in the treatment of a presidential assassination.

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[94] *Time Inc*. and its subsidiaries often create montages of JFK's life in a series of "where were you when" segments. Though the Zapruder film's most graphic images are never used in these retrospectives, Kennedy passing by in presidential cars and waving in slow motion, etc., stands in as a suggestion of his grisly end. Such innuendo, both metonymic and synecdochal, is common in the television format, but implies an entirely different use of the slow-motion technique. I direct the reader's attention to discussion of slow-motion throughout this section for the various uses associated with the avant-garde.

Figure 14. *The Zapruder Footage: An Investigation of Consensual Hallucination*

The censor bar is also associated with the redaction of sensitive information from official documents. It is as if some official from the Pentagon had descended on the film and blacked out the confidential "need to know" visual information, the result being a comical comment on governmental redaction that guts important documents of their real evidence.[95] While the slow-motion sequence acts as a framing of the time of the event, the section with the censor bar proposes a framing of the space, as the bar gets larger and larger, eventually taking up more than half the frame.

Figure 15. *The Zapruder Footage: An Investigation of Consensual Hallucination*

All discussions of an over-zealous censor aside, the bar effectively reframes the images, focusing our attention on the periphery of the main action. When slowed down and with the application of the black band, we get a much deeper sense of the figures around the car, the bystanders taking photographs, the cars on the other side of plaza stopped to watch the motorcade pass, and the reactions of that crowd to the unseen trauma behind the black curtain. Conspiracy-minded viewers might even find the censoring helpful, in the highlighting of suspicious characters such as "The Babushka Lady," "The Umbrella Man" discussed in chapter

[95] Along the same lines however, the technique alludes to the long history of ownership and publication bans that have dogged the Zapruder film's release to the public. See Chapter 1.

1, or perhaps the mysterious shadows behind the stockade fence. As such, Sanborn's limitation actually turns out to be able to focus attention on contingent details in the scene. By obstructing a clear vision of the central event, he focuses the viewer on the background, much like Jacobs above.

Sanborn's addition of a frame counter, or use of a Zapruder version with the frame counter already embedded, reminds the viewer of the time code so common with any video production. It is, of course, much older than that. Specifically, in FBI agent Shaneyfelt's use of the Zapruder film as a timetable of events for the assassination. As seen in Chapter 1, his separating out and systematic numbering of all 486 frames was key to the original investigation. Key as well was that during the Warren Commission years, as critics searched for the missing frames that so confounded early researchers, the Zapruder film remained a timetable only for those who had the complete version. In Sanborn's film, the frame counter may echo this history, but more importantly it offers a further understanding of these images as a calculable series. It is a consistent reminder of the temporal progress of the frames towards the conclusion of the film, but also a material mark that defines it as a film: a temporal framing linked to the spatial framing of the viewfinder. It is thus not only a banal assertion of the completeness of the footage, but an essential gesture towards the film not being a narrative, but a timed interaction with a series of frames. Not a story about the death of the president, but a view that is always already "framed" by mechanical vision.

Though not an attraction in itself, the repetition inherent to Sanborn's film is a key element. As we saw earlier, it is important to understand repetition as inherent to our understanding of the concept of attraction, if not film itself.[96] Gaudreault and Dulac ask us to see repetition as necessary to the functioning of attractions as such, and *The Zapruder Footage* is an excellent example of this connection. Sanborn repeats the short clip almost twenty times and takes roughly twenty minutes to reach his film's conclusion. Though Ken Jacobs could safely assume that most of his audience had not and would not normally be exposed to the original *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son,* Sanborn must assume that his audience is at least well aware, or in fact deeply familiar, with the subject of his investigation. His film thus enacts a kind of repetition and circularity that becomes essential to its interpretive quality. The familiarity with the footage

[96] See discussion of this work in Chapter 1.

and the continued reappearance of the images on screen form a cinematic event out of the experience of the film.

Though Sanborn, like Jacobs, is hardly a member of the early European avant-garde, he shows a surprisingly similar attitude to the boundaries of camera vision. Although he has a broader variety of manipulations available to him as a video artist, he approaches the Zapruder film with the kind of clinical application of these techniques that belie the film's more playful aspects. His "investigation" is just that, an experimentation with the footage in order to push the boundaries of what the footage can say, with the notable result of revealing more about how film is watched than what it reveals about the events depicted. The frustration so many viewers have experienced and the abuse Sanborn has received for his manipulations [97] result from the gap he presents between what the film is and what people want it to be. The nostalgia for an America of which Zapruder's film depicts the death, extends to a certain sense of public ownership over the meaning of the film, and a structure which is patently reconstructed. By treating the Zapruder film in this way, Sanborn has dissociated the camera from vision and from memory, making it alien again and ensuring it cannot be read for those purposes. The rancor he stirred up with the film shows how fragile both can be.

ATTRACTION AND PERFORMANCE: *THE ETERNAL FRAME* BY THE ANT FARM COLLECTIVE (1976)

The Ant Farm Collective's[98] very wry and campy video retelling of the JFK story as present day (1976) parable represents a different kind of intervention that Sanborn's. This one is specifically designed to frustrate, disrupt and beggar the sense of historical nostalgia around the Kennedy assassination. The film is part art piece, part documentary and part provocative performance. In the film, Kennedy appears to have arisen from the dead, speaking in public and to the camera about his existence as merely an image; his death on the streets of Dallas as merely

[97] Conversation with the author, May 2013. Sanborn confided that he received many threatening calls and emails over the years after showings of the piece. He has received censure from both members of the establishment and from conspiracy proponents. Of particular note is his choice of music and particularly psychedelic manipulations of the images. For some of his critics these are distasteful and inappropriate, others have accused him of crimes against the state. Some respondents have even threatened him with death.

[98] The Ant Farm was a group of avant-garde artists, architects and designers founded in San Francisco in 1968 by Chip Lord and Doug Michels. Their output peaked in the mid-1970s with projects such as *Media Burn* and *Media Van* which criticized modern image culture with traveling performance art events and installations. *The Eternal Frame* was an extension of this work, focusing on national cultural icons.

a transmutation to a purer form. “I suffered my image-death on the streets of Dallas, Texas, August 10, 1975, in order to render my ultimate service to the media which created me and without which I would be nothing.”

Figure 16. Stills from *The Eternal Frame* (Ant Farm Collective 1976)

The faux Kennedy, played by an actor who barely resembles the president, goes on to assert that no president can ever be more than an image, and an image can only ever be dead. The image of the president then goes on to make statements, be interviewed and then mock-executed with an intentionally tasteless projected background. The film then takes a documentary and self-reflexive turn, as the filmmakers capture spectator reactions and present the cast and crew’s take on the earlier film.

The reenactment of the assassination, however, is the attraction that bears the most scrutiny here. The camera follows the reenactors (including a man in drag playing Jacqueline Kennedy) through Dallas as they drive through Dealey Plaza hamming up their portrayal of the assassination.

Figure 17. Stills from *The Eternal Frame* (Ant Farm Collective 1976)

Present too are cameras to record the ideas and opinions of onlookers, caught off-guard by the seemingly spontaneous re-creation of the famed assassination. One of the most

compelling characters in the film is a father who meets the crew and ends up tagging along on the shoot. He has two boys with him and narrates the entire reenactment as if it were completely accurate. In fact, most onlookers seem convinced that the spectacle is an official piece of touristic theater. Presumably the team circles the block several times, as it seems clear that more onlookers are being attracted to the site. The people interviewed seem excited and energized about the reenactment, in no way scandalized, or even really conscious of it as an art piece at all. One woman is quite clearly moved by the scene, breaking out into tears on camera as her husband films the proceedings, crying "just like the real thing." There is a definite sense of real emotion as the woman says "I'm glad we were here…to see this…I wish we had a still camera to capture it…It was too beautiful."

Figure 18. Stills from *The Eternal Frame* (Ant Farm Collective 1976)

At the end of the film the reenactors are interviewed to comment on the day's work. They all seem very satisfied, but perplexed at the reaction of the crowd. The faux-Kennedy remarks, "I thought the most interesting thing was watching the people enjoy it so much…how could they enjoy it so much?" The reenactors seem genuinely surprised at the crowd's reaction, perhaps even frustrated that they interpreted it simply as a tourist stunt.

Figure 19. Stills from *The Eternal Frame* (Ant Farm Collective 1976)

Eternal Frame never fully asserts itself as postmodern video art, documentary, re-creation or as a practical joke; perhaps in an attempt to be all four. It is at times earnest and playful, satirical and mocking, high-minded and low brow. The historical re-creation takes on the form of a sociological test. The art may have little to do with the re-creation itself, which is lackluster at best and intentionally so, and more to do with the reaction it inspires in the onlookers. Though trying to draw attention to the eternally framed nature of the assassination as spectacle, drained of its political potency to create outrage, what the filmmakers unintentionally create in Dealey Plaza is a space of social dialogue where the theories, ideas and reactions of the public circle back to the narrative and the nostalgic in plain defiance of their campy approach. The experimental dimensions of the film as a "happening" or social provocation are almost subverted by the very responses their performance seems to inspire. The artists appear perplexed, even frustrated, that the audience does not realize that the joke is on them. Its message is thus less for the spectators at Dealey Plaza for their reenactment, those not in on the joke, and more for those sophisticated viewers of the film and about our reactions to the spectators' reactions.

This rather antagonistic relationship backfires on its original purpose, because it engages narrative with narrative, rather than subverting the kind of vision that the Kennedy myth puts in place. The framing of the media spectacle of the assassination is not so much destroyed by the collective's efforts, but instead added to the aesthetic experience of the event. The collective makes its point by over-cranking the sappiness of the narrative in a way which, to them, is an obvious critique. Inhabiting an environment where such representations seem so reactionary, the campy send up of a re-creation makes no comment on the way in which people see the event. The camera is here to record the intervention, not make an intervention itself. As a result, the

disruption they propose becomes part of the fabric of the nation's emotional investment in myth, rather than revealing its gaps. The documentation of their take on the stunt thus becomes the intervention, a knowing wink among the cognoscenti, rather than a statement of the type they intend.

Attractions as Free Agents: Santiago Alvarez's *LBJ (1968)*

Cuban filmmaker Santiago Alvarez's *LBJ* (1968) takes a similarly mocking tone, but with a different political object and for much more solemn ends. Created as a searing critique of the newly unelected president, the rhetorical goal of the piece seems to be an indictment of Lyndon B. Johnson as the ultimate architect of the assassinations of JFK and RFK in an attempt to consolidate power through a rolling series of unofficial coups. The evidentiary value of this accusation notwithstanding, Alvarez makes an incredibly strong and physically affecting portrait of what he sees as the rot at the heart of American society by filling the frame with a glut of images from cinematic and print sources that ape the techniques used by advertisers in the world of alienated commodity value.

For the purposes of this analysis, I will focus on the first section of the film, "Jack," in which Alvarez deals specifically with the images of the president's assassination. I will then draw parallels between this reframing and the way the assassination of JFK is treated with the other death sequences in the film. Though hardly engaging with the Zapruder film as a specific text, Alvarez's montage nevertheless speaks to the gap it presents between the conventional modes of vision associated with the camera and the revolutionary vision that sees beyond this form of representation. Specifically, though *LBJ*'s form is similar to the kind of montage Eisenstein proposed as an "art of comparisons" in the 1920s, the film is less a string of visual attractions whose impact is charted out for a specific effect, and more a reconstruction of vision out of the very sources that seek to imprison it.

After the much talked-about introductory sequence, which cartoonishly presents Lyndon B. Johnson as a morally bankrupt rich American, the announcement of the three chapters takes place. The film is arranged in three parts, each predicated on the frame into which we "enter" for that chapter, all linked to one of Johnson's initials: L.B.J. "J" represents Jack the president, "L" represents Luther, as in Martin Luther King Jr. and ultimately, the murderous racism of the United States, and "B" represents Bob or Robert Kennedy and his assassination.

Figure 20. Stills from *LBJ* (Santiago Alvarez 1968)

The first chapter begins with a screen divided into three parts, much like the cartoon fronting a slot machine. Images rotate through these portals to reveal a flower in vase on the far left and a death's head in the center and a small but ornate compass or watch. These images rotate forward and down coming to rest on letters ending on J indicating "Capitulo" [Chapter] Jack. The images flash as if they were somehow signifying the viewer having won a prize.

Figure 21. Still from *LBJ* (Santiago Alvarez 1968)

We then see images from JFK's inauguration; Kennedy swears on the Bible and then turns to shake LBJ's hand, then that of Richard Nixon. He turns away to make his speech and the shot cuts to Johnson and Kennedy looking off into the distance. We immediately cut to a shot of Johnson cooking on an old style wood stove, perhaps making coffee, and then outdoors cooking on a barbecue wreathed in smoke. Next are moving images of a mechanical puppet that seems to be representing hell. Smoke swirls around the close up of a demon's head devouring a human body.

Figure 22. Stills from *LBJ* (Santiago Alvarez 1968)

Next we see a series of still images of Jack and Bobby Kennedy conferring together alone, followed by a still of LBJ making a phone call. Another image of Johnson making a call, now with his hands to his forehead, seeming frustrated. Then a series of stills representing the Kennedy brothers alone together in conference, in silence, in the oval office. Then pictures of Johnson drinking a soda as John, removed, looks away in the foreground. Then a picture of Johnson quietly listening as Robert Kennedy speaks.

The next sequence in the film devotes itself to the assassination. The section begins with the wanted poster, put up by conservative groups protesting Kennedy's visit to Texas. We see "El Afiche De Dallas." [The Poster from Dallas] the text resolving to English "Wanted for Treason" with doctored mug shot of JFK above. The sequence then cuts between images of JFK and Jacqueline getting off the plane in Dallas, met by Johnson, his wife and a series of local dignitaries and the wanted poster detailing JFK's crimes: "Betraying the Constitution," "lax enforcing of communist registration laws" and "illegally invaded a sovereign state with federal troops" among others. As the camera surveys the list, it is replaced by a document in Spanish.

Figure 23. Stills from *LBJ* (Santiago Alvarez 1968)

We now cut to a still image of the president in the motorcade car smiling to the camera. These still images follow the presidential limousine as it makes its turns towards Elm Street. We see familiar images of the president and his wife waving to the cameras and smiling as they make the turn onto Dealy Plaza. A still shot of the trailing car with secret service agents standing in attendance shows the plinth from which Zapruder will take his film in the background. Another close-up of JFK's protection pulls back to clearly reveal the grassy knoll and the parking lot fence. Inexplicably, the shot jumps to a hooded figure emerging from behind a tree and leveling a crossbow. This fictional image then cuts back to an archival one of the limousine from behind inside a set of crosshairs.[99] The camera zooms and irises in on the rear right passenger, presumably Kennedy. Again the hooded, crossbow-wielding assassin points the crossbow from behind the tree, suddenly releasing the bolt which flies off-screen to the left.

Figure 24. Stills from *LBJ* (Santiago Alvarez 1968)

Three quick still shots then appear as the music crescendos to three matching shots: a still shot of the limousine from the side with Kennedy receiving the fatal shot, [100] the camera crash zooms in on Kennedy falling forward, Jacqueline reaching out to him; the second—the camera again crash zooms in on the still image of a woman's face, frozen in shock; the third—a moving image of an owl suddenly turning its head looking off screen left. These images fix the shock of the assassination more than its events. The series of images, reminiscent of Soviet montage, seems to source that shock in a variety of cinematic locations. Each one breaks the space of the last as they skitter between different contexts.

[99] Perhaps a direct use of Warren Commission's reconstruction November 19, 1964, later published in *Time/Life* magazine.
[100] Most likely images from the Muchmore film of the assassination.

Figure 25. Stills from *LBJ* (Santiago Alvarez 1968)

This representation of the murder is hardly as explicit as that of the Zapruder film. This series of images is notably free of blood and gore, and the actions and reactions of those around the murdered man. However, it is far more notable for the absence of any coherent cinematic space. Jumping between images as Alvarez does there is no continuity, as established in the Zapruder's tracking shot of the presidential limo, of space and time. As a result, the images *imply* rather than depict the president's death. This factor is essential because, by not tying his representation of the event to a clear and coherent space, Alvarez's assassination is free to tie itself to so many other images. The crossbow wielding assassin, the woman's silent scream, the owl turning its head, all become profuse with a kind of meaning that goes beyond the simple facts of the event. However, at no point do we doubt who is responsible, thanks to the context in which this death sequence takes place, LBJ is squarely implicated, no matter which dots need to be connected. This dislocation of images, the erosion of their evidentiary qualities, is similar to that achieved by Jacobs' in his extreme close-up examinations above. What is important is not where the images come from, but their effect. This perspective is in keeping with many of the implications of the Zapruder film already discussed. The Zapruder film is not important in the way that it parses or interprets the event that it depicts, in that it fails utterly, but for the way it reveals the disconnect between intention, apparatus and meaning. *LBJ* works precisely to make this disconnect explicit.

The chapter then follows the swearing in of LBJ, starting with a close up on a still image of the event, with him looking solemn and worried, his right hand raised, to a close-up of Jacqueline, grieved and disbelieving. Kennedy's removal from the White House is signposted, by a series of that that show him in a rocking chair facing away from the camera, which resolves

to a shot of the chair now being removed from the White house, stacked on dolly with other chairs.

The next sequence chronicles the funeral and procession with images of the funeral carriage led by six white horses, the coffin draped in the American flag. A close-up of Robert Kennedy's stricken face zooms out to reveal the casket and passing dignitaries. A picture of Jacqueline and Robert Kennedy together, Jacqueline's face is covered with a black veil, the camera pedestals down to reveal her black gloved hands clasped together.[101] The solemn stillness of these photos is undercut by an image of LBJ getting onto a horse. This image resolves into sequence of images that paint LBJ as death: a pale man on a pale horse—shots of LBJ smiling and holding a shovel. A quick dissolve compares a still image of President Kennedy speaking in front of the official seal of office to that of President Johnson, in an almost identical position. A still image of Albrecht Durer's engraving *Knight, Death and the Devil* from 1513. The shot zooms in on the knight's face. Dissolve to an image of LBJ's face composited into the helmet and face mask of a knight.

Figure 26. Stills from *LBJ* (Santiago Alvarez 1968)

These images resolve as the camera zooms out and the music slows with a cut back to the chapter screen like a slot machine, skulls in all three segments.

The film goes on to Chapter 2, "L" for Martin Luther King Jr., and 3, "Bob", representing Robert Kennedy. In a similar way LBJ's "victims" are set up as noble men in the pursuit of positive change, and cut down for their efforts.[102] However, as much as we might want to see *LBJ* as a sort of indictment of the then sitting president for crimes against the state, the film is much more important for the kind of vision it makes manifest on screen. These sequences are

[101] These are presumably newspaper or magazine images of JFK's funeral. The beginning shot pans slightly to center the horse in frame.

[102] Alvarez, memorably, intercuts Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech with images of a Nazi firing squad taking aim and shooting.

part political parable, partly a smear on the character of the new president, but more than that Alvarez is giving the audience a new series of visual configurations. He is repurposing images meant for different contexts, with their own set of meanings, to create relationships in the abstracted space of the frame. The lack of fidelity is key here as Alvarez is necessarily implying that images *mean* on the basis of their context. The humour of the juxtapositions is more a by-product of the process to get the viewer to see images differently, not as conduits of meaning from world to screen, but free agents that can be reorganized to convey new meaning. What is more, it is a process he invited the viewer to join. This latter point becomes clearer with an understanding of Alvarez's ambivalent attitude to narrative.

Though the images here tell a story, they more provide a loose series of impressions, with the viewer left to reconstruct the narrative, namely that LBJ, even though he was vice-president, was set apart from the Kennedy brothers, not privy to certain conversations. This leads to a distinct impression of LBJ frustrated by the closeness of the two brothers, perhaps jealous and suspicious that Robert thinks of himself as the vice-president in LBJ's place. Somehow, (not explicitly shown) LBJ is behind the assassination. LBJ gleefully buries Kennedy and takes over as president. This narrative sense will continue through the next two chapters, L-Luther and B-Bob, as it is implied that LBJ's racism and hubris leads him to remove Martin Luther King Jr. and his jealousy and rage to kill RFK as well. But this impression of narrative should not be read as an abandonment of Alvarez's experimental credentials. Such an approach is only paradoxical when looked at from a perspective where narrative is antithetical to the goals of the avant-garde. Maria Chiara D'Argenio's work on Alvarez notes that the director's approach to montage is committed to traditional Einsteinian values as well as newer technological and cultural perspective with an emphasis on how the camera can shape vision.

According to D'Argenio, narrative is an interesting aspect of Alvarez's work as it seems to weave in and out of his montage:

> [Alvarez's] editing based on juxtapositions creates not only the sense of (physical and ideological) confrontation but also the cause-effect relationship that characterizes narrative. In fact, as in all of Alvarez's films, narrative is paradoxically present and absent at the same time. (D'Argenio 133)

She goes on to describe Alvarez's structure as more narrative or "dramatic" in nature than it may appear at first, identifying a clear act structure, as seen above, with an introduction, development or turn and conclusion (a call to action). Furthermore: "The editing also gives a new temporality to the photographs. Isolated photographs become almost filmic shots thanks to the use of juxtapositions, close-ups, zooms and pans" (D'Argenio 133). This making something cinematic out of still images is essential, because it can create causes out of effects, characters out of bystanders. These images become elements of not only a new narrative, but a series of relationships that present an ideological interpretation of the events depicted.

Alvarez necessarily undercuts his own narrative, however, by arranging images in a fragmentary, kinetic and fundamentally alienating manner. As viewers we are forced to jump from setting to setting, character to character, symbolic reference to historical event and these ragged edges disrupt the sense of any fixed narrative sequence. Only the broader ideological perspective is clear. What Alvarez necessarily presents is a do-it-yourself or connect-the-dots form of narrative where the camera is less a device for making sense than for setting up a new relationship between images, ideas and the audience. This is what D'Argenio refers to as the "dialogic relationship" Alvarez builds with the spectator, where the ultimate performative goal is that his work is the creation of a "revolutionary subject" (D'Argenio 134-136).

LBJ is hardly related to the Zapruder film in itself. Its structure echoes a far more traditional view of the avant-garde approach to vision. However, when we look at the kind of vision implied by Alvarez, the kind of vision that does not take images at their face value, yet looks beneath the surface to what they might show about an existing political reality, the connection becomes clearer. His approach here is not aiming to make images mean different things, but to ask the viewer to see images differently. These images are shorn from their original context, but also proposed as free agents, able to imply and mean differently in different places. In addition, we must acknowledge the Zapruder film is similar, though in a restricted sense. Long before Alvarez's intervention, the evidence believed to be contained in the film ricocheted between the opposed ideological poles of official and conspiratorial explanation. As proposed above, it was claimed as evidence of the Single-Bullet theory as well as a constellation of conspiracies.[103] What is so interesting here are Alvarez's implications that this ambivalence is

[103] Perhaps the most salient being that of the "crossfire" theory: multiple assassins, multiple points of the fire and in some far-flung cases, multiple ideological motivations.

not a weakness, but a strength. As many of the artists already seen, by extracting images from their conventional flow and seeing them not as visual evidence but as profuse with other possible meanings and connections, their true importance can be discussed. The baseline Alvarez proposes for this kind of revelatory vision is exactly what the Zapruder film was never allowed to do inside its formal use as evidence of a crime. Alvarez reminds us that tying images to their function as part of political, commercial or entertainment goals belies their importance in teaching us how to see the world. When looked at in this way, these implications can explain why, whether they are considered as smoking-gun evidence of conspiracy or not, the Zapruder film for many acted as a catalyst for a new political orientation: a suspicion of government and industry fueled by a suspicion of the iconography they produce. Though the film may not have been proof-positive of a crime, for many it was new way of seeing their nation and its leaders.

This more revolutionary goal was not out of place given Alvarez's formal role as head of a central division in the country's Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográficos (ICAC) and that this institution was tasked with a major role in the education of the Cuban people. Cinema was enshrined in Cuban law as one of the main building blocks of the revolution. He was part of a team that developed weekly newsreels for theatrical release, "aimed, with a clear political function of replacing the [newsreels] that existed during Batista's government."[104] One can see that Alvarez's experimental practice in his use of documentary sources, but he is fundamentally doing more than simply informing. "[Alvarez's] formal experiments induce the viewer to focus on the way the film is constructed... to create the actual meaning of the film... to participate in the revolutionary struggle" (D'Argenio 128-129). This participation is not predicated simply on being informed of how stultifying is the influence of the modern media landscape or how ultimately pernicious is the influence of US economic and cultural imperialism. Alvarez makes an effort in *LBJ* to go beyond mere parody or ironic comment. The avant-garde techniques Alvarez uses here are fundamentally the framing of the kind of vision necessary to revolutionary consciousness.

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[104] For this argument and other important information see D'Argenio 131. In this section she cites Cuba's Law 169: "Because film is an art. Because cinema constitutes, due to its characteristics, an instrument of opinions that forms individual and collective consciousness and can contribute to deepen and purify the revolutionary spirit and sustain its creative impulse."

In a film where he employs the techniques of commercial advertisers,[105] Alvarez's structure demands that these images not be interpreted in their "native language." Rather, his efforts here intend to invite the audience to join the revolutionary struggle to free those techniques from merely commercial use. "…to confuse the assimilation of expressive techniques with [consumer society's] thinking and end up in a superficial imitation of those techniques, it is not advisable." (D'Argenio 137) What defined cinema as a revolutionary tool for Alvarez was its ability to "…form opinion as well as individual and collective consciousness… [while being] didactic, dynamic, modern and communicative at the same time."[106] In order to create a new kind of citizen, it was necessary to conceive of a new kind of spectator, a spectator who had a way of seeing these very common and mainstream images in a different way:

> As poets were creating and training a new reader, film-makers were also creating a new spectator…Alvarez clearly stated this: his objective, as well as that of Cuban cinema, was to create a form of cinematic expression for the national culture and to form a new 'more critical, more complex, more informed, more demanding, more revolutionary public. (D'Argenio 142)

LBJ is not a simple string of visual stimulations, wherein spectators are called upon to compare and find wanting the images of the capitalist machine. Nor is it a call to action as much as it is a call to see the framing of vision differently. Alvarez distances viewers from the camera as a way of distancing them from its use to mislead and misinform. His framing enacts this more investigative, critical vision, compositing images from mass media as part of a wider context of commercialism, racism, imperialism, and a near-biblical sense of hubris. This gesture is not towards the creation of an alternate narrative for events, replacing images with counter-images. Alvarez here repurposes the camera to instantiate the kind of vision that sees the gaps in conventional modes of spectatorship and refuses to take the device at its word. This is the camera turned against itself, so to speak, alienating camera-vision in favour of an empowered and revolutionary eye.

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[105] See D'Argenio 137. The author echoes my earlier assessment of Alvarez's fast cutting montage in addition to symbolic animation, publicity images and intertitles.

[106] These are quotes from Michael Chanan's work on Alvarez. See D'Argenio 142.

ATTRACTION AND LOSS: *REPORT* BY BRUCE CONNER (1967)

The culmination of nearly three year's work, Bruce Conner's 1967 film *Report* shows an examination of the images surrounding Kennedy's death similar to work seen above in *Tom, Tom the Piper's Son* and *The Zapruder Footage,* along with the rhythmic, kinetic and magpie approach to montage similar to that of Alvarez, though with a much more personal and sorrowful tone. The found-footage approach Conner developed using dynamic montages of still and moving image fragments from a variety of sources in films such as *A Movie* (1958) and *The Cosmic Ray* (1962) became his hallmark in *Report* (1964–1967). Striking in such a short film, *Report* contains a vast amount of visual information. Like the work of Santiago Alvarez above, Conner packs the frame full of images that read outwards from the president's death to the blizzard of images, moving and still, promotional, educational and entertaining that bombard the eyes of the American public daily. Not having access to the Zapruder film itself, his intercut images is based around a profusion of journalistic images surrounding the assassination, its aftermath, but also everyday images including television commercials, news reels, stock footage, film clips and reportage. His film also includes abstract blurs, flickering scraps of academy leader and light projections. However, the camera vision that Conner interrogates here has less to do with finding its limits, but lamenting them.

The film is divided into two parts; one could almost say two films. The first deals with the report of the events surrounding the President's death; the second is a processing of these events in the context of other images. The implications of the first section deal with Kennedy as image, with the death of the man materially replicated with the death of the image on screen. The main image corollary in the second section compares the president's death and its aftermath with footage of a bullfight collaged with advertisements for household goods. These along with images from the day of Kennedy's death and the assassination of Lee Harvey Oswald call on the viewer to make a variety of connections to the assassination as a macabre blood sport, a commercial product to be consumed constituted of terrible shock and personal tragedy. The wry even cynical elements in this second section are tempered by the subjective and almost tender way in which Conner treats the footage of the president and the first lady in the first. In multiple interviews, Conner has talked about the deeply personal nature of the film, particularly the links

between the techniques used and the way they connect to his emotions in the wake of the death of President Kennedy. [107]

Many analyses of the film have lingered on the allegorical and thematic juxtapositions that are part of the film's second half.[108] However, it is important to note the way in which the first section of the film sets up a distance between what we will see on screen and actual vision. More than an abstract precursor or nod to some abstract pressure to appear experimental, this first sequence sets the tone for the film as a whole and points at revealing the gap between cinema and world.

The film begins, after a prosaic title card, with three shots, silent at first, of the presidential limousine passing by onlookers. After a brief period, a radio report collected from the day narrates the journey. Though we see the same passing of the limousine, the narration carries the action forward, until the announcer responds to the surprising event. The radio commentator signals the assassin's strike with the agitated words: "It appears as if something has happened in the motorcade route," and instantly the coherent space of the frame breaks down. Conner first reverses the shot so that the limousine passes in the other direction. This shot-reverse shot sequence is repeated three times with the last shot being the limousine passing the camera and being lost in the glare of the sun.

These shots give way to a series of images then suggest that the film has run out of the projector, we see academy leader, numbers, blank frames. But as the sequence goes on, a certain sense begins to emerge, a flash of the word "finish" followed by black, "head" followed by frames with a hole burned in the emulsion, vaguely resembling a bullet hole, then a black background with the word "picture" in white then black lettering.

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[107] See Conner's interview with Robert Haller quoted in Martin Norden "A Report on Bruce Conner's Report,"in *Underground U.S.A.: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon*, edited by Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider, Columbia UP, 2008, pp. 76-85.

[108] See Danks' "Shooting the President: Bruce Conner's Report" online in *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 50, April 2009. (http://sensesofcinema.com/2009/cteq/report/). Also see Martin Norden's work mentioned above.

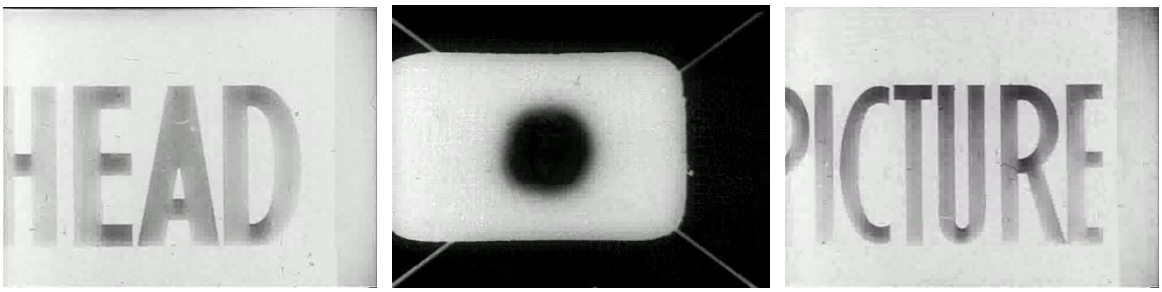

Figure 27. Still from *Report* (Bruce Conner 1967)

Then comes a series of words proclaiming production information, each frame separated by one of black: "Production of," "Code Letter," "length," "Agency," "Agency Ident. No," "Product." A series of frames proclaiming "HEAD" and "PICTURE" reappear but intercut with a series of black leader on which three Xs are scratched where the emulsion is dirty and smudged. The words appear again, but off center and flickering. The sequence ends with an out-of-focus frame of the number "0," having lasted no more than five seconds.

Figure 28. Still from *Report* (Bruce Conner 1967)

This relationship to the materiality of film and the life of the president is made both explicit and implicit by the collection of words and images in the above sequence. Most noted by scholars[109] has been the montage at the beginning of the film that matches Kennedy's death with the projector/camera apparently running out of film. Following the above sequence, the grey field resolves into what might be called a "flicker" effect. Carl Belz, writing at the time of the film's release, metaphorically describes this sequence: "A rhythmic sequence that evokes the dying President's slip from consciousness..."[110] while Peter Boswell reads it more materially from the spectator's point of view: "As the 'live' action vanished into a veil of unknowable disorder, the visual material likewise blanks out...As the flashing greys persist upon the screen,

[109] Most notably perhaps see Norden 76-85. He also cites the work of Peter Boswell and Carl Belz.
[110] Boswell, qtd in Norden 80.

people in the audience actually being to wonder if 'something has happened,' not only to the President, but to the film itself."[111]

With respect to both these interpretive assessments, the "rhythmic" nature of the flicker sequence seems to be belied by the very direct and visceral response that the sequence inspires.[112] The seeming abstraction here is undercut by the voice of the news broadcaster that persists. Reading the flicker sequence in context with the academy leader section before, a more literal relationship is clear. As the audio tells the story, Conner reminds us that the death of the president and the immediate moments after, the ones of greatest drama, went unseen by the majority of the world. Confusion, shock and disorientation reigned, without anyone having a perspective that would encapsulate or explain the event; there were only fragments. Thus the confusion of the images here is not merely an aesthetic trope, but a materializing of the confusion of images in the wake of the assassination. This sequence materially represents the crisis in images that the Zapruder film embodies. As such, these techniques are not present in the spirit of any cinematic brutalism, nor are they meant to achieve some sort of abstract meditation on film as no more than rhythms of flashing light. It is more prudent, given the thoughts above, to see the sequence as an attempt to reconstruct a particular way of seeing (or not seeing) the event. Conner uses these techniques very literally to cause confusion and disorientation to put the viewer in a purposely limited position. The shock of the president's death is not simply a physical one, or even a political or historical one, but a shock to a whole system of representation.

It is here that we can see Conner's statement as being consistent with the implications of the Zapruder film. Where it is supposed to give clarity to the confusion and disorientation around the president's death, it failed. Its mediation of the president's death, a hope for the objective recording of the camera to propose some kind of precision, proved only to provide more images. Conner's manipulations signpost as visual the epistemological disruptions that these images fail to solve. In the absence of resolution, Conner replays the footage of the presidential limousine passing again and again because, as a piece of film, it is replayable. Though using it for what it is intended to do, preserve and replay events, Conner's vision of the apparatus reveals how hollow

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[111] Belz, qtd in Norden 80.

[112] When taught in class the flickering screen must be signposted beforehand to avoid sick stomachs and epileptic seizures.

that preservation is. Not just because it is beholden to capital or manipulated by the sentimental structure of narrative, camera vision fails because it cannot fulfill what we demand. Cinema is no time machine; it replays rather than alters events. Conner must eventually let Kennedy's limousine pass by the camera and he must be shot and die.

The second half of the film extends this commentary with an almost dizzying barrage of images responding like ripples in water from a tossed stone. Underpinned by the same steady news radio reportage as in the first section, this commentary's charmed and almost breathless description of the arrival of the Kennedys at the Dallas airport is undercut by images that mock the announcer's tone. As stated above, the main series of images compared in this montage is that of a bullfight, a series of television commercials mostly for food and household products. These are interspersed with a series of short fragments of cinematic, stock and historical footage some of them lasting for no more than a few frames. Interpretations of this montage have mused over its relationships to the president as both a hunted animal and a manufactured product.[113] But what is so striking about reading *Report* in comparison with similar sequences in films like *LBJ* above is the way in which it uses images to draw the apparatus of cinema as insufficient in the face of the crisis before it.

The pairing of the audio from the president's assassination with the visuals from a bullfight is not simply a visual allegory or even a crass kind of joke, nor is the visual comparison of Air Force One to a refrigerator, or the doors of a trash compactor opening to the entry of the president and his wife onto Love Field.

Figure 29. Stills from *Report* (Bruce Conner 1967)

More and more products flash upon the screen accompanied by the audio describing the president's arrival, with the visuals switching back and forth to images which match the audio—the Kennedys descending from Air Force One and greeting the crowd, the constant counterpoint

[113] See Norden as referenced above and Adrian Danks' "Shooting the President: Bruce Conner's Report" online in *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 50, April 2009. (http://sensesofcinema.com/2009/cteq/report/).

of the bullfight—and a somber mood becomes more prominent as more violent and disquieting images increase. We are treated to images of atomic explosions, tigers being shot with water cannons at a zoo, a rifle bullet shattering a lightbulb and a prominent series of shots from James Whale's *Frankenstein*. Conner has often spoken of these shots from *Frankenstein* as his own desperate wish to revive the president and somehow turn back time through the use of the cinematic apparatus.[114] This disturbing imagery then targets the audience as we are treated to scrolling shots of machine gunners mowing down soldiers as the commentator narrates how the crowd tries to get closer and closer to the president, so that the Dallas police have to hold them back. This undercurrent of violence particularly in the relationship of the crowd to the Kennedys continues, with shots of tigers being shot with water cannon.

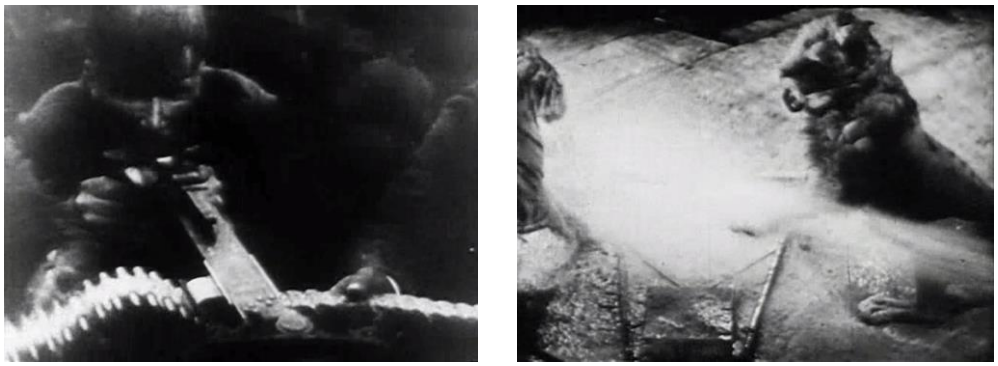

Figure 30. Still from *Report* (Bruce Conner 1967)

The final visuals of the film are preoccupied with Kennedy's funeral and the attendant spectacle, underpinned by the radio narration of his inauguration. We see Jacqueline Kennedy clothed in black and the long trail of the funeral procession. The counterpoint here is the visual of a large bubble being popped by a pin. The announcer continues to cheerily narrate their interaction with the crowd and the visuals lead us ever closer to the final resting place of the president. Conner's final shot with a secretary pushing the button on her computer marked "sell" clearly connotes the assassination as the liquidation of an asset, whether that be in a business or conspiratorial sense.

[114] See interview quoted in Norden 76.

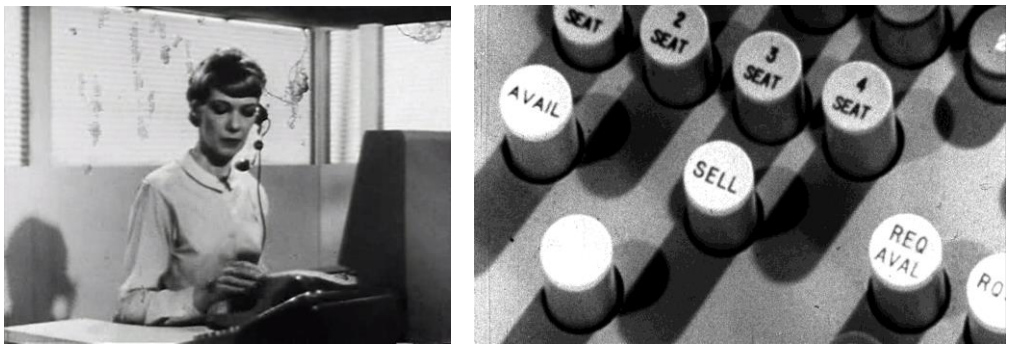

Figure 31. Still from *Report* (Bruce Conner 1967)

The visual humour here hides a deeper, more unsettling truth: the president's value comes not because of his inherent worth, his political power or even his star quality, but from what can be done with his image. The camera, in the advertisements, is a device that praises, lauds and reifies its object. In the footage of the bullfight, it coldly documents, standing aside as the animal is killed. Though mobilized by Conner as a balm for nation's wounds, and his own, he reveals that the camera is not our friend. More specifically that the images it creates, like those of the president, are a third entity that exists between us and the world. Absent is the political call to recognition so clear in Alvarez's *LBJ*, or the wry and campy reimagining of *The Eternal Frame;* in *Report* we are presented with the raw unease of images rearranged to express their inescapable failure. Conner's film alludes not just to the Kennedy assassination, or to the shock and loss associated with it, but to an ultimate failure of film to redeem these events and find some kind of coherent meaning in their juxtaposition, leaving us just as empty in this regard as the Zapruder film does. The sombre tone of the finale links the death of the president and the failure of those who sought to protect him with that of Conner himself and cinema's failure, more broadly, to reset the clock, or to offer back some semblance of explanation or holistic representation of what happened.

Conclusions

In each of the discussions above, it is interesting how so many different artists, with so many different bodies of work behind them, have such a similar way of approaching the representational gaps indicated by the Zapruder film. Each of the above films seeks to revisit foundational aspects of the cinematic apparatus in the form of different attractions that further reveal or explain the inability of film to reproduce the world. Some may be emotional and

personal, like Bruce Conner's *Report*, others may be quasi-objective investigations, like Jacobs' *Tom, Tom the Piper's Son* or Sanborn's *The Zapruder Footage.* Each, however, uses the camera to disrupt the conventional "framing" of events. Recontextualizing and reformulating images in the wider context of contemporary visual culture for each is essential. Some of their ends are aesthetic, others more political, but the films discussed above all seek to expose the inability of the camera to do what conventional viewing structures depend on it to do. In an experimental sense then, they test it against other images to show how thin the strand that connects each image to its intended context truly is. It is telling that *The Eternal Frame,* the film that used the camera for its more traditional purposes by recording a performance and reactions to it, seemed to undo the revelations to which it aspired. In being so focused on the exaggerated performance satirizing JFK as an image, the filmmakers forgot to deride the medium that produced those images. They were thus surprised to be staging a form of public therapy rather than exposing the clay feet of a false idol.

The Zapruder film is less a text that can be accorded to any one particular or mode, as its implications run to the very foundations of cinematic representation itself. The avant-garde is certainly not the only venue or vector by which its revelations can take place. The next chapter will chart the response of fiction film to the challenge to conventional modes of representation discussed here. Far from unable to comment on the gaps revealed by the Zapruder film in the relationships between camera and world, fiction will be one of the most interesting and dynamic modes to grapple with these issues. Amid the thrills and chills of conventional thrillers will be shocks of a much more complex kind. Interweaving the fears and anxieties of characters in the wake of dramatic events, many of these films will make a fundamental link between the ongoing trauma of a post-JFK America and the nagging sense that cinema isn't what it used to be.

Chapter 4: Zapruder and Fiction Film

This chapter will discuss the response of fiction film to the crisis in representation the Zapruder film helps reveal. The gap to which it draws attention between the apparatus of cinema and the world, between what is seen and what is understood, will be dealt with here in different ways. The discussion will be underpinned by the quality of fiction film to gather together and to make a kind of narrative "sense" out of fragments in the popular cultural and media landscape. Often it is fiction film that cobbles together a sense of order out of disparate confusing or shocking causes and effects. One of the true comforts of narration, in the traditional sense, is its ability to convey a sense of completeness, integration and wholeness. But as we will see below, a significant undercurrent in fiction film's engagement with President Kennedy's assassination, scattered and halting though it was, targeted precisely the epistemological and evidentiary gaps revealed by the Zapruder film. As a piece of evidence missing from public discourse and then a national scandal by television broadcast, the Zapruder film ended up proposing more problems than it solved. While the manipulations of experimental filmmakers discussed in Chapter 3 more obviously disrupted the conventional modes of viewing, we will see filmmakers engaging with similar issues in a more veiled and subtle, yet no less disruptive, relationship.

As a result of these concerns, this chapter will target films of a very particular stripe. It will address mostly thrillers of the mystery and conspiratorial variety from the mid to late 60s and then again in the wake of Zapruder film's national broadcast in 1975. It will concern itself exclusively with films that respond to the evidentiary crisis posited by the Zapruder film and its implications for cinematic form and narrative structure. Films echoing similar issues from later periods will be included as well. What makes these films unique is the way their approach to creating and recreating assassination events, evidence and interpretation all bear the imprint of this crisis in representation. While some seek to respond to that crisis by doubling down on ever more byzantine webs of supporting evidence, others seek to draw attention to it and build a new kind of interpretative strategy.

No matter what their approach, each of the films below responds to the notion that, in some way, the camera can no longer be trusted to do what it used to do. Many would say that this mistrust goes back to very origins of cinema, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. For this, and many other reasons, this project is grounded in those early reactions to film. As such, the films

here will be considered as part of a re-engagement with this this shock and disbelief, whether mining it for fruitful incongruities, or patching it over with yet more elaborate proofs. It must be noted that although these films address a lack, it can hardly be said to be a lack of drama or even a form of resolution. Unlike traditional mysteries where conspirators are unmasked as part of some satisfying narrative conclusion, these films usually start with the trauma of an unsatisfying conclusion and continue from there. Fiction in these cases is not addressing a gap in terms of resolution, but an epistemological dissatisfaction with that solution. As such, these films have a unique quality of unease and disquiet in the representation not of the shocking events of their story, but to the unreliability of the medium itself.

In the first of the analyses below, we will consider films that consciously reconstruct an assassination, be it of President Kennedy himself or some analogous crime. The first group of reconstructions will emphasize the power of camera and narrative to fill gaps and clarify understanding. As much as these sequences emphasize realism in the representation of the chaos of the space of assassination, the terror and confusion of the attack, they present a representation that explains and stabilizes understanding. Such sequences will look to work against the crisis mentioned above. Discussed will be sequences from Robert Groden's original composite of the Zapruder film broadcast on television in 1975, David Miller's *Executive Action* (1973) and Oliver stone's *JFK* (1991). The second set of sequences will take the recreation of assassination as an opportunity to sow doubt and to obscure clear conclusions. They will use narrative and visual techniques to fragment understanding and forestall interpretation. Sequences discussed will be from Monte Hellman's *The Shooting* (1966), Alan Pakula's *the Parallax View* (1974) and Brian De Palma's *Blow-Out* (1981).

These contrasting approaches will also define the approach of the second section. The analyses will consider the tensions revealed through a reified object of proof that plays a central role in the crime or conspiracy. Here the Zapruder film plays a cameo, so to speak, as some piece of visual or some other material evidence that somehow offers some insight into the crime. But far from a simple narrative device, these pieces of evidence change and dissolve as bona fide proof of the event. Just as the characters in the sequences concerned try to stretch this object over the gaps in their own knowledge, we will see how the films themselves stretch cinematic technique to fill epistemological gaps of its own. Some films present this object as a solution to

the mystery, albeit with disastrous implications, while others point to its ambiguity and insufficiency. However, each set of sequences approaches the same lack proposed above: the fundamental unreliability of cinematic vision. Sequences discussed will include films discussed above, *Blow-Out* and *Executive Action*, along with relevant sections from *Blow-Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966) and *Greetings* (Brian De Palma, 1968). The evidentiary tension, engaged with through different visual and narrative elements, define these films as unique responses to the challenges represented by the Zapruder film.

Part One: Framing the Assassination

The visual trope of the film's frame suddenly becoming the scope of a rifle and putting the audience in the place of an assassin staring down the barrel at an unwitting target has become a cliché. Countless spy, mystery and thriller films use this trope to build suspense, or somehow heighten the mood of a scene. However, the way in which these narrative films discussed below frame the assassination has less to do with point of view, but in the way they propose narrative causes and effects and, more materially, how they show those causes and effects playing out on screen. The first set of sequences discussed emphasizes the singular ability of the camera to realistically portray the experience of a violent crime like assassination, but on top of this they add a framework of explanation. As such they propose a visual tension: the suspense of the assassin taking aim, or the surprise of violent death emerging from off-screen space, as twinned shock and explanation, as attractions based around the articulation of astonishment and knowledge.[115] However, the reconstruction, notably, forestalls further revelations. It remains a closed text, a self-sustaining whole.

[115] Here I repeat the associations Gunning makes in his discussion of attraction above.

Recreations as a Case for Conspiracy

Television's Original Sin: Analysis of the Groden Composite.

The first of these "fictional" films is an essential starting point as it defines the crisis underwritten by the Zapruder film in a very pointed way. Its presence in the media landscape is a defining feature of many of the fictive interventions that will be discussed later. Considered in the context of the issues in representation already discussed, it should not be a surprise to see Robert Groden's composite of the Zapruder film nationally broadcast on March 6, 1975, as the first and most important fictive representations of the assassination. Though, of course, composed of many fragments of footage similar to Zapruder's that depict real events connected to the assassination, Groden's work is fictional in the way it proposes itself as a single view of the event. Despite contrasting film stocks, angles and points of view, its nature as a hybrid object is downplayed. Groden's production is unreal not in what is shown, but the way he cleaves to the fantasy of the camera's all-seeing gaze.

The broadcast version of the film[116] had made the rounds on the underground circuit and struck many, including comedian and activist Dick Gregory, with its clarity and stability.[117] Gregory was the one who brought the film to the attention of Geraldo Rivera, then a TV personality known for his hard hitting approach to journalism. After seeing the film at a little known screening in Boston, Rivera booked Gregory and Groden, along with other notable assassination critics, to present the film and start a discussion on his late night news magazine show *Good Night America* on ABC.

Groden himself presented the film and narrated it for the audience. The footage itself would not be surprising to many; the composite would become a standard version used in many retrospective documentaries that treat with the president's death (Wrone 69). It consists of black and white as well as colour images the visual technician cut together from the day. Groden used the Nix and Muchmore footage to track the progress of the motorcade along Houston Street and the Zapruder film enters to track the final process down Elm Street. During the broadcast Groden narrated these physical markers to keep the audience situated.

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[116] See Chapter 1 for the technical details on how this work was achieved.
[117] For more information on this history, see Wrone 65-69.

Figure 32. Interview with Robert Groden, (*Goodnight America*, ABC Television 1975)

As frame 313 approached for the first time he announced the "head shot" and Rivera exclaimed "That's the shot that blew off his head…That's the most horrifying thing I've ever seen in my life." There was an audible gasp from the audience that became shocked silence as Groden repeated the images close up and in slow motion. Here Groden then took the part of the interpreter drawing the audience's attention to the "violent *backward* motion" of the President's body. Into the shocked silence of the studio Rivera exclaimed "Oh God, that's awful." And then "That's the most upsetting thing I've ever seen…we'll talk about it in a minute," before throwing to a commercial.[118]

As shocking and traumatic as it was for the audience in the studio and at home to watch Groden's composite, it is important to note that it is not the actual Zapruder film. By compositing the Zapruder's footage with that of others from the day, arranging them in a temporal sequence and "clarifying" or "image-correcting" the original, this new film no longer presents the former text in the form that makes it unique. This is a hybrid vision of the event, arranged in cinematic time and space to be a coherent and legible piece of evidence. As we will see this tracking of the presidential motorcade through the various points in cinematic space is key to the fictive reproductions of the assassination discussed in this chapter.

This hybrid nature of the composite's vision, though alluded to in broad strokes by Groden in the form of which footage belongs to which camera and how he has altered the footage to achieve the effects displayed, is overshadowed by the cohesion of the visual structure he presents. His product is a professional film, an altered reproduction that fills in elements the

[118] This précis is based largely on the version available on YouTube under the tag: THE ZAPRUDER FILM IS SHOWN ON "GOOD NIGHT AMERICA" (MARCH 6, 1975).

original lacks in order to better document the events of the day, but its result effect is much closer to a reconstruction than a document. Groden himself acknowledges the organization of shots to achieve and maintain temporal and spatial continuity. This organization is further elaborated with the very cinematic use of a short cut-away shot between the jagged end of the Orville Nix footage and the jagged beginning of Zapruder's. For a few short seconds, we see Beatrice Hester and her husband Charles sitting on a bench near the northeast end of the pergola, in the direction of the Schoolbook Depository at the corner of Houston Street and Elm Street. This spare shot at the beginning of Zapruder's film is almost valueless in an evidentiary sense, its presence in Groden's composite clearly ensures "continuity" between disparate views.[119] This inclusion, therefore, is hardly a mistake. In fact, it is a formal gesture as it smooths the change of "camera position" from one location to another. The "cinematic-ness" of such a gesture, used by both fiction and non-fiction filmmakers alike, is hardly in service to the truth value of the image, but to the cohesion of this patchwork as a single cinematic time and space.

While this hybrid vision is designed to improve upon the original, to make it speak more or better in whatever truths is has to reveal, and Groden's verbal footnotes designed to signpost its constructedness and vouchsafe its documentary function, the result is dangerously chimeric. Though Groden seeks to ground the images in a solid discursive and production context, his editorial choices pull in the opposite direction. Phenomenologically, the images dominate the commentary to such an extent that viewers may well get the impression of watching a single document instead of a patchwork of several, despite being advised to the contrary. Calling this version "The Zapruder Film" is a category error, and a revealing one.

While this reproduction is ancillary and supplemental to the Zapruder film as described and theorized about in this project, the displacement of the film by its supplement is important to note. The Groden composite shows more of the event than the original film and, at the same time, less. The much promoted, advertised, and anticipated shock of frame 313 that creates such a stir in the audience is misplaced. Despite an elaborate preamble in which Rivera asserts that

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[119] Here I am combining two statements made by Groden. The first, regarding the "continuity" for which he combined the films originally comes from his presentation for *Goodnight America*. The second comes from a deposition he made in 1996 for the Assassination Records Review Board. Here he is questioned specifically on the content and elements of his composite and what sources (and generations) he used. Assassination Records Review Board, Deposition of Robert J Groden, July 1996, Pages 4-26. Accessible through the Assassination Archives and Research Center. URL: https://aarclibrary.org/

disclaimers drive audiences towards shocking films rather than away from them, he nevertheless says: "if you are at all sensitive... if you are at all queasy... then don't watch this film. Just put on the late-night movie...because this is very heavy." While Rivera is preoccupied with the film's violent content, almost ignoring the number of copyrights he is violating by broadcasting the film, he misses the formal shock the film represents. In many ways, Groden's composite must be called "The Zapruder Film" precisely because it is not.

The more fundamental horror of the film flows from the fact that, even before it reached the television screens of the nation, the Zapruder film was a piece of undead media. And like Frankenstein's monster, a dead thing brought to life by an intent from which it quickly separates itself, the Zapruder film would equally fail to fulfill Rivera's intended goal of awakening the American populace to any concrete and wide-spread consciousness of conspiracy. What it definitely did, however, was contribute to a wide-spread mistrust of both official and clandestine investigations and the hype around their evidence. This unease is noted by French film theorist Jean-Baptiste Thoret in his appropriately irreverently titled book, *26 Seconds that Splattered America: The JFK Assassination and American Cinema*.[120] He claims that while switching over to an older film[121] might be better for those with weaker stomachs, an antipathy to watching the Zapruder film reveals less a physical anxiety and more an epistemological one, an anxiety towards the new kind of cinema that was emerging. This generation of films would challenge not only the digestion of the nation but create the nagging sense that fiction and fact were now somehow mingled and that what proposes itself as a fact could be false, and that which proposes itself as false might include some vital truth, a truth the viewer had to locate for themselves.

> At once living and dead, mechanical and organic, real and fake, Frankenstein's monster—imaginary and hermeneutic—stands at the thin line where contradictory qualities mix to the point that they become indiscernible (Thoret 60).

Thoret is referring at once to the monstrous character of literature, the Universal Horror Film and the medium that created it. However, the analysis of Groden's composite demands that we add the Zapruder film to his list. The apparatus of cinema is at once living and dead,

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[120] This is my own translation. The original title: *26 Secondes : L'Amérique éclaboussée: L'assassinat de JFK et le cinéma américain.* All subsequent English quotes are my own translation. The original French has been included where relevant.

[121] Perhaps, following Bruce Conner's *Report,* we could suggest James Whale's *Frankenstein…*?

mechanical and organic, real and fake. The cinematic experience treads the line between these various forces, and formulates them as shock when narrative and visual elements emphasize and play with the contradiction. The true horror that will drive the assimilation of the Zapruder film into fiction film has little to do with its content, but the way it forms new relationships between cinematic images. Its chimeric qualities[122] set up a proliferation of figures and tropes that never truly find an end point. The true horror of the Zapruder film is that it must be repeated again and again in these ways, examined minutely, almost compulsively and without resolution.

The obsession Thoret notes here, one that drives this repetition and proliferation of cinematic tropes related to Zapruder, assassination and conspiracy in the popular imagination, must be acknowledged as an epistemological one. The desire for "full disclosure" of information that would fill in all of the missing pieces that tie the assassination together into a coherent event, a narrative that makes sense, defines this obsession. However, this compulsion should be more thoroughly defined by the circularity that defines the attraction which we saw earlier in the work of Dulac and Gaudreault (243). Thus what may seem on the surface like a morbid compulsion tied to this moment in the 1970s, where gruesome depictions of violence were becoming more common on the nation's screens,[123] is more a reiteration of certain threads in the experience of cinema as such. Add to these thoughts on circularity Gunning's discussion of attraction as a twinned experience of astonishment with knowledge as a "vertiginous dance," and the Zapruder film becomes a key element in the disruption of conventional narrative of fiction film. Gunning's version of shock is not committed to the content of the film, but is equally "a shock of recognition." It concerns not just the illusion of the spectacle, but of its limits. "Far from fulfilling a dream of total replication of reality, the experience… exposes the hollow centre of the cinematic illusion (Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment" 129)

So the shock of Groden's composite, the astonished gasp from the audience, should not be considered the result purely of content, production or viewing contexts, but the way the film

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[122] Here I refer to the sense described earlier in Chapter 2 that, like a Lumière actualité, the narrative quality (having a beginning and middle and an end) of the Zapruder film is essentially determined in a meaningful way by what happened before the lens. It is a real event, given a narrative structure by accident. Thoret (21-38) notes this quality as well.

[123] Thoret notes looser controls on filmmakers since the abandonment of the Hays Code in 1968 that resulted in the groundbreaking work of Sam Peckinpah with *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) also lead to foreign imports like the shocking Italian Mondo films and more grim domestic products like Michael Findlay's *Slaughter* (1971) and the follow-up *Snuff* (1976). See Thoret 37 and 75.

draws attention to limits of the apparatus; the unreliability of its vision. Like the glass skywalk at the top of the skyscraper that keeps brave visitors from falling to their death, yet permits them to see the drop, the cinematic apparatus is here exposed as a protective layer while, with only slight alteration, exposes how thin the veil really is.

Reconstruction as a Case for Conspiracy: *Executive Action* (1973)

David Miller's *Executive Action* presents another notable composite in its pursuit of truth in the death of the president. The film, with the notable script and story contributions of Dalton Trumbo, Mark Lane and David Freed, is almost unique among those presented here for its emphasis on the veracity of documentary and archival sources in the creation of its fiction, creative supposition to reconstruct the plot to kill the president. Miller and his astute colleagues present a concerted and plausible explanation of the intricacies surrounding a conspiracy, building a narrative that is equal parts thriller and a case for conspiracy in the president's death. We are treated, in *Executive Action,* to conspiracy as a *fait-accompli*. The dramatization of the conspirators and their plotting begins the film and acts as a framing narrative throughout. We learn quickly that a right-wing group within the government, for reasons too byzantine to explain, have formed a cabal to murder the recalcitrant president and force the ascension to power of the more pliable Lyndon B. Johnson.

The representation of the assassination comes in two parts, the mock-assassination that serves as training for the crack team of assassins that will set up a deadly crossfire in Dealey Plaza and the assassination itself. Both events take place in the film with the framing narrative of the conspirators observing the events at arm's length. The training sequence begins in a lavish mansion as the chief of operations, Farrington, explains to the cabal that a triangulation of fire has the best chance of delivering results they desire. His description of the tactics of the situation serves as a bridge as the scene cuts to a box canyon where men in relaxed outdoor wear practice on a moving target. The camera flits from one shooter to the other then back to the target showing only three bullets have found the mark. A man dressed in a police uniform radios through the score: "Three misses. Three hits. Take the target back. Stand by to go again….Start the target." Throughout the movement of the target into the crossfire position, uneasy music

plays and there is no framing narration. A crash-zoom on the ringleader saying “Fire!” sets all rifles ablaze and series of shot-reverse-shots of the shooters and their target reveal a better result.

Figure 33. Stills from *Executive Action* (David Miller 1973)

This mock-assassination sets up some very important narrative and visual conventions that will be answered and augmented in the representation of the event detailed later. Firstly, framing narrative necessarily keys us into conspiracy as the structuring logic for what we are about to see in Dealey Plaza. We are introduced to the conspirators and the men that will carry out their orders. One of them is even wearing a police uniform, which serves as its own kind of overturning of nationalist stereotypes. We hear the description of the crossfire, we see the process of the car and we see the reaction of the shooters. A series of cause and effects are put in place here that will be repeated in the actual assassination later. Likewise, the mere fact of the men training to carry out this operation puts paid to the notion that a lone gunman could have carried it out unassisted. In this sequence, the stage is set for the upcoming event in both narrative and visual senses, such that its depiction of those events will constitute a full and complete explanation.

On the day of the assassination the conspirators change from an audience to Farrington’s lecture to witnesses and perpetrators of a crime. The sequence is defined by cross-cuts between the documentary footage on their TV screens in the conspiratorial mansion, full-frame shots from news and archival footage of the actual event as well as the fictional reconstruction. Parallel action in the scene connects all these events as simultaneous. This interlacing of various narrative threads is peculiarly precise. At each stage we are aware of the location of each assassin, where Kennedy and the motorcade is in their progression towards Elm Street as well as being reminded of the framing narrative by seeing the well-heeled conspirators watching at home.

Figure 34. Stills from *Executive Action* (David Miller 1973)

One assassin sets up in the Texas School Book Depository, the other on a roof (presumably the Dallas County Records office or perhaps even the Dal-Tex building) and a third behind the stockade fence. The conspirators all watch nervously from their various lairs. Interspersed with these shots are news and archival shots of Kennedy and the motorcade proceeding down Main street, turning onto Houston and then down Elm.

All these cinematic spaces are connected primarily by the precise placement of all of these objects. Archival footage of the motorcades movements is signposted by literal street markers, presumably original but shot by Miller's crew.

Figure 35. Stills from *Executive Action* (David Miller 1973)

Though a mishmash of different locations, time periods and film types (including black and white and colour) are further smoothed over by edgy fast-paced music and canned sound effects that give the silent archival footage the feeling of a present event.

Cutting rhythm gets faster as the moment of the shots arrive. Cross cutting between the assassins, their POV through their rifle's scope, and several split second images of Kennedy waving to the crowds. We see the first assassin in the book depository aiming carefully, then, through his scope he sees the president from behind, then back to the assassin aiming carefully, a flash of Kennedy waving and smiling into the camera, an extreme close-up of the shooter's finger on the trigger, we see Kennedy hit through the back of the neck through the assassin's

scope. All music stops. The second assassin on the roof aims, through his scope we see the president fall to his left. Then another shot rings out and we see Governor Connally again through the rifle scope. After the report of the rifle the film slows down, Connally falls in slow motion. We see black and white TV footage from the day showing a woman in sunglasses looking on in disbelief as she kneels to the ground. The Book Depository assassin fires a shot and, though his scope we see Connelly struck again in the back.

Figure 36. Stills from *Executive Action* (David Miller 1973)

There is a meandering shot, presumably from the Muchmore footage, of chaos on the grass of Dealey Plaza as the third assassin behind the stockade fence takes aim. Then a reconstructed shot shows the president receiving the fatal shot from the grassy knoll. He is struck and he falls to his left. Jackie and the governor are not visible. A chaotic black and white handheld shot is intercut with images of scrambling bystanders follows. This montage of frenetic action around the grassy knoll is intercut with shots of the assassins exiting as well as archival images of Dallas Police and Secret service looking up in vain for the shooters.

This assassination sequence, for all its dependence on familiar tropes of guns and scopes, pulse-pounding music, the sound of ammunition loading and slow motion finale, builds suspense and its narrative in a very interesting way. The use of montage, parallel action, and tense rhythmic cutting are all credits to the skill of Miller and his crew, but it is the use of documentary support in the construction of a complex cinematic space that is so fascinating here.

Documentary (and faux documentary) sources in the sequence, and throughout the film, do not simply act as evidentiary support, they are key to its creation of a consistent and anchoring cinematic space and time. This representation is, of course, a cheat. Miller is cutting together his cinematic space just like any fiction film director would, in order to keep the space and time of the film's events coherent and understandable. But more than that, the assassination sequence in *Executive Action* proposes its fiction as a bridge between truths, rather than a supplement.

The camera acts in this sequence as it does throughout much of the film, from the privileged position of a "magic eye" flitting between all of the most important parts of the event and, by extension, the narrative. Rather than simply representing the event of the assassination in the sort of tense "you are there" realism that has become so common in contemporary thrillers, the camera knits together shots within a framework already established by the film's fictional narrative. The assassins ascend to their perches and carry out the operation as they had trained to do and the conspirators watch from home, but the progress of the motorcade is meticulously tracked in time and space, even to the extent of signposting it with intercut place markers.

Thus the meticulous reconstruction with its precise placement of objects, men and machines, along with a meticulously reconstructed backdrop all act as indexical markers.[124] Not markers for the real assassination, but for the alternative version proposed by the narrative. The precision here is not just to create a more realistic image, but to reconstruct what actually happened in Dealey Plaza, with ample room for conspiratorially minded viewers to compare the assassins' shots, each confirming a crossfire conspiracy interpretation. This privileged position is necessarily a composite; a reconstruction in some sense similar to Groden's but with extensive fictional supplementation. Moreover, the event makes a complete narrative as it is fully independent of the real events it portrays. This independence is clear from the way in which one stray detail after another from the events of the assassination is tied up by the conspiracy plan, which has been organized and explained from the beginning of the film. In locking down these contingencies, tying up the loose ends of the mystery, the assassination sequence completely seals itself and the film off from further interpretation. It is a closed circuit where narrative supplies the solution to conundrums that have nagged the world since 1963. This sequence points towards a wider evacuation of the power of contingency from the film, focusing more on

[124] Here I am using "indexical" in the same sense as Doane, etc.

narrative strategies. However, in doing so *Executive Action* shoots its aspirations as a truthful document of events in the foot.

Nevertheless, Miller and his team are deadly serious in their use of documentary footage as a support for their case. These elements are not merely for aesthetic or nostalgic purposes. The archival footage is pointedly assimilated into the mise-en-scene of the film. Framing and eye-line matches, tracking motions in comparison between the various newly created shots and those of the old footage have been very carefully planned to create a cohesive connection between materially different cinematic spaces. In these terms, the sequence above does not simply represent the space of Dealy plaza in a realistic way, it re-enacts it to an evidentiary degree. It is as if Mark Lane, a criminal lawyer, one of the writers of the film and a key critic of the Warren report, were presenting this reconstruction in open court. Through this kind of cinematic alchemy, we are asked to consider this less as a piece of narrative fiction, than for its truth value; the degree to which it connects to the facts of the case. Thus these documentary elements are not added to merely create a sense of "believability" but to make of the cinematic event a genuine "document;" a "what if" scenario that tries to convince as much as any of the more sober, legalistic, evidence-based arguments for conspiracy.

Executive Action has this ambition in common with Groden's composite above. They both want to use cinematic tools to create a sense of cohesion and consistency in the frame, while maintaining the evidentiary value of the components they use. Though it might be easily claimed that Miller and his team are only proposing a "possible theory" or "what if" scenario, the way in which they meticulously construct and maintain a cohesive cinematic space takes it a step further. Though historical fiction and the insertion of fictional characters into historical contexts is indeed a recognized genre, *Executive Action* uses a form of hybrid vision that combines visual documents with visual reconstruction as a form of epistemological subterfuge. The suspense built in the "will they, won't they" cinematic logic that underpins the thrill of the assassination sequence, is undercut by history. We know full well how this story ends. The film's address of the audience in sober educational tones, is thus undercut in this typically cinematic reconstruction of the assassination. However, this bit of cinematic sleight of hand has a much more profound purpose: to smuggle in an alteration of the conventional suspension of disbelief. The conventional disavowal of: "I know very well this is a movie, but…" through the cinematic

space and time of the reconstruction becomes discursively twinned with a disavowal of the conventional interpretation of the assassination: “I know very well that Oswald acted alone, but…” The assassination sequence here cleverly mingles the thrill of suspense with the thrill of the discovery of its conspiratorial implications.

Reconstruction as a Case for Conspiracy: *JFK* (1991)

If the assassination space of *Executive Action* is a complex hybrid of documentary, recreation and archival footage, then Oliver Stone’s *JFK* takes it a step or two further. Though typically dissociative and bewildering in its execution, Stone’s representation of the assassination will present some of the same intentions that guide Miller’s work in *Executive Action.* In his own inimitable way Stone is proposing a hybrid document as a more direct link to the events of the day.

Stone’s odyssey takes the shape of a dramatization of the real-life story of Jim Garrison, a district attorney in New Orleans, and his 1969 prosecution of Clay Shaw, a prominent businessman accused of racketeering and various sexual offences. Over the course of his investigations, Garrison becomes aware that Shaw is involved with the CIA and is indeed neck-deep in the affair in Dallas. His trial of the businessman and his accomplices quickly becomes a revelation of the conspiracy and a desperate reach for the legal, historical and ultimately cinematic truth.

Stone’s grandiose sense of storytelling includes sequences with incredibly complex examples of fast cross-cutting rhythm, along with double-take inducing colour, eye-line and even grain matching between archival and reconstructed sources. Where *Executive Action* presents information in an almost lecture-like format, proposing its case for conspiracy in a very logical way, *JFK* delivers information, theory and wild-eyed supposition in a torrent of ever increasing volume and speed. His narrative structure, however, is very similar to Miller’s, including the framing narrative, this time from the perspective of the investigator. Also echoing *Executive Action,* the events of the assassination are represented in two sequences. The first is an introductory montage where the assassination takes the shape of a violent and traumatic nightmare. The second is another montage taking place in the frame of a courtroom

reconstruction where Jim Garrison reveals the Zapruder film itself as a damning piece of documentary evidence.

For all his dramatically dissociative visual techniques, Stone is here diverging very little from the response of *Executive Action* to the crisis proposed by the Zapruder film. In many ways his near-psychedelic montages of past and present, cinematic and documentary shots, real life and fiction represent a muddled sense of presence, a kind of intensified perception of the events in Dealey Plaza. As such, he is less dissociating truth from the cinematic apparatus in these sequences and more celebrating its power to create a sort of "ur-image" of the assassination.

JFK begins with a black and white sequence of a woman being tossed out of a moving car on a lonely country road. No explanation is given as the woman cries out after her kidnappers. This odd beginning frames the narrative to come as shots of the woman in hospital, a wild-eyed Cassandra prophesying the president's murder, are intercut with scenes of President Kennedy's arrival at Love Field and the progress of the motorcade towards Dealey Plaza. The woman frantically pleads with the people around her, "They're going to Dallas on Friday, they're going to kill Kennedy…" This dialogue runs behind images of Kennedy speaking at the airfield, glad-handing with the crowd and finally getting into the convertible limousine. A solemn drumline runs behind images of the Kennedys' arrival at Love Field and a caption displays the date and location. We are then treated to numerous shots of the motorcade from numerous angles and in numerous different grades of film—some obviously journalistic footage, others more amateurish. Amazingly we also have 8mm shots from the perspective of inside the limousine; these are obvious reconstructions, though limited in on-screen time and sandwiched between archival shots.

Like Miller, Stone is meticulous in his tracking of time and space throughout the sequence. We are given a time mark as the camera shoots a billboard in black and white showing 12:15 among half-visible advertisements behind the School Book Depository. A series of shots in black and white show us a man having a serious epileptic seizure with people turning to help him. This event is intercut with more shots from inside and outside the motorcade signalling its progress towards Dealey Plaza. The time, now in colour, shows 12:18 as people, also in colour, tend to the epileptic.

The first establishing shot comes with a wide angle view of Dealey Plaza, a colour reconstruction filmed by Stone, presumably from somewhere on the triple overpass. Shaky handheld shots of the epileptic, now laid out in an ambulance showing no signs of distress, are intercut with the billboard now showing the time changing from 12:22 to 12:23, a shot of Kennedy's "wanted" poster, two little boys running in the grassy field in the middle of the plaza.

Figure 37. Stills from *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

This structure is repeated throughout the sequence, archival footage from Dix and Muchmore, are intercut with images of Stone's reconstruction, shot in both black and white and colour. This bewildering combination of film colour, quality, framing and composition is underpinned by the steady situation of the time (as shown on the billboard) and the movements of the motorcade, in a series of shots that almost double the structure in *Executive Action.*

Figure 38. Stills from *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

Where Stone cannot track the motion of the motorcade precisely with archival footage he inserts his own, matching the framing and composition of the vintage article. For example, a shot of the Kennedys smiling and waving at the crowd in colour is matched with black and white image of a policemen holding the crowd back as the motorcade passes and then an archival shot of the limo turning onto Main Street from behind as the trailing car heads towards the turn onto Elm Street (see below).

Figure 39. Stills from *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

The realism of the scene is supplemented with reconstructions inside the presidential limo as well; even Zapruder and his secretary get in on the act as the car makes its fateful turn onto Elm.

Figure 40. Stills from *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

The appearance of Zapruder triggers the assassination sequence, but curiously enough Stone reconstructs the turn onto Elm himself, rather than showing the jump at the beginning of Zapruder's own footage. These disparate versions are connected by a shot of a girl in a red skirt, visible in the Zapruder original, which bridges them. (See below)

Figure 41. Stills from *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

Figure 42. Still from the Zapruder film, Frame 161

The sequence ends as archival footage freezes Kennedy as he nods, smiles and waves to the camera. The shot suddenly cuts to black. The sound of a bolt action rifle ratcheting to load a cartridge is heard and then a shot rings out. A canted angle black and white shot shows a flock of pigeons excitedly taking off of the roof of a local building in fright and as the birds fly two more muffled shots can be heard and then muffled screaming in the background. The shot cuts to a vintage 1960s CBS TV news intertitle as the original report of the attack plays in the background.

This introductory sequence would never be confused with a solemn laying out of the events of the assassination, but in its frenetic and dissociative style, a definite consistency is maintained. The establishing shot comes late in giving the audience a sense of place, but Stone quickly subverts that space by reversing shots so many times that it is not always clear where the camera is placed, or what perspective it should be giving us. This dissociative approach is by no means novel, as we will see in Alan Pakula and Gordon Willis' approach in *The Parallax View* discussed below, but what makes Stone's work so interesting is that he, like Miller in *Executive Action,* weaves markers of time and space into the hectic flow of their montage. Composition and framing matches link the passage of the motorcade through the streets of the plaza, as in Miller. The time on the billboards is a constant throughout the montage. Though in black and white and colour it locks down the events we are seeing, and despite the sequence's dreamlike flood of images, ensures a sense that time, like the president's limousine, is moving forward. The girl in the red dress, the faux Zapruder being supported by his secretary on a plinth by the grassy knoll, all these elements anchor the images not only to each other, but to the historical record.

Though Stone has essentially made a career out of muddying the line between past present and psychological spaces as diegetic elements,[125] he does so here by making his cinematic Dealey Plaza a site of both public and private memory. He uses home movies, news and archival shots that take a more objective point of view for the traditional purposes of establishing and maintaining cinematic space along with narrative causes and effects. His reconstructions, when not supplementing these goals, take a more personal and cinematic touch, as in the images of the girl in the red skirt filmed in longshot as she runs to get a closer look at the president. Even Zapruder's film is shown here in excerpt, without the jump and the film's beginning and without the frantic procession under the triple overpass at the end. Just as Miller in *Executive Action*, Stone tries to transform archival lead into cinematic gold, but he must alter the materials before bending them to his will. The madness of the more dissociative elements is undercut by the consistent anchoring of indexical markers. Like Miller, Stone wants to create of his fever-dream a document of truth.

This ambitious goal is perhaps most prominently on display in the second assassination reconstruction of the film. It arrives towards the end of the film when Garrison presents (as he famously did to great effect in a real New Orleans courtroom) the full Zapruder film to the court as proof that the conspiracy he is trying to demonstrate can be tied to Clay Shaw. In a crowded courtroom, Garrison (played by Kevin Costner) begins his monologue on the expanded timeline of events, including the view of the shooters and grand total of six shots on which his theory depends. Garrison tells how the multiple teams of assassins get set in position in anticipation of the arrival of the president. The tense music, that transforms the Zapruder film into a dramatic "smoking gun" in this sequence, rises and rises until it almost drowns out the primary audio track carrying Costner's voice.

Like Groden in his presentation of 1975, Garrison takes on the role of narrator as he sets up the film by drawing attention to the various actors and objects that will be important to the case. "Kennedy's motorcade makes the run from Main onto Houston...it's going to be a turkey shoot!" he says as we are treated to images of all the assassins as they prepare. A low-angle close up of a projector lens shudders into life; from this perspective it very much resembles a rifle

[125] Here I am referring to *Natural Born Killers* (1994) among others of his that trade on creating an unpredictable dreamscape out of the diegetic space of the frame.

scope or barrel. Full frame we see the reproduced Zapruder film (presumably Groden's composite) of Kennedy's motorcade turning onto Elm Street. The film is played in extreme slow motion. The tension mounts as the music takes on a parade feel, a brass band with drum line behind, sometime exuberant, sometimes solemn.

Shots similar to those of *Executive Action* define the sequence, though Stone continues to blur black and white, color archival and reconstructed footage. The assassins from their various perches track the movement of the car. We see much of this movement through the frame as cross-hairs. The first shot rings out and we see the frame bob up suggesting a trigger has been pulled. The shot then whip-pans to a reconstructed colour shot of the motorcade coming directly at the camera, cut to images of the Zapruder film then to Garrison as he narrates the impact of the first shot.

Figure 43. Stills from *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

We see a second shooter raise his gun and aim at the motorcade from a long distance and the shot cuts to Stone's reconstructed Kennedy responding to a shot in the throat.

Figure 44. Still from *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

The montage returns to the Zapruder film to track the movement of the car behind the Stemmons freeway sign, as all the while Garrison narrates the journey. We see other people filming the event, a woman in a head scarf, perhaps Mary Moorman, is shown filming the procession. This shot bridges to one of the assassin's scope, then shows us the more sinister viewfinder of the assassin aiming at the back of the president's car as it continues down Elm.

Figure 45. Stills from *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

The viewfinder bobs as a shot rings out. This time a reconstructed 8mm shot shows the motorcade passing from a position similar to Zapruder's, as the president's head bucks forward. The Moorman footage now comes in and locates the movement of the already stricken president in front of the grassy knoll leading up the stockade fence.

Figure 46. Still from *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

Figure 47. Still from the Moorman footage of the assassination (Mary Moorman 1963)

The shot returns to the courtroom now, as Garrison note that Governor Connally is still holding on to his Stetson hat. The hat takes center frame and as Kennedy's head passes close to center frame, we see a close up of Garrison, his eyes narrowing as he anticipates the conclusive evidence of the head shot. The shot cuts to another black and white rifle scope this time from above (presumably the Texas School Book Depository), another shot rings out and the camera location moves to inside the vehicle. These are blurry extreme close-ups pans from Jackie Kennedy to Governor Connally as the occupants respond to the shots. A colour 8mm reconstruction of the motorcade moving on, again in slow motion, resolves itself into a crisp 35mm longshot of the limousine and its stricken passengers. We see a final assassin readying his weapon and taking aim. The Zapruder film returns with the familiar shot of Kennedy slumped to

his left, his wife slowly turning to tend to him. A bystander under the highways overpass reaches up and feels blood on his cheek, a short shot of a man with an umbrella as the camera pans by.

Figure 48. Stills from *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

The crowd cranes to see what has happened as the assassin standing behind the stockade fence levels his rifle. We see the motorcade pass by from his point of view with and a blurry rifle barrel in the extreme foreground, an extreme close-up frames his eyes as he closes one to take aim.

Figure 49. Stills from *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

We see the rifle barrel buck and then a crash zoom flies us into the reconstructed motorcade. The Zapruder footage of the fatal shot plays, the music cuts out, a loud rifle shot rings out and fades, Kennedy's head explodes and Jim Garrison says "This is the key shot." The music rises in volume and intensity as we see the film reflected in Garrison's glasses. A blown-up image of the Zapruder film shows the original series of frames around the head shot as Garrison says "The President is going back and to his left, shot from the front and right" as music punctuates the statement.

Figure 50. Frame 312 from the Zapruder film used in *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

Another short series of shots establishes the position of the assassin from Kennedy's perspective, shaded though this is by the stockade fence. A whip pan shows shocked onlookers as we see the limo pass into the foreground with secret service agents running toward the back of the car. A child looks on, still waving, but with a darkening face. Again, from the stricken president's point of view, we see railway workers pointing off screen right towards the stockade fence.

The final series of shots is a morbid repetition of the Zapruder film around the crucial Frame 313. Kennedy's head explodes. Garrison intones, "Back and to the left." Again the gory explosion, the First Lady horrified, the music cuts out completely. "Back and to the left." The shot repeats a third time and Garrison says, almost disinterestedly now. "Back and to the left." The final establishing shot is of the courtroom in darkness, presumably from where Garrison has been standing. Clay Shaw and his defense team are visibly shaken, looking away from the screen situated behind the camera.

Figure 51. Still from *JFK* (Oliver Stone 1991)

One last time Garrison dictates, "Back and to the left" turning to make his point to the crowd he doesn't realize has turned away. We then see a close-up of the Zapruder film as Jackie Kennedy rises up and turns towards the back of the limousine desperate to find some sort of help. The montage concludes using footage from the Moorman film and reconstructions of the

aftermath of the assassination. Garrison continues with his narration, while we see the assassins in their teams fleeing the scene.

The complexity of this later montage, though ostensibly supplementing it, almost supplants that which opens the film. It is designed to overwhelm and it does so, considering the vast amount of filming from a vast array of different angles, with different film types, mixing colour and black and white reconstruction and archival footage, not to mention the integration of Garrison's dialogue, sound effects and momentous music. If the introductory montage played fast and loose with point of view and demonstration of narrative causes and effects, this later sequence seems to jump around indiscriminately. Stone uses multiple whip pans in the sequence, perhaps to mimic the movement of a head whipping back and forth from one point of focus to another, or the blur in a rifle scope as it whips around sighting numerous targets. The focalization on characters also whips in its own fashion as perspective shifts from key players in the assassination to victims, to bystanders, to the courtroom actors and audience. In an impish twist, Stone's subverts expectation by creating reconstruction in black and white, while using colour footage of the original event. This muddying of lines and subversion of expectations create the familiar dissociative effect not allowing the audience to fully register an image before moving on to the next.

Despite all of these visual disruptions, however, the constant beat of Garrison's dialogue and the music keep the standard narrative crescendo in place. As mentioned above, Stone continually offers space within the hurly burly of the action to anchor the images to a cohesive, if not continuous, cinematic space. To this end, the placement of the assassins' shots is key. Each arrives with plenty of set-up in terms of their location and its relation to the motorcade. Each shot is seen through the shooter's scope, framing not only the target, but its placement in time and space. Though sometimes disrupting the typical shot-reverse-shot point of view editing, Stone never leaves us in doubt as to where the bullets are coming from and where they are going. Viewed in such a way, the sequence's edgier techniques only serve to supplement the "you are there" realism of the moment.

By proposing his composite in way than Richard Groden would never have imagined, a cinematically dense and vitally *present* version of events, Stone has joined the video technician and David Miller in falsifying his document from the start. The agnosticism about the truth value

of documentary versus fictional images, while smoothed over by conventional cinematic narration in *Executive Action*, is front and center in these sequences. As we saw above, the visual disjunction between the various types of footage, grain and even colour of the film, matters little to Stone's overall intention. These variations become markers of "authenticity" that play into the fiction he creates by altering these fragments' connotations, but furthermore the audience's response them. He does not seek to merely supplement what he proposes as the Truth of the Zapruder film, but to almost supplant it. As if no one heeded the film when the time was right, Stone has here cinematically produced an event out of an interpretation.

This fact is visible from the very beginning in the as the first sequence's jump-cut to black just before we hear the fatal shots ring out. As Thoret notes, this black screen is a telling gap that defines the film.

> *JFK* as a project seems to hold onto this *false* match between the event and its image, as if the 90 minutes to come have as their only function to replace these missing frames [the blackout] with a film that confirms the missing original's thesis (Thoret 70).

The missing frames, so central to the assassination critics' demand for open access to the Zapruder film, here represent Stone's intentional withholding of the camera's ability to reveal the shooter. His fictitious composite stops short of revealing any more images, recreated or not, of the assassination. However, in doing so he shows his hand and confirms his goal with the rest of the film. Into this visual silence he inserts three discrete gunshots. For conspiracy buffs, or even those familiar with the Zapruder film in general, this sound cue constitutes a pronouncement of a given version of events, one version in an entire canon of conspiracy theories. The three shots, not two, not four, are here an index for a particular set of theories related to the assassination. They imply the number of shooters and where they logically might stand. As such, a basis for comprehension must be had of the events, before this index can be read. What is striking is how this full frame black, though nominally meant to present the mystery of the assassination, contains within it the framework for a solution. The mystery it is meant to signify is still alive and well, though Stone doggedly, even desperately at times, tries to fill that more profound absence with the rest of his film. As if making his case to the public the way Jim Garrison is making it to the fictional courtroom, Stone crams as many varied pieces of documentary and fictional evidence as possible into this gap in order to convince us the solution proposed by these

three shots. For Stone, the Zapruder film is the obviously superior document to every other kind of evidence. But it is not enough to let it stand as a document in its own right. It is assimilated into *JFK* as the hinge upon which his film turns. The epistemological gap, literally applied to the screen as a black field, is where *JFK* applies itself.

Clearly Stone has created his own cinematic event in these recreations of the assassination. They are both readings masquerading as divinatory dreams. As such, the cinematic techniques used to shock and disorient the viewer integrate a logic of attractions where the viewer is made to feel the thrill and danger of the event as a participant as well as an onlooker. However, this rollercoaster-like tension and suspense, when looked at more closely reveals the same problems as those in *Executive Action*. Similar to Miller's framing, Stone's multi-perspective, multi-temporal, multi-focal sequences seek to reconstitute the event in a sort of schizophrenic omnipresence in which the vital limitations of history and place are thrown off. Thus the truth value of the image is a necessary forfeit; lost in the bargain to 'see more' than Zapruder's original document can provide. As a result, as Thoret confirms with his assessment, "Stone films less from the point of view of history and more from the point of view of its *phantasm*" (Thoret 70).

Recreating the Assassination to Sow Doubt

This ambition to fill the absence left by the Zapruder film, to create a document that the supplements or supplants the original, is by far in the minority among films concerned with the implications of the Kennedy assassination in this period. The reconstruction of the assassination, for the majority, is much less an opportunity to set the record straight as it is to confirm the crisis proposed by it and engage productively with the limitations of cinematic vision. The cinematic space of assassination, for the sequences below, is proposed as an uncertain terrain. The violence they present is not solely done to those caught up in the event, but to the explanatory frame that makes it part of the narrative. Some will intentionally distort the images on screen to produce that uncertainty, while others will falsify the recreation by filtering it through unreliable witnesses. The result is a series of sequences that use cinematic technique to point towards the gaps and leakages in the medium as a watertight conduit of narrative wholeness.

Assassination and Confusion: *The Shooting* (1966)

In the case of Monte Hellman's *The Shooting*, directed just three years after the assassination, we can see a very early example of filmmakers grappling with and furthermore narrativizing the epistemological gap proposed by the event. In the case of this film and its companion piece filmed in the same year, *Ride in the Whirlwind*, we actually have the director's own confirmation that the violent deaths shrouded in mystery and false conclusions involved in both films link directly to the very real death of the president.[126] Two sequences from *The Shooting* are of specific note in the way that they reconstruct, visually and through expository dialogue, the violence of sudden death and loose ends it leaves behind.

The Shooting begins with an eye-witness account of a murder. Coley, the young assistant to a crew of prospectors in the desert wilderness tells Willett Gashade of the death of their partner Leland Drum. Their fourth member, Will's brother Cohen, having ridden off to evade persecution over a deadly accident in town, Coley gets a fragment of the tale from Leland before going back to sleep. He wakes up to see his partner, drinking coffee by the fire and chatting with some unknown person, when he is shot by a mysterious attacker hidden somewhere around the camp. Coley watches through the tent but is too scared to look any closer.

Figure 52. Stills from *The Shooting* (Monte Hellman 1996)

These images are underscored by Coley's description of the event. A markedly more macabre version by far, they describe in detail how Leland's face "sputters out" all over his coffee with his face "half-off."

[126] Ciment 56.

Will is disturbed, but overall intrigued by the mystery. Who would shoot Leland? Where did his brother go? What was the event in town that spooked him? The narrative follows their search for answers as Will and Coley try to track down those responsible. The obscure circumstances around this murder that drive Will forward to find an answer bear a striking similarity to the circumstances surrounding the president's death. Leland is shot in the head by an unknown attacker, from some unknown location for unknown reasons. The location of the killing blow could be enough to echo the famous event, only then 3 years previously. But the truly striking sequence that ends the film puts the assassination in close-up and further deepens the mystery proposed by both.

Having joined up with a pair of mysterious gunslingers hunting down a killer, whom they presume to be the same as the one who killed Leland, they journey to a rocky no-man's-land where they see their distant quarry climbing a rocky hill. One of the gunslingers, a woman named Judith, follows the man while Will is detained by the other. Sensing something wrong Will breaks away from his attacker and scrambles up the stark canyon walls behind her only to see her draw her gun and shoot. What appears next on screen is a surprising slow motion sequence. Will scrambles up the hill to stop Judith as she takes aim. He pulls himself ahead by grabbing onto a rock and the man they have been hunting turns around revealing himself to be none other than the spitting image of Will himself, Cohen, his twin brother. Judith takes aim, Will tries in vain to stop her and the woman shoots Cohen dead.

Figure 53. Stills from *The Shooting*

All of these shots take place in the kind of slow-motion "last minute rescue" sense that has become a Hollywood cliché. However, not only is Will's effort a pathetically futile attempt to stop the murder, we are treated to even slower motion images from the bullet's point of view.

We see a freeze frame close up of Cohen's head looking left, his left temple is centered. Will falls in two frames towards the ground, gunshots echo, Cohen is again framed in close up, but the image is magnified. There are two more frames of Will falling, then three close up shots of Cohen that magnify twice over, stopping on a freeze frame on an extreme close up of his temple.

Figure 54. Still from *The Shooting*

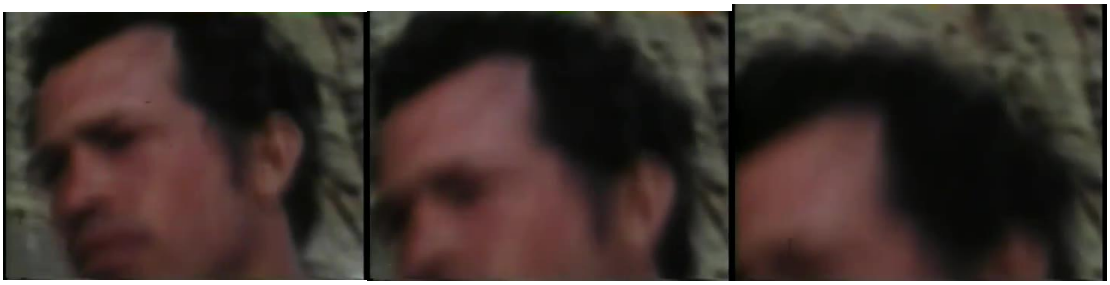

Figure 55. Stills from *The Shooting*

The film ends with a normal speed shot from a high angle looking down on Will as he looks up in dismay, with Judith lying close behind him. Will says "Cohen" and then we cut to an extreme longshot of Judith's companion coming at a slow pace, presumably to kill Will.

Another curious doubling defines the representation of murder in *The Shooting,* yet its effects could not be further than those already discussed in *Executive Action* and *JFK,* the first an account at arm's length, underscored by a short narrative sequence, and the second a representation of a violent event with the manipulation of time and perspective that would not be out of place in an avant-garde setting. Hellman has here presented a mystery conditioned by unknowns and unknowability that only magnifies when the "big reveal" of the twist ending arrives. Key to the impact of the image of Cohen is the fact that he looks exactly like the man we've been following as our primary investigator. Also important is the fact that Judith instantly recognizes him as the murderer she has been hunting and shoots without hesitation. We are never told that Will and Cohen are twins, nor do we have any clear account of what Cohen did in town to spark Judith's murderous rage. The film ends with Judith's semi-hired gun, approaching from a distance, presumably to silence the last witness. The mystery ends there, with a trail of carefully laid visual and narrative breadcrumbs that add up to very little in terms of full understanding.

Beyond these thoughts though, should be a consideration of the interpretive conditions set up by *The Shooting.* What we have on screen, what Hellman shows us through the narrative, and in the assassination sequence shown above, form a base of knowledge for the wrong assassination. The film leads more to a historical link to the Kennedy assassination, than to any explanation of the mystery of the film. These elements, echoed in the circumstances of the first murder and in part reenacted in the second, represent a missed connection to the diegesis of the film. They represent incomplete parts which, in their incompleteness, spawn a whole host of

connections to the visual culture from which the film emerged. Hellman has stated as much, explaining in an interview with Michel Ciment for the French journal *Positif*, that this film and its companion piece *Ride in the Whirlwind* were a way for him to process the events of 1963 and somehow find some consolation (56).

The personal crisis that he defines by recourse to the experience of "waking up surrounded by vigilantes" in the wake of a crime (56), is as much a crisis of interpretation as it is a case of mistaken identity. Hellman dramatizes the risks of misreading a situation, not knowing all the facts, through his protagonist in *The Shooting.* Will is seeking answers for the wrong questions. The film leaves their answers ambiguous for a reason. Apart from the visual and temporal distortions mentioned above, the narrative goal of the film is not to give answers, but to present its characters reacting to their lack. As such *The Shooting* is in fact a shrewdly observed character study preoccupied not with resolving a mystery, but exploring how each character tries to determine the motives of the others with only scant evidence. This gap in understanding, carefully guarded by each lest they turn on each other, puts the confusion and lack of evidence in the wake of the assassination in a different light. By reducing the suspicion and conspiracy to a micro-level, Hellman proposes a set of human relationships where SNAFU is the only rule.[127] We are constantly trying to understand the motivations and perceptions of others through their actions. And a medium like cinema which, unlike the novel, shows surface behaviour more than psychological motivation, is perfect for propagating this lack of assurance or explanation. In Hellman's work we see this lack of assurance worked out to the most negative consequences; not only is Will is unable to save his brother, but the audience is still left in the dark. The resolution of tension for Judith's character who is desperately seeking revenge, is alienated from the resolution of the primary narrative focalized through Will. With his death the epistemological quandary set at the film's beginning remains unresolved. As well as all the attendant questions mentioned above, we still don't know why this all happened in the first place. Thus *The Shooting* creates an interesting analog to the Zapruder film by providing images that show a murder, both as memory images and intense, slowed-down, present tense without actually solving any mysteries left behind. These techniques, one narrative, one achieved in editing are in excess of what the camera can provide to the temporal specificity of a filmed live event, however in their

[127] I use the acronym in its original sense to indicate: "situation normal, all fucked up."

deployment they are equally unable to resolve the central event that they record. This curious subversion of expectation might lead viewers to think that perhaps the entire purpose of the narrative was less to make explicable the death that began it than it was to give visual and narrative shape to the violent results of not knowing and an inability to explain.

Assassination and Distanciation: *The Parallax View (1974)*

If *Executive Action*'s assassination sequence is designed to tie up loose ends and *The Shooting's* leaves more questions than answers, the sequence that begins Alan Pakula's conspiratorial thriller *The Parallax View* obscures and confuses from the very beginning. Pakula and his cinematographer, Gordon Willis, create an assassination reconstruction that intentionally blurs the cinematic space as a terrain of knowing. Their framing of the assassination draws attention to the capacity of cinema to lie and misrepresent events, drawing attention to the complex and uncomfortable core truth that rests beneath.

The narrative of the film follows a journalist, Joe Frady, who takes up the three-year-old investigation of the murder of a prominent senator after the disappearance of the principal suspect and numerous key witnesses. Frady sets out on the quest following the suspicious death of his close friend, and eye-witness to the assassination, fellow journalist Lee Carter. In seeking out those responsible, Frady discovers the bizarre and powerful Parallax Corporation, a shadowy body of conspirators linked to Carter's murder, the senator's assassination and many more malevolent acts meant to clandestinely manipulate the world's political and economic systems. Masquerading as a prospective assassin, Frady infiltrates the corporation and receives an assignment to murder another popular senator. Only too late does he realize that he's been set up to take the fall, and becomes another patsy in their plots without ever reaching his goal.

The assassination sequence that starts the film is essential in setting the visual and narrative tropes that define it. The scene opens on a political rally for Senator Charles Carroll held atop the famous Space Needle in Seattle. The presidential candidate is presented as affable, good-looking and an "ideal husband, father and president" as his wife describes him. However, it is difficult to make this judgment as he and the other guests are backlit and appear as semi-dark figures inside the frame. As the doomed senator shakes hands and makes casual conversation, it

is the backdrop of the Seattle cityscape that we see most prominently, as the light coming in through the massive windows atop the Space Needle all but obscures his face and those of his guests. This marked obscurity of objects, allowing us to see, yet not quite make out what we see, is essential to the narrative and visual impact of the film. In this scene, Pakula and Willis create a series of visual disruption that connect explicitly to an epistemological disruption between what is seen and what it means.

The scene begins with a beautiful high-angle shot from the deck of the space needle; light music and the sound of conversation play in the background. The camera pans right to reveal a cocktail party in full swing with Senator Carroll and his wife greeting visitors. As the camera cuts to a medium shot of the couple making small talk, the shot curiously remains in wide aperture, the sunset from behind the senator blaring through the image, creating lens flair and generally making his face indiscernible.

Figure 56. Stills from *The Parallax View* (Alan Pakula 1974)

As Carroll walks past the window the high angle city scape remains in focus, while the senator remains in shadow. He walks away from the camera greeting guests and glad-handing until he is far away. The scene then cuts to a waiter, watching the senator pass, an eye-line match implies that the previous shot was the waiter's point of view. This sinister looking man, who will eventually be revealed as the assassin, moves past the camera and off screen.

Suddenly we are outside the skydeck in broad daylight, where Lee Carter is talking to a friend who works inside the campaign. Two waiters pass between them and the camera, exchanging knowing glances as one passes the tray to the other, showing us that something is definitely up. A sharp knock on the window by Senator Carol interrupts the conversation and the image transitions to a two shot of he and his wife framed between the figures of Carter and the Senator's aide. (See below). Both of these foreground figures become key players in the

narrative to follow, but at the moment they stand on either side of the senator and his wife, who will fade from the narrative.

Figure 57. Stills from *The Parallax View*

Senator Carroll's wife smiles innocently and turns as the senator picks up a microphone and begins speaking. The shot continues to present this odd framed image of the senator's back, odder still in that we hear his speech only through external speakers with the other guests on the exterior deck. He remains framed between the two foreground figures as he begins thanking the guests and making an offhand joke about being too independent for his own good. The shot continues as the Senator turns to face the crowd inside the observation deck lounge thus turning his back to the camera.

As the senator reaches the position of an ersatz four-shot, arranging the two interior figures in the middle of the frame and the two external figures outside, two gunshots ring out and the senator's back explodes, blood spraying the bay window that separates us from him.

Figure 58. Stills from *The Parallax View*

It is only at this point that the shot changes to an interior close-up of the senator's body sliding down the glass of the observation deck, leaving a slimy blood trail behind quickly obscured by bodies in the foreground as if the camera is only one eye among many.

Figure 59. Stills from *The Parallax View*

The editing rhythm picks up as the senator's wife bends to follow her husband. We then jump to a blurry mid-action shot of a red-jacketed waiter holding a gun. He is instantly grabbed and pulled down. This shot lasts only a few seconds. We then see a longer shot, fully in focus, of the sinister waiter seen earlier slowly and secretly returning a pistol inside his red jacket. We then cut back to the other waiter as he haplessly struggles with his captors; he falls forward and we hear an audible thump above the mix of crowd noise and shocked cries. The camera then whip pans an almost 360-degree arc, focusing on no point in particular as guests tumble this way and that. The shot comes to rest on an open space behind the crowd, as a figure in a red jacket; out of focus and shaded due to the glare from the windows behind, flees screen right pursued by another blurry figure.

This sequence of shots, from the death of the Senator to the chase of the shadowy assassin takes no more than ten seconds on screen, with numerous breaking of the contiguous cinematic space of the lounge where the events take place. It can, in many ways, be considered a tour de force for both Pakula and Willis in that they are able to disorient the viewer, while still communicating the essential narrative information that will drive the story forward. They do this through a series of cinematic misdirections that subvert conventional visual expectations.

Senator Carroll is shown only as a darkened figure, moving through his own cocktail party like a ghost. This way of shooting him has the narrative effect of making viewers emotionally uninvested in the character’s death and more interested in the controversy that surrounds it. However, more specifically, it is one of the many distanciation effects used in the sequence: shooting the senator in wide aperture making the city more prominent than the senator in the frame, using jump cuts between assassins to dislocate the space in which the assassination took place and then finally whipping the camera around 360 degrees before resting on the

unclear image of what we later find out is the decoy waiter fleeing the scene. In contrast to the disorienting effects of *JFK* discussed previously, Pakula and Willis purposefully avoid clearly showing what has transpired, leaving gaps in the visual evidence presented. The images in the sequence present few answers, while providing many possible threads for the audience to pull on: How many waiters were there? Who fired the first shot? Who was the man fleeing the scene? The answers to these questions are simply not in the shots as they are presented. Whether, in terms of lighting, framing or shot selection, at the end of the sequence we are literally in the dark as to who is responsible.

The conundrum is made even more obscure as the pursuit moves outside to the paradoxically bright roof of the Space Needle. A short parallel action sequence shows us the pursuit of one waiter, who runs out a side door followed by guests and security, while the other calmly makes his way out behind the bar and lounge area. With downtown Seattle in the distance below them the waiter struggles with one of his pursuers and they end up rolling towards the edge of the catwalk surrounding the roof. Before anyone can right themselves to catch him, the assassin falls off the edge and we hear only his scream as he plummets to his death. The three men stand at the edge of the roof looking down, heads bowed in frustration and resignation.

This sequence establishes not only the mystery of the assassination: a senator dead, no assailant to question and conflicting witness accounts, but materializes that mystery in the lack of concrete visual evidence presented to the viewers. This re-creation of assassination from the bystander's point of view carries with it the visual doubt associated with that position. The camera's magic eye may flit about showing us important information, but even more important are the gaps it leaves behind. Though the cause and effect flow of narration is maintained, the shock of the Senator's death as viewed from an unfamiliar angle and the dislocation of the space inside the conference hall creates a dislocation that keeps the audience at arm's length. This denial of the kind of visual and narrative resolution of time and space around this central event will be the idée fixe of *The Parallax View* and is indeed a key analogy with the Zapruder film. As alluded to before, by focusing on the logical point of interest in the motorcade, the presidential limousine and its illustrious passengers, Zapruder missed what would have been the most revelatory of the unforeseen forthcoming event, a muzzle flash, puff of smoke, an assassin fleeing the scene. Though Pakula and Willis' sequence gives us more than any bystander may

understand of the assassination, we still have nothing conclusive; just a concrete sense that things are not as they seem.

As with *The Shooting* above, this somewhat unreliable visual document of the event is far more legible as a reference to the assassinations of JFK and his brother Robert. The political target, an iconoclastic presidential hopeful, the red waiter jackets, the surprising shot from off-screen, even the pink of Lee Carter's blouse and the horrified reaction of the senator's wife all harken back to the complex stew of visual tropes that define various representations of those real life events. As such it acts as a hermeneutic "double-agent" interwoven with a series of indices that link to events inside the narrative and outside to the historical world. What meaning it has to convey is thus a hybrid. The answers to fundamental narrative questions like who shot the Senator and why are as absent here as they were in the real life events. Thus these indexes are not here to simply call up conflicted reactions of shock, confusion and dismay, but to echo and confirm both texts, despite the latter's shadowy overlords, as incomplete, additive and escaping full comprehension.

The Doubting Document: The Assassination Sequence in *Blow-Out* (1981)

Perhaps the film most materially engaged with the doubting of vision within its own text is Brian De Palma's awkwardly brilliant thriller *Blow-Out*. Although it must be said the film manufactures this doubt with a combination of visual and audio devices, *Blow-Out* comes closest the putting on screen the instability and insufficiency of technology, and of human interpreters, to make whole meaning out of fragmentary vision. In a way, *Blow-Out* does not so much present the crisis of vision proposed by the Zapruder film as much as it points to the dangers of ignoring it.

Working loosely from the scenario of the Antonioni film from which the name is borrowed, De Palma's main character, Jack Terry, is a commercial sound engineer who becomes an ear-witness to a political assassination and is drawn into its investigation. The trouble begins when he realizes he has captured key evidence while recording sounds for the soft-core B-movies from which he makes his living. While making these recordings, he witnesses a car

swerve out of control after apparently experiencing a tire blow-out.[128] Investigating further he realizes that the car was that of Governor Jack McRyan, and the passenger whom Terry fishes out of the river is Sally, the governor's escort for the evening. At Sally's insistence, Jack takes her back to a motel after she is released from hospital and it is there he realizes that he has captured the whole event on tape. It is through his discovery of the information that we see the assassination recreated before our eyes. Only De Palma gives us ample reason to question Jack's conclusions.

While Sally sleeps, Jack has little to do but go over the evening's recordings. Listening to the tape several times over, he makes the shocking discovery that rather than being a victim of an innocent accident, Governor McRyan has been murdered. What Jack had originally thought was only a single sound of the tire of the Governor's limousine blowing out, he realizes is a double sound: a rifle shot and then the blowout of the tire.

We see Jack sitting in the motel listening to the tape with headphones over and over again, using a device to go back and forth from just seconds before the blow-out to just seconds after. As he listens to the tape, we cut back and forth between images of Jack listening and then repeated shots of the space of the assassination. A pencil stands in for his directional microphone as we watch his hearing wind and then see wind in the trees earlier that night. He lowers the pencil/microphone and we hear a pair of love-birds canoodling by the water. They mention a creepy man standing further along on the bridge, a foreshadowing of the location of the shooter, and Jack moves his pencil/microphone on.

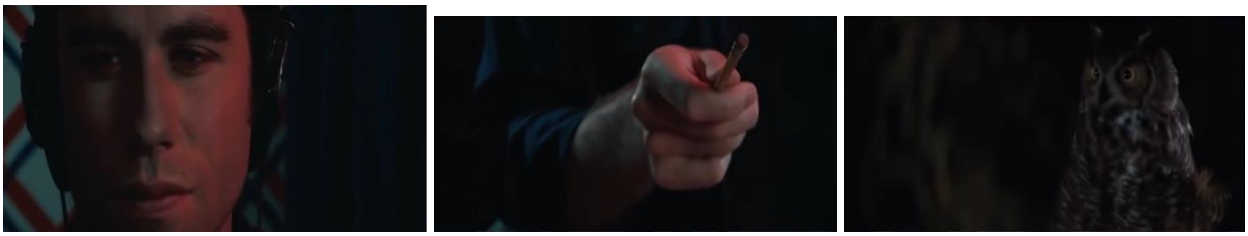

Figure 60. Stills from *Blow Out* (Brian De Palma 1981)

[128] Kennedy followers will note that this resembles in several different ways the Chappaquiddick incident. Senator Ted Kennedy, then in line for a presidential run, ran his car off the road, killing the female passenger and only escaping narrowly himself. The dead woman was later revealed to be a political staffer with whom many believed Kennedy was carrying on an illicit affair. Kennedy maintained his position in politics and was never charged, but was never favoured for a presidential bid again.

Jack seems lost in the soundscape he has created, but the screech of tires and a revving engine call him back. Images of the pencil moving turn to images of the car as it approaches. Jack's eyes are shown in extreme close up as he is surprised by a sudden sharp crack, the screech of the owl brings us back to the memory images as the focus racks from the owl flying away, to the limousine as it takes flight over the guard rail. Jack's eyes flash again across the screen as the car splashes violently into the water and we hear one of the love-birds heard earlier exclaiming "Jesus Christ!

This complex point-of-view sequence establishes a connection between two distinct cinematic times and spaces, one from earlier in the evening where Jack saw the car crash that killed the senator, and the space of the motel where he is hearing/remembering what he saw. The sequence is a hybrid in more ways than one. Even if we are willing to accept that the images we are seeing are sufficiently accurate to represent what Jack actually saw, as the point of view narrows in on the all-important limousine and its path into the water, the hand of the director begins to show itself. Jack's point of view could not have been quite so close as to see what we are seeing. Though the camera here is representing Jacks vision, it is unquestionably supplementing it as well. This double memory assistance, with the audio tape, and the pencil as a microphone are all joined together by the most important of the three, the cinematic device that allows us to see what Jack is remembering. It is a supplement that will become essential to the upcoming shots where the two cinematic spaces, one past, one present, will merge on screen for a truly striking split screen.

As Jack rewinds the tape and replays it we see a series of shots that remain in the space of the motel. Extreme close ups of Jack's fingers manipulating the machine, his eyes narrowing as he focuses on the sounds, suddenly give way to truly stupendous split screen involving three layers of action: an extreme close-up shot from underneath and behind the car showing the tire, immense in the foreground and set to the right, and the grassy knoll behind. Jack's face is in split screen on the left side of the screen also in extreme close-up, almost the same size as the tire itself. The contrasting light and grain of these superimposed shots, Jack face lit by the red motel sign, the limousine tire from the front and the background lit from behind the camera, creates a striking incongruity. The mismatch becomes almost campy as Jack turns his head to face the tire

on the other side of the screen, clearly cocking his head to hear more precisely, though the positioning of his head makes a clear eye-line match with the tire's explosive blow-out.

Figure 61. Stills from *Blow Out*

However, despite this mismatch, a key piece of information is delivered in the form of a flash from the grassy knoll in the background which matches the tire's loss of pressure. The shot immediately pulls out to show Jack sitting the motel table with his tape machine. He stares into space, shocked, muttering "Shit!"

The ostensible reason for this striking split screen, would be to communicate that Jack is putting two and two together and realizing that the curious jumble of sound that he heard earlier is a rifle shot closely followed by the tire blowing out. However, it in no way would Jack have been present underneath the car to witness the scene. Thus these cannot be memory images, as the others were, but some kind of additive internal vision. Though Jack seems certain of his conclusions, and perhaps we are asked to go along with him due to his professional skills, there is a stark gap between what we see on the screen and what Jack sees in his "mind's eye." Jack has made a mental connection without any visual confirmation, but we have received that confirmation on screen. Thus it is *evidence* to us, but only an *educated suspicion* to him. Inserting a key piece of information in this way serves a very valid narrative function. This is the moment Jack discovers the cause of the governor's car crash and the evidence of a conspiracy, which entails a series of effects that will lead to his hapless pursuit of the assassin. However, inside this visual analogy lies a far more complicated engagement with the gap between the material traces of an event and the connections made from those fragments.

De Palma's film has many notable similarities to the much more critically acclaimed thriller *The Conversation* (1974) by Francis Ford Coppola. *The Conversation* engages with the limitations of the device, again sound recording, to render complete understanding of a

murderous event. Like Jack in *Blow-Out,* Coppola's hero Harry Caul is equally befuddled by these limitations and his pursuit of the villain leaves him equally broken. But it is the urgency of vision in De Palma's film that is so striking. With the slightly campy mismatch of time and place mentioned above, De Palma makes material on screen the gap between seeing and believing, and hearing and believing. He confirms the necessity of supplementing Jack's audio with some kind of visual. Cinematically, we must "see" Jack's internal vision of the event. It is not enough to simply see his face react to the double sound (to which we too have privileged access) or to see him jump and otherwise physically react to a sound we cannot hear. In *The Conversation,* these shots are very common, with Harry Caul listening attentively and the camera showing his reactions to what he hears.

Figure 62. Stills from *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola 1974)

Much of the film's drama is connected to Caul's inability to access and make real connections with the world he can so easily keep tabs on through his devices. Coppola's restraint in this regard is out-distanced by De Palma's split screen in *Blow-Out*, a clear gesture of cinematic excess. In his overstatement of Jack's internal state, we are not allowed to take away our own understanding of Jack's interpretation. Unlike the privileged access we have through the ears of Harry Caul in *The Conversation* to the diegesis of that film, we are given too much access through the extra-diegetic representation of Jack processing of what he is hearing. Putting the shot of the tire being blown out by a rifle in *our* visual field, instead of keeping it inside Jack's head, makes a very different gesture. By presenting something Jack could not possibly know for

sure as visual evidence, De Palma not only leaps over the hermeneutic gaps between hearing, seeing and believing, but submits it as a visual attraction.

In drawing our attention to a leap in logic that, despite being correct, he is able to pass off as visually evident to the audience, De Palma's campy and excessive gesture emerges as a kind of falsification of the document; a knowing wink from the director acknowledging the cheat involved. Thoret goes a step further and considers this reconstruction sequence a form of hermeneutic critique. In essence, De Palma's insertion of this so-called real event is "...less a statement on the reality of the facts involved, than an allusion to the aporia in all hermeneutic activity" (Thoret 108). Jack's experience in the motel is consistent with the moment in time at which the incredulous skeptic becomes the conspiracy believer, the moment where external evidence and internal belief meet. But the sequence presents this event in a context of obvious fabrication. By making the sequence of the blow-out of the governor's tire analogous to Zapruder's infamous frame 313,[129] De Palma is here implicitly questioning what we see in that document as well. As such, the split screen is a visual allegory for the leap necessary to believe that the Zapruder film proves who killed President Kennedy. The revelations of the political conspiracy concerning the governor's assassination in the film are likewise undercut by this cinematic fib. But it is a lie that turns out to be true. Thoret asks us to look at De Palma's reconstruction here as a cinematic patch that covers the gap between hearing and believing (in Jack's mind) and seeing and believing for the audience. As such, "*Blow-Out* shifts the question of the location of truth, [from the absolute Truth] on which conspiracy theorists are so fixated, towards that of [cinematic] verisimilitude; the tension created between the two is central."[130] In other words, the question is no longer "what is fictional in this supposedly true story I am being told," but "what is true in this supposed fiction."

Thoret's thoughts here ask us to step outside the assassination recreation as a narrative event, or one that proposes itself as an unsure version of that event, and points us towards thinking of them as being defined by the epistemological gaps they obscure. The sequences above are thus more than simple narrative devices, they propose themselves as bridges of a gap; one defined and made material through the Zapruder film, where what we see does not

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[129] Thoret 108.

[130] See Thoret 108 for a more detailed discussion of this aspect. "*Blow-Out* déplace donc la question du champ de la vérité à laquelle sont rivés les exégètes du complot, vers celle du vraisemblable, et la torsion opérée est capitale."

necessarily connect to what we may believe. The next section will tackle this question with recourse to fiction films that recreate material evidence in a way that necessarily draws attention to the gaps it is supposed to cover.

Part Two: The Reified Object—Films that find an analogous Zapruder film and explore its implications.

The sequences in this section form a different kind of reaction to the gap in evidence proposed by the Zapruder film. Setting aside the expository documentation of eye witness testimonies in *The Shooting* and *The Parallax View* in favour of their visual reconstruction, the films that follow propose some sort of analogous piece of evidence. Whether it is an image or series of images, this evidence, becomes uniquely revelatory of some underlying truth about the violent event. But the importance of these analogs, for the films as well as for what follows, is that they are often flawed or incomplete in some way. They fail to fulfill their ultimate purpose of bringing those responsible to justice. Some of the films discussed below will take very seriously the trauma caused by the gap between evidence and explanation; others will mock and dismiss it. However, each engages with it as a crisis linked to cinematic vision and its insufficiencies as a complete record of the world. As a result, films that touch on these issues already discussed in previous sections will appear here again for further analysis. The goal will be to isolate from those elements already discussed, the way in which these Zapruder analogs echo and disrupt the quest for evidentiary value.

The Reified Object as Lacking in Evidentiary Value

Blow-Out: The Reified Object of Doubt

It would seem germane to begin our discussion of revelatory pieces of evidence where the thoughts of the last section leave off: Jack's recording and his revelations of conspiracy in *Blow-Out.* De Palma makes a further reference to Jack's reconstitution of the assassination by necessitating further supplementation of the document he already possesses. In the film, Jack is convinced by his evidence but, as his educated ears can pick out the sounds where others cannot, he feels he must find a visual corollary to fortify his proof. Enter the photographs of Manny Karp, who has captured the governor's death in a series of photographs for a local tabloid. By cutting out the extensive frames available to him through the magazine, Jack meticulously matches his sound to Karp's images and produces a kind of crude animatic.

Figure 63. Stills from *Blow Out*

Lining up the sounds of the tire blow-out with the visual, he creates a kind of Zapruder clone that is received by others as having solid evidentiary and legal value.

The comparisons here between Jack Terry and Robert Groden should be fairly clear, although Jack plays a curious double role, having both captured the crucial sound and assembled the images. These narrative events directly implicate the compositing done in the case of the Zapruder film. Not simply the Zapruder frames published in *Life* magazine, or Groden's editing, but the many integrations of other media added to the film during the investigation.[131] However, this historical echoing is not simply a recycling of the scenario and context of the assassination. De Palma is making a very clear comment on the nature of documentary evidence and the role that belief plays in the establishment of visual "fact." As with Groden, it is the hybrid document,

[131] Most notably, the use of the Dallas police officers' dictabelt recordings of the president's shooting. The syncing of the rifle reports with the visual of the shots hitting the president was a key revelation in the creation of a timeline for the assassination and underlined the presence of a rifle shot that had been hitherto overlooked. See Introduction.

the reconstruction, which is finally allowed to speak. Moving from his specialized area of knowledge, sound recording and editing, into the visual realm somehow make Jack's document more legible, though in so doing he has falsified the original. The images he adds are the "patch" in the diegesis of the film, bridging the gap between his educated guess and what really happened. We are already on board with his mental reenactment as the truth, however, because it appears on-screen in the background of Jack's face as discussed earlier. Thus the Zapruder analog here, Jack's composite film of the assassination along with his realization become the central true lie around which the narrative, turns.

> …De Palma objectivizes what is, after all, seen only with the mind's eye; a little interior film that suddenly acquires the status of objective proof...For De Palma, [this gesture] is less a judgment on the reality of these facts than a demonstration of the aporia at the heart of all hermeneutic activity.[132]

This criticism extends to the narrative event so the film, as it is only with this hybrid document that Jack becomes a target for the conspirators, including Sally, Karp and the psychotic assassin, Burke. It is Jack's belief in and pursuit of the underlying truth of his fiction that draws him into a chain of events that will leave him a broken man.

In *The Conversation*, the fragments of audio that convince Harry Caul of a murder lead him to a similarly misanthropic end. Caul confirms his suspicions by the gory close-up witnessing of a bloody hand dragged across frosted glass, but his recorded audio never becomes visual. It rather becomes supplemented by more audio. His obsession with making his evidence "speak" becomes an analog for his inability to connect with others. He ends the film in a room full of holes where he believes listening devices have been planted. De Palma and Coppola both here confirm that the gap between perception and reality can be a bottomless pit.

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[132] … autrement dit, De Palma objective ce qui n'est après tout qu'une vue de l'esprit, un petit film intérieur qui acquiert subitement le statut de preuve objective... pour De Palma il s'agit moins de statuer sur la réalité des faits que de démontrer l'aporie de toute activité herméneutique. C'est alors que le grand récit politique, (l'assassinat d'un sénateur) se double s'une petite fiction qui enchâsse le film et l'absorbe, comme un [quoting Michel Chion] "trou noir vers lequel vient converger tout un dispositif abracadabrant et somptuaire." (Thoret 108)

Figure 64. Still from *The Conversation*

Images as Lying Truths: *Blow-Up* (1966)

Whereas some documents may act as narrative elements while drawing attention to a more fundamental gap, the film from which *Blow-Out* takes its name and which it and *The Conversation* borrow from implicitly, proposes its document as that gap's quintessential expression. Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966) is a film dedicated to the divide between reality and the images (fictive or evidentiary) that the camera produces. Set in the surface-obsessed world of 1960s swinging London, the film takes as its protagonist the brilliant, successful and misanthropic photographer Thomas. Surrounded by beauty and frivolity in the fashion world from which he makes his living, he has become disingenuously interested in the "real" world. At the beginning of the film we see him emerging from a homeless shelter, where he has been photographing the destitute men that live there. He then bloodlessly sells them on as "art photographs" in a chic London gallery for a book on the subject. Clearly Thomas is more interested in the surface the world presents than what lies beneath.

After a morning of fashion shoots that has left him bored, Thomas abandons his staff and takes a walk looking for more "reality" to photograph. While taking pictures in a local park, Thomas becomes preoccupied with two lovers and takes their picture without consent. As one of the pair, a beautiful woman, pursues him demanding her photos back, he begins to have an idea of their value. But when he develops them he finds something more sinister. The documentation of a perceived affair turns into the documentation of a possible murder.

Through a series of shots where Thomas develops the film and look closely at the contact sheets we see that he has discovered something interesting. After finding out all he can with only

a magnifying class we are treated to a very sequence whereby Thomas re-photographs the images, blowing them up to the size of small posters. Hanging these up around his apartment he is able to make out the woman's concerned expression responding to some third figure. More blow-ups reveal this to be a blurry hand holding a gun in the foliage nearby.

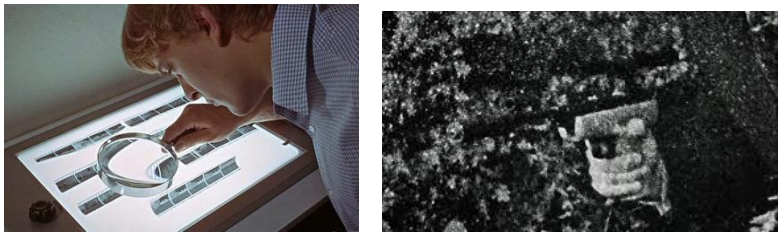

Figure 65. Stills from *Blow-Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni 1967)

Further investigation draws his attention to a blurry form underneath a bush, which appears to be a dead body. With the further assistance of technology, he is able to confirm that he has documented a murder. He runs back to the park only to have his suspicions confirmed by a body lying where he had photographed it. Spooked by the sound of someone approaching he returns to his studio to find it ransacked, with the blurry images of the corpse still on his wall.

Figure 66. Stills from *Blow-Up*

An analogy to the Zapruder frames published in *Time* magazine should be a starting point for comparisons here. But the deeper connection is in how Antonioni represents the relationship to camera-assisted vision. Through the images discussed above, the various apparatuses Thomas uses make clear a conspiracy exists, but does not indicate its scope or dimensions. Using the tools of the visible available to their nth degree, Thomas is only able to clearly reproduce those limitations.

By extension, Antonioni's anti-hero shows himself to be a poor interpreter of the truth he has discovered. For him there is no "outside" of the frame. Like Jack and Harry with their microphones, his camera is the primary sensory surface through which he connects with the world. His interest in that world, his compassion for it and his control over it, is predicated on its visibility. That this conspiracy could be hidden from his view, or that the limitations of the medium limit his own powers of control, is a central point. We see Thomas confounded by a situation in which he cannot use his camera to "see" more clearly and his inability to interact with and furthermore control that environment. When he ventures outside in an effort to find the killer, or at least to solve the mystery, he is left flummoxed and frustrated. Trapped by his own hubris, where all images are as manipulable as the world from which they come, Thomas can do nothing but produce more images.

These thoughts are of clear concern for the implications of the Zapruder film in that they confirm as bankrupt the conception of the camera as an unimpeachable reproduction of reality. In a world where people deny the gap between surface and meaning, Antonioni shows this visual evidence of a murder to be an ironically dead object. In a world where images are only interpreted through their link to other images, their connection to the world they represent is profoundly lost. In a similar way to conspiracy-minded investigators of the assassination, Thomas is unable to prove the existence of the conspiracy or even get anyone to really listen to him. Paradoxically this is largely the result of his solipsistic concentration on deciphering the evidence he already has. Thus the reified object of *Blow-Up*, and the Zapruder film by extension, reveals conspiracy is better read as a mirror which conveys our desire for control of events and limits on those controls that we would rather forget.

Thomas' crisis in *Blow-Up,* in this way, is like a miniature version of the deeper crisis in which the Zapruder film plays such an important role. As we saw above with *The Conversation* and *Blow-Out,* the instability of the relationship of the viewer to the world through an apparatus that extends their ability to sense it, remember it or control it, let them down. Though this may represent a kind of existential crisis or trauma for Jack Terry and Harry Caul in the world of these other films, Antonioni's view is hardly as bleak. *Blow-Up* indeed is a hopeful film in the way that it reasserts, with its admittedly bizarre ending, that the fundamental link between humanity and the world is not broken. Thomas' game of phantom tennis with a group of mimes

is hardly a token gesture of his reconciliation with people he has so often dismissed and antagonized throughout the film, no more than it is a statement of his resignation to the insanity and injustice of the world. The absurd game is less important for its broader aesthetic statement, as it is for showing Thomas engaging with people in a genuine way, albeit through the pretense of a ridiculous amusement. Though hardly as stable and reliable as first assumed, Antnonioni's film here points outside the film, the theater, the cinematic relationship, towards those important and valuable ones to be had in the world; albeit embroiled in their own realm of social frivolities. The answer he proposes to the crisis in representation is not more representations, but more human interaction.

Mocking the Reified Object: *Greetings* (1968)

Blow-Up's anti-hero Thomas and his struggles to reach beyond his limitations might be considered a tragic figure by some. But these limitations are played for laughs in the case of the countercultural antihero of Brian De Palma's *Greetings* (1968). Lloyd Clay may be a slightly more stoned and hapless version of Thomas, but what he lacks in cool he makes up in his passion to solve the Kennedy assassination. Throughout the film, which De Palma treats as a sort of clearinghouse for counterculture clichés: spiritual gurus just looking to get laid, hippies trying to get out of military service, and of course, obsession over the Kennedy Assassination, he satirizes the sacred cows of the movement. However, it is in portraying Lloyd's obsession over "Total Disclosure" where De Palma makes his most interesting criticism of the reification of images.

Early in the film, Lloyd sits down with a man on a park bench and is shown a kind of postcard with a series of blown-up images of a crowd at the beach. The camera disinterestedly pans from Lloyd and the inexplicably British gentleman in the foreground and his two friends Jon and Paul making merry in the park behind. They are trying to annoy someone enough to injure them as a way of getting out of military service. The gentleman presents Lloyd with an image of a crowded beach scene and talks a bit about his artistic process. He describes how, when blown up very large, one can still identify the figures. "It's very difficult to identify any of the different elements in the picture, so it's almost a question of relating these marks to these others. You see you can't tell what anything is...but somehow the relationship of each mark to another tells you that it's people…" Lloyd replies "Say you know what this is...this is like the

movie *Blow-Up*. Like the huge picture...the way the guy blew it up…" The gent replies: "So I'm told, but I did this about 18 months before...I did the painting 18 months before…"

Figure 67. Still from *Greetings* (Brian De Palma 1968)

As Lloyd look at the photograph the camera begins to give us extreme close-ups of the small postcard-sized images, as the gent shows him how he understands the various figures in it.

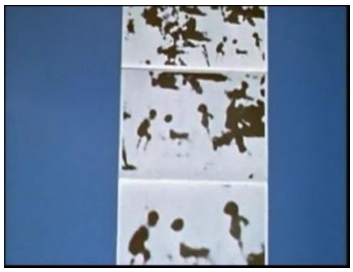

Figure 68. Still from *Greetings*

> The painting is from here… [designating a point on the photo] and from this point you can tell this is a boy...even though it's a smudge, you can still identify that it's a human and even identify the sex… you can even identify as a female and the relationship of that figure to that figure will let you know that this is a woman...this must be the mother of this thing...it's like a sort of family group. The woman is sitting in a deck chair. That blob is a head. When you blow it up a good deal more...it looks like it's a dog or something...actually I don't know what it is...but it's the relationship of this mark to those marks…

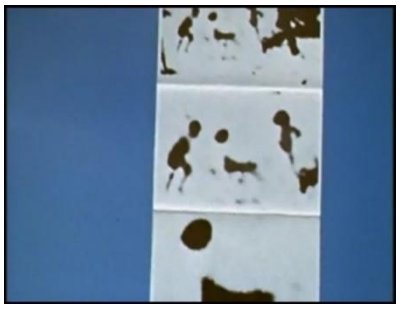

Figure 69. Still from *Greetings*

The drama with which blur analysis was so breathlessly discussed by official and unofficial investigators in relation to the blown up frames of the Zapruder film is obviously being played for laughs here. Neither man can fully make out the images before them. But the British gent, claiming Antonioni may have poached his idea, is giving Lloyd a very shaky lesson in image interpretation. On the strength of this interaction, Lloyd believes he know has the key to unlocking the assassination conspiracy in just the same way. De Palma plays the line between legibility and illegibility for comic effect here, but ultimately he is speaking to the instability of the enduring passion for conspiracy around the Zapruder film.

> Interpretation [in *Greetings*] is not just about establishing new connections or hierarchies between pre-existing elements, it literally modifies those elements themselves. This links to the whole process of conspiracy in that it extracts a certain material from objective reality and then reintegrates it, transformed into what is, despite itself, a fictional version of that reality (Thoret 87-88)

What Lloyd misses is that no vision is good enough to determine girl from woman from dog in these images. The sense that he makes from them is thus *his own* and inferentially only very weakly related to the "image" referent.

Armed with his new strategy, Lloyd goes to a photography studio with a large print and a negative, obtained by clandestine means, that he is sure contain the proof of who shot Kennedy.

He flirts with a gorgeous studio tech, explaining how this first print of the key photograph "already massive," needs to be "enlarged" in order to blow the case wide open. [133]

Figure 70. Still from ***Greetings***

He points to a white spot on the photograph that he claims is a Dallas police officer, the true assassin. Yet when he mentions the officer's name, De Palma comically bleeps it out, as if censors have entered the editing booth and given him orders to delete it. The studio tech doesn't see it, but leaves to fulfill his request. Lloyd continues to contemplate his blurs, while a photo-shoot takes place in the background. As if the reference to the film was not yet obvious, we see Lloyd look beyond his blow-up to see a model with a cameraman standing above her, replicating the eroticized photoshoot from Antonioni's film. A reverse shot of Lloyd snickering suggests that his interest in "total disclosure" has distinctly sexual undertones.[134]

His enlargements return from the lab comically quickly and further inflame Lloyd's conspiratorial ardor. In an ecstasy of revelatory fervor, Lloyd turns to directly address the camera. Holding the photograph in front of him, his hand shaking as he points towards an indiscernible white blob, he declaims vehemently: "This clearly shows that Officer 'BLEEP' was in the front and firing from the front with a Russian 6.76 millimeter rifle…But look..." The camera zooms in on the photograph showing another series of white blobs. "You can see, he's got a rifle there...SEE!?!...LOOK!..." The camera freeze-frames and then zooms in even further on the blurry photo as the sound track continues. Lloyd's frantic "SEE!?!..." fades to black.

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[133] Actually a copy of the famous Mary Moorman footage from the opposite side of Elm Street looking towards the grassy knoll.

[134] This is a key element in the emasculation of Lloyd's character as a form of sexual displacement. Throughout *Greetings* the pursuit of conspiracy produces a corresponding lack of interest in "normal" sexual pursuit. For more on this dimension, see Thoret 112-114.

Interestingly enough, while De Palma is obviously playing Lloyd's zealousness for laughs, he actually plays along by bleeping the accused assassin's name and earnestly brings us closer and closer to the image.

Figure 71. Still from *Greetings*

However much De Palma lampoons the hunt for conspirators and apes Antonioni's film, a comparison between the two films is not a spurious one. Both protagonists seek visual proof of their suspicions that never is really available in the first place. Missing the gap between image and world, they believe they have access to a crime they can only reach through photographic reproductions. At some point in the process, they are able to apprehend truth in this way, but lose that truth as they pursue it past the limit of the medium. Antonioni himself states: "The photographer in *Blow-Up* is no philosopher; he seeks to see from closer up, but as he enlarges the object too much, it decomposes and disappears. It is a moment in which he holds onto the truth only to have it slip away moments later."[135] No more a philosopher is Lloyd Clay. Seeking only to see close up, both Lloyd and Thomas ignore the limitations of the objects they reify. And in coming closer to the reality they seek, both become obsessed by the idea that the image can mean more, if only there is more of it. That its limits can be transcended by expanding the frame. What they get for their trouble are more blurs.

Document Falsification as Proof of Truth

Of the films discussed so far, two are notable for the way in which they propose themselves, through a variety of epistemological gymnastics, as their own reified object of truth. Groden's Composite of the Zapruder film proposed above is just such a film along with David

[135] Tassone 247.

Miller's *Executive Action.* Both films introduce a kind of continuity to disparate fragments that create a false sense of coherence. Paradoxically, the aspects by which they augment the original documents are considered proof of their work's evidentiary value. This section will evaluate these sequences and the remarkable double turn by which they seek to create truth out of lies.

Groden's Composite

As mentioned above, Robert Groden, in the construction of his composite version of the Zapruder film, created the first hybrid presentation of the film, a presentation proposed in the spirit that, with various manipulations and additions, the Zapruder film proves the conspiracy to assassinate the president. His argument was that despite its limitations, with certain modifications, the case for conspiracy could be made clear. However, in his effort to show "more" than anyone had previously seen of the film, his gesture actually concealed a two-fold failure. Firstly that the Zapruder film could ever show "more" that the frames that were exposed on the day of the assassination and secondly, perpetuating the idea that the apparatus of cinema can ever reproduce with integral realism a reproduction of the world as it is: the myth of total cinema.[136]

Despite Groden's insistence on supplementation, the evidentiary context into which his film emerged was not lacking. While much of the broadcast audience for *Goodnight America* had likely not had a chance to see the Zapruder film in the wake of assassination, there had been a deluge of evidence, court proceedings and legal wrangling foisted on them from the day of the shooting. In *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film*, Art Simon notes that more than 2300 articles and books were devoted to the assassination between 1963 and 1979. On television, CBS included at least one program each year from 1963 to 1965, a four-part series in June 1967, and a two-part inquiry broadcast in November 1975. And even before the House Assassinations Committee convened in 1976, at least three public interest groups—the Citizen's Commission of Inquiry, the Assassination Information Bureau and the Committee to Investigate Assassinations—were established to disseminate and spearhead efforts to launch a

[136] Here I am using André Bazin's concept, if not his theorization. See Bazin, "What is Cinema" 17-22.

new federal investigation.[137] This almost overdetermined access to information came to be defined by the lack of the Zapruder film: a common document in official channels, but missing from the public record. This key piece of visual evidence was known to the public, through the stills published by *Time/Life,* and its absence became more than just a glaring omission. A simple frustration over a lack of access had turned into a political orientation for many, as various accusations of conspiracy and cover-up became more widespread in the years after the Warren Report's release.[138] Into this environment of suspicion around "total disclosure" showing the Zapruder film on national television was almost an empty gesture: opening the doors of access after the horses of conspiracy had bolted.

Groden's composite is, in many ways, defined by this structuring absence. It must do and be more than the original film, exactly because its absence had so defined the images around the assassination. From the beginning then, the composite is not so much a piece of material evidence, but defined by the symbolism of the original. Groden's hybrid document bears the marks of a battery of expectations not only of what it would prove concerning the assassination, but the net of conspiracy and lies that it would unravel. Without access to the film it became a totem for a certain way of thinking about the American nation, government and how mainstream media organs kept their sins a secret. As proposed by Groden in 1975, the evidentiary value of the Zapruder film was next to none. Rivera's great spectacle of finally revealing the reified object of truth is undercut by its already falsified structure. As such, the space for Groden's composite film was far larger than it could ever hope to fill.

Falsification to Prove Truth: *Executive Action*

Executive Action proposes itself as its own reified object of proof. The film, almost like no other so far discussed, seeks to offer its narrative fiction as a supplement, as it were, to fill in

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[137] This list does not include the Warren Commission's initial investigation from November of 1963 and September of 1964, which were reported on extensively and then published in book form; Attorney General Ramsey Clark's pathologist's inquiry in 1968 into the available autopsy, photographs and x-ray evidence; the conspiracy trial of Clay Shaw by the New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison in 1968; the National Committee on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in 1969, an initiative initiated by the assassinations of JFK, Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.; the Rockefeller Commission's investigation of the CIA in 1975; and the House Select Committee on Assassinations begun in 1976, whose report was published in 1979. See Simon 7.

[138] See Chapter 1's outline of the public screenings discussed by Wrone.

the gaps of other sources that inform the case for conspiracy. In this way it bases its intervention on the ability of film to imagine the conspiracy outside of Zapruder's frame and communicate the structure of that conspiracy. It is its faith in this capacity to educate through spectacle upon which it founds its case.

This educational aspect is noted by Art Simon as well in *Dangerous Knowledge.* The evidentiary process of the film proceeds by the logic of a series of ersatz history lessons, "...each accompanied by visual aids supplied by the film's main characters" (Simon 175). In this way it is similar to the courtroom model introduced above, where exhibits are presented to the audience as jury. Each step in the planning and execution of the conspiracy is thus foretold from the beginning. This approach is exemplified at several points in the film, but is clearest in the expository revelation of the assassination at the conspirators' mansion at the beginning of the film.

The conspirators gather at an elegant mansion to develop their sinister plan. Farrington, head of operations, begins enlightening the murderous group about the history of presidential assassinations in America. This story is supplemented with the history of the long and troubled history of interrelationships between the nation's intelligence agencies, their connections with the presidency and the frosty relations between JFK and the various heads of these institutions. This information is projected onto a screen as a slideshow which we are subjected to, as are the conspirators, in a darkened room.

Figure 72. Stills from *Executive Action* (David Miller 1973)

Other lessons follow. Lee Harvey Oswald is portrayed as the ideal scapegoat for the crime; Farrington narrates the lesson while other conspirators give their commentary. They point out how all the evidence, flashing on the screen as documents and archival photographs of Oswald, suggests the involvement of intelligence agencies grooming Oswald from the start of his

military career. Oswald's history continues through his visits to the Soviet Union, with the commentary that the Russians have bought into his cover story as an authentic defector. Oswald's return to the United States is chronicled with documentary precision right down to his one-way ticket to Fort Worth, Texas, as well as his shadowy contact with all American intelligence agencies.

While this lecture of sorts fulfills the expository obligations of the narrative, it must be noted that *Executive Action* does not use documentary evidence as narrative device nor as factual support, but as raw material. The line between the fact and fiction often blurs, however. In the introduction, a black and white picture of a luxurious mansion takes its place among others in a long line of documentary photographs only to fade into colour to form the establishing shot for the fictionalized mansion that will house the conspirators. This transition becomes an alibi *Executive Action* uses frequently in order to use documentary evidence for narrative and fictional purposes. However, these connections often dissolve under closer inspection. As Art Simon points out, the extended news montages that occur throughout the film, through framing device of televisions in various living-rooms and social spaces, are clearly not the product of original broadcasts. "Images of JFK signing the [nuclear] test ban treaty are preceded by excerpts of congressional testimony... against the treaty…"[139] They are montages created by the filmmakers for a very specific goal.

By wrapping lessons on the conspiracy to kill JFK in narrative garb, many points that would be questionable if presented in a lecture format emerge as narrative truths. There is no need to explain the reasons for the conspiracy or how it was accomplished, because it transpires on the screen before our eyes. One could compare this kind of intellectual smuggling to Mark Lane's work on the book and film *Rush to Judgment*. In fabricating a case for the legal defense of the slain accused Oswald, Lane is allowed to poke numerous holes in the Warren Commission's "prosecution" of the assassin.[140] In that case, the goal was at least intellectually honest; in *Executive Action*, however, the interweaving of fact and fiction leads us inexorably

[139] For more examples, see Simon 177-178.

[140] This great book and the following film by Emile De Antonio, though related, are beyond the purview of this investigation. However, their very interesting perspectives on the assassination and the conspiracy that surrounds it is highly recommended.

away from any conception of the whole truth of the events of the assassination and towards the plausible deniability of the fiction.

This narrative framing as an escape valve through which the film is able to vent any real historical tension, is paradoxically constructed around the reification and certain "real" documents (Oswald's passport and historical papers, etc.) and the denigration of others, produced at the behest of the conspirators. Through this mindboggling bit of cinematic trickery, Miller is able to use fiction to falsify a real historical document, in support of his fiction. The sequence takes place in a photo studio where the photograph of Oswald in his backyard toting a rifle, a pistol and a newspaper, which will play a key role in his posthumous conviction for the crime, is created. Through a series of extreme close up shots an elaborate "photo-fit" process is reconstructed showing how different parts of the image can be cut and pasted and then re-photographed to create the composite image required by the conspirators.

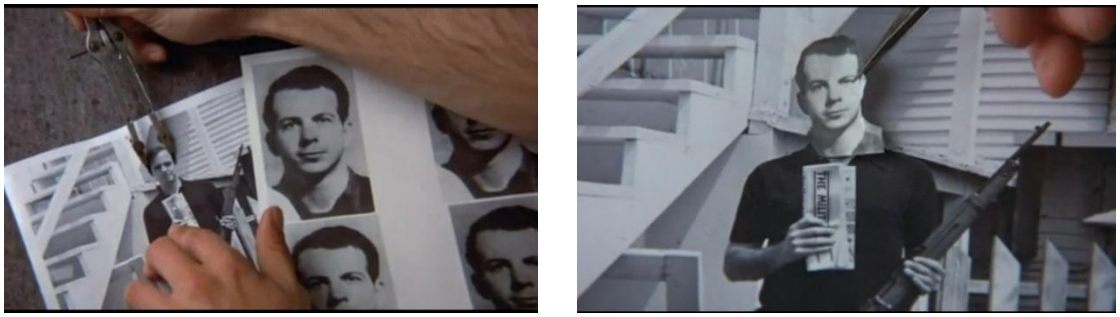

Figure 73. Stills from *Executive Action*

Art Simon, too, notes this as a double fudging both inside the narrative and outside. "While the narrative acknowledges the manipulation of images, suggesting in the manner of the buff's skepticism that things are often not as they appear, it insists that the spectator accept its own archival imagery [i.e., its own manipulations] as sound evidence" (178).[141]

But beyond these contradictions, *Executive Action* must be seen as using the manipulations of cinema for its traditional means: to rule out the idea that there was any

[141] The square brackets here represent my own interpretation.

manipulation at all; to obfuscate, to misdirect, and to hermeneutically stall. Thus its contradictory stance in the pursuit of "full disclosure" shows the necessarily self-referential nature of the cinematic apparatus. Rather than closing the debate, they have simply provided more fodder for the conspiracy buffs to gnaw on. Rather than a film apart, proposing itself as its own evidence, its meticulously constructed framework of interlacing fact and fiction endlessly defers resolution in favour of more "evidence."

Conclusions: Tragedy of the Failed Investigation

No matter what the approach of the films discussed above, they all bear the mark of a lasting historical trauma. But it would be a mistake to identify that trauma exclusively for its political, economic or even cultural dimensions. The issues discussed above propose that we consider them for their connection to the instability in the structure of representation proposed by the Zapruder film: most notably the myth of cinema's total ability to extend vision and memory.

The lack of resolution that defines so many of these narratives has less to do with the historical events which they echo, and point towards a more profound question at the heart of such narratives: does this trauma ever truly end? Perhaps the visual and narrative interventions discussed above can be seen as only extending the damage; a morbid compulsion to repeat rather than work through. However, with a closer look it is obvious that fiction film, like any other form, holds within it the potential for constant reevaluation of camera vision and the doubt that its attractions only thinly veil the "death's head" beneath the skin of the film.

These are only a few of the films that deal with the assassination of the president and with the conspiracies that defined American culture in its wake. They were chosen for the specific qualities by which they allude to, gesture towards, or in some way try to express the crisis proposed by the Zapruder film. The echoes of its implications for fiction film are wide reaching, and for numerous reasons, too numerous to fully explore here. Perhaps it is the Zapruder film's fate to have an everlasting ghostly presence in the media landscape, haunting films that deal with sudden death with mysterious implications. But it is more cogently put as an ongoing crisis that is viewable through these films. As "magnifying glasses" (as Thoret refers to them) through which the Zapruder film is examined, they lead to a more fundamental examination of the crisis in which it participates. Like a repetitive compulsion that never leads to

a working through the same tools are used again and again ineffectively to heal a wound that never truly closes.

Throughout this chapter the question of interpretation has returned again and again to dog the best intentions of image producers. Communication in this way will always be complicated by misreadings and false connections. But it is perhaps through the reiteration of these missed connections that the gaps discussed can truly be seen. As opposed to any morbid compulsion, and on the strength of the above investigation, a more productive thesis may be proposed. The trauma of the president's death is less what was done in November 1963, but what is perpetuated through the assumption that an amateur's home video holds the key. The value of the Zapruder film here is not in its form, even less in its content, but how it points to the gap beneath the cinematic images in which we rest our desires and ambitions to control the world they represent. Engaging productively with this gap is necessarily an acknowledgement of the limitations of the apparatus, but also necessarily our own.

In no way should these popular films be seen as lesser than those discussed in other places in this thesis; lesser by means of influence or lesser in terms of the statements they make. In a very real sense these films attest to the concerns and cultural undercurrents that dogged the public in the wake of the president's assassination, which still echo today. In the following chapter, the narrative and cinematic solutions discussed here will give way to a whole new set of digital tools with which filmmakers and technicians will attempt to resolve the events of November 22 1963, and make the Zapruder film itself "speak" more than the previous analog media could. What we will see is that these same challenges remain, and that the overwhelming advancements in digital technology only serve to re-mediate them unless new engagements that productively engage with the crisis that underlies the images can be found.

Chapter 5: The Digital Dossier: Zapruder in the Age of AutoCAD

The digital revolution has affected the legacy of the Zapruder film in the same way as it has much of the visual culture of the twentieth century. It is now running, on a loop, at any time in any place with an internet connection, accompanied by an army of clipped, copied, annotated and altered versions with any number of theories attached. A viewer can watch the film as often as they desire and manipulate it to a certain degree as well. Some applications offer slow-motion and zoom features and with capture software, the viewer can download the clip directly for further manipulation on their device. This situation is a far cry from the dark and dusty college auditoriums where Zapruder's flickering images (several times removed from the original) would be projected in complete silence. For this reason, the Zapruder film is an excellent test case for shocking and traumatic films in the digital age. It brings to full fruition Bazin's discussion of cinema's repeatability, along with the prophetic title "Death Every Afternoon" now realized to an unlimited degree. We are now some distance from the spectators in their seats at the Grand Café in Paris in 1896, shocked and appalled as a train seems to come right towards them from the screen. With a few clicks of a button viewers can now see a U.S President's head explode in the context of assassination films with differing levels of graphic content from different time periods, countries, and political situations. The Zapruder film must be considered, then, as part of a constantly present yet constantly changing visual context. Its digital milieu is in constant flux. Two views on YouTube will render different suggestions of other films that would compare or have been viewed by other users. It is endlessly annotated by other viewing patterns, offering endless avenues for further comment. In a word, the Zapruder film in digital form is no longer unique in form or in content. It is a clip, constantly played against the endless white noise of other clips.

This chapter will discuss the digital after-life of the Zapruder film with its reconstruction on DVD and online as primary texts. We will explore how the endlessly iterable digital environment into which it has entered, shows "more" as well as "less" of the revelations discussed in other chapters. In a world or fragments, the Zapruder film is drained of its formal shock and joins the rest of its "undead" brethren as another piece of the visual flotsam and jetsam of digital life. However, that has not stopped artists and technicians from engaging with the film in a way that echoes earlier interventions. In an age of computer-assisted design, where full-scale

models of cinematic environments can be created, where footage can be manipulated in almost innumerable ways, its impact has never been so stable, and yet so unstable at the same time.

Though it may be amusing to plumb the depths of the internet's clip-o-sphere to see what people have done and are doing with the Zapruder film,[142] its proliferation and assimilation into the morass of internet conspiracy belies how quickly the film was digitally captured, examined and reproduced. This chapter will start with the original digital restoration of the film by MPI Home Video in 1997 at the behest of the Zapruder family, and the heralded release of the DVD as a "collector's item for all Americans!"[143] The resolution of the "public ownership" problem that dogged the release of the original film will be considered less a victory in the long struggle for access, and more a re-inscription, this time on a massive scale, of the issues concerned in its initial national broadcast. Though Zapruder's nightmare of the film being available in Time Square, with barkers inviting citizens to "See the president's head explode!" (Stolley 134-135), had already been partially realized, the misguided interpretations of his film's truth value would now be imprinted into the very structure of the digital document.

From one public release to another, we will turn to a full digital reconstruction of the assassination event released by NBC News in 2004 as part of a one-hour feature entitled *Beyond Conspiracy*. The computer-assisted design employed in this reconstruction was, again, promoted as the antidote to the endless haggling over the evidentiary claims of the original film and its interpreters. The reconstruction is a materialization of the fantasies of "total cinema" created from the very first panoramic visions of early cinema. *Beyond Conspiracy*'s claim to fully and conclusively end the debate by proving the single-bullet theory largely falls flat because of this phantasmagoric three dimensional space. Likewise, 2015's *A Coup in Camelot* (Stephen Goetsch) introduces another digital reconstruction, this time using an unprecedented High Definition scan of the Zapruder film at 4K-6K (between 4000-6000 DPI). This technology, the highest resolution available to the modern industry, creates yet another digital environment to prove the case for conspiracy in rejection of the conclusions in *Beyond Conspiracy*. The contradiction presented by these proofs, supposedly using the same evidentiary material, not only falsify their conclusions, but allude to the gaps inherent in the raw material they treat as a bona-

[142] A few minutes on YouTube renders three alien abductions, three Cuban assassins, three accusations that the Zapruder film is itself a forgery and many other examples.

[143] An oft-cited claim included on the DVD's cover and in promotional material.

fide link to the real world. Like so many reconstructions already discussed, each manipulation of the original is believed to preserve the evidentiary value intact, however it only highlights the crisis in representation to which the Zapruder film draws attention.

The final digital intervention discussed here will be the one of the most genuinely novel digital recreations currently available. A New Zealand technician, creating digital collages of the Zapruder film stills using the photographic software he employs to create satellite maps to chart weather systems,[144] has reproduced a series of moving panoramas that bypass many of the contradictions already discussed. Using digital tools that acknowledge the limits of the original, Antony Davison has created fluid texts that do not confirm or deny the evidentiary value of the original. The result is a hyper-textual image that, in many ways, defies classification as document, film or conceptual art work. In echoing some of the earliest forms of panoramic attractions, Davison preserves the most important qualities of the Zapruder film, while hinting at the possibilities for digital artists to address the gap between image and world in a new way.

As in previous chapters, these analyses will address the Zapruder film as the flawed raw material for continued ruminations on the epistemological value of the moving image. As we will see, employing a vast armature of techniques designed to ever more precisely remediate the analog image, including features designed to supplement and augment the original ultimately fail to bridge the epistemological divide fundamental to the master film. Though so many filmmakers discussed in previous chapters have addressed or engaged this gap, the digital arena will be one where new technologies frequently re-inscribe the faith in the cinematic extension of vision.

The Digital Interventions: A Historical Introduction

What made all of these digital versions of the Zapruder film possible was the shifting ownership of the camera original negative at the end of the twentieth century. On April 24, 1997, the Assassinations Records and Review Board voted that the US Government should take possession of the original film when it reverted from the Zapruder heirs in the form of the LMH Corporation, established when the original reverted to them from *Life* magazine in 1975 (Wrone 268). This point is significant in that the Board was content to obtain the original film rather than

[144] Antony Davison uses Adobe Photoshop and AfterEffects to achieve his images. See below for a full discussion with references.

negotiating the restoration and reproduction rights. These rights were given to MPI Home Video by the LMH Corporation in anticipation of the August 1st 1998 deadline in a double move cited by some critics as part of the family's and distributors' quest "...for public ownership and public access to the film, while at the same time making a profit" (Trask 327).

The conflict that tied up the transfer of the original film into the hands of the government centered on what was "fair and just compensation" (Wrone 268) for the original. While sources vary on how much the government offered for the film, the amount was somewhere between one million and three million dollars; the Zapruder family demanded thirty million (Vågnes 98). Both sides, through a lengthy legal struggle involving competing appraisals, ended on the figure of sixteen million (Vågnes 101).[145] While negotiations focused on the fixed amount for the camera-original film, LMH Corporation sold the rights to digitize the film, in part fearing that the government's offer would include the copyright. The corporation thus "...sought to control the film's distribution to the public, in the form of a DVD, while it still could" (Vågnes 96). This good faith, and profitable, gesture set the scene for promoting the digital release of the Zapruder film as a public-access campaign. In anticipation of the court's ruling, MPI Home video issued the pre-release promotional material mentioned earlier in the summer of 1997.

For many assassination scholars and critics, Zapruder-faithfuls and Zapruder-doubters, the film's digitization was virgin territory. The DVD's evidentiary value put old debates over authenticity, conspiracy and manipulation back on the table. In what follows, the structure of MPI's DVD will be examined to show how the distribution company sought to forestall the continuation of such debate over the digital Zapruder film. And how these initiatives, so tied to establishing the new copy's evidentiary, truth and commodity value, forestalled the film's disruption of conventional modes of representation from the very beginning.

Analysis of MPI's 1998 Restoration

Image of an Assassination: A New Look at the Zapruder Film attempts to live up to its title in numerous ways. We must remember that in 1998, commercial DVD releases were still heralded events and that a DVD's supplemental materials were not merely expected (as they may be today) but were real selling points. In contrast to the clunky VHS or Laserdisc media, still in circulation and use at the time, MPI's DVD release is heavy on extra features. There are four

[145] For more information on this legal battle, see Wrone 67-74 and Vågnes 91-101.

reproductions of the original 26 seconds of footage in various aspect ratios: close-up frame, full frame, medium frame and wide frame.

Setting aside for the moment this slightly ridiculous parsing of the image into imaginary aspect ratios, the film itself is accompanied by a four-part documentary series narrating the story of the Zapruder film through on-screen text, voice-overs, interviews and film clips. These chapters entitled "Capturing the Image," "Sale of the Image," "Public Screenings," and "Renewing the Image," seek to create the DVD as an enduring document. Indeed, the DVD, instead of promoting its subject, could rather be seen as a promotion of the digital restoration process. A substantial section of the DVD, devoted to interviews and documentary footage of the processes by which the film was digitally archived, is instructive for the ways in which images of the technicians involved in the process act as support for the images they produce.
This section, entitled "Renewing the Image," begins with a discussion of the importance of the film and how past archival efforts have damaged it. The creation of a state-of-the-art archival copy of the Zapruder film is essential to its evidentiary value. *A New Look…* thus provides a litany of proof of this copy's authenticity vis-a-vis the original. Joseph Berabe is introduced as the "Director of Scientific Imaging" and an expert in photo-macrography, who ships his specialized material to an official National Archives establishment in College Park, Maryland, for the processing. We are assured that MPI Teleproductions was present from the very beginning to record the process. We are further given a rundown of the technology involved: A Zeiss Luminar 40mm Lens f4.5 12x magnification and Kodak 6121 transparency duplicating film in the 4x5 inch format. The method by which Berabe was able to process the film without damaging it is then explained. He developed his own system by which he could encase the entire length of the original Zapruder in a series of tiny polyester sleeves, moving the frames under the cameras lens, photographing each of them without the polyester, and then moving them on undamaged. Photographing each of the 486 frames separately caused great concern about consistency, and the film spends particular time on the pains taken to ensure the calibration of the equipment so that the exposure and colour balance remains the same. For example: one bulb was used throughout for lighting the entire process, as was film with the same emulsion number. Each exposure was timed to be exactly the same length.

Figure 74. Stills from *Image of an Assassination: A New Look at the Zapruder Film* (MPI Home Video 1998)

Each frame was enlarged to 4x5 inches on the Kodak 6121 transparency film from film edge to film edge ensuring the capture of the sprocket-hole area of the negative, so contentious to earlier reproductions. Adam King and the team at King Visual Technology then developed the transparencies, careful to maintain colour balance. After the chemical process, each enlarged frame is investigated one by one for defects and problems in the development, and then sent back to the archives in Maryland in a binder. With the transparencies at the archives, the digitization process begins. Digital technician Todd Murphy explains the process by which each frame was scanned at up to 1500 DPI so that they could be further blown up to the point that there would be enough space outside the image to "motion-track" the frames. Each image was then re-aligned precisely according to picture frame and sprocket-hole measurement and then animated, stabilizing the image. The team then made a second pass to further stabilize the film to account for movements deemed to be the result of camera jitter. We are assured that with "the digital tools available today, the technicians brought out as many details as possible from the original optical print."[146] We then see screens full of Zapruder frames in numerous windows being manipulated by mouse cursors, contrast and brightness being adjusted, etc.

Figure 75. *Image of an Assassination: A New Look at the Zapruder Film*

[146] All quotes in this section are from interviews in the "Renewing the Image" section of the film.

Murphy assures us that this makes the digital reproduction look "a lot better than the original footage." Dust and scratches were removed, except that around the original splices, where the film was so damaged, little could be done in any format. The film is then rendered and sequenced into its original format at 18 fps for the final product.

Throughout these discussions the technology of photo development and reproduction is proudly displayed. Each of the above steps brings a new expert who confidently presents the work as top of the line and state of the art. The detail of this documentation is indeed astounding, and mimics the kind of product enhancement one sees from film distributors such as Criterion, which, before the advent of Bluray, released two-and three-DVD sets detailing the painstaking work involved in the restoration of cinematic classics. MPI's conscientious detailing of its restoration is, however, not what attracts cinephiles. We must first connect this exhaustive detail with the nature of the Zapruder film as a national artifact (though at this time still held privately by the LMH Corporation) and secondly with the effort to ward off the criticism that followed the film's original processing.[147] With its understanding of the Zapruder film as an archived national treasure, MPI is very much selling the value added to its DVD product through the processing of the original film. As an act of commercialism, this presentation could be excused. As an effort to conserve the evidentiary as the film passes from analog to digital, however, the presentation hints at a much deeper anxiety over the decay of visual evidence in the digital age.

At each stage in the above process, the camera is used to document and to emphasize how the processing of the Zapruder original all the way to the final digital rendering maintains the pristine and even 'virgin' nature (read: evidentiary value) of the original. That evidentiary value is never questioned, as it is the entire foundation on which the value of the new copy rests. This fact is manifest in the overdetermined link between the two copies where the digital technician Todd Murphy, channeling Robert Groden in 1975, asserts that he has even improved on the evidentiary value of the original with a series of minute adjustments.[148]

> Once we stabilized the footage and make sure that everything registered very well, we took another pass… that stabilized the original camera jittering, to get rid of any motion that would have been the artifact of hand-held camera… [the film] goes through many

[147] See Chapter 1 for a full discussion of the botched processing, copying and distribution of the original Zapruder copies.
[148] Video interview as part of the MPI DVD. This video is a chapter entitled "Renewing the image."

> different angles (sic) and there are different levels of exposure that the camera was not able to correct. Also there were some dark areas towards the end where we were able to get more out of the film, by ramping those levels up and down as the camera passed through the sequence, which I think look a lot better than in the original footage…

Recent developments in digital restoration antiquate Mr. Murphy and the other technicians' boastful claims of the "four-step colouration process" and "archival quality digital copies." The mere fact that the process is half analog (the film photography of the frames into blown-up transparencies) and half digital (the digitization of those transparencies) shows what a slight departure this was in the history of such technologies.

Discounting the claims it makes for itself, MPI's digitization process in this section shows not a departure from the original processes by which the Zapruder film was developed, but simply a greater consciousness of its value. Doubly frustrating is the way in which it proposes as resolutions aspects which merely re-inscribe the lack of resolution inherent in the original. Here we see a commercial process by which the Zapruder film is monetized with its value linked directly to those aspects that the original inherently problematizes: a direct link between camera and world. As a result, the Zapruder film is drained of its essential shocks and reformatted for its commodity value. However, it is the ostensible control over the film itself, offered by its new format, which constitutes its most celebrated value.

MPI stakes its claim to superiority of this digital Zapruder film on a number of different aspects. Firstly, its four viewing formats: Namely "close-up frame," "full frame," "medium frame," and "wide frame." I hesitate to call these aspect ratios because, in an effort to make them internally coherent, the size of the frames seems to be arbitrary by any external measure. Nor is the value of the digital reproduction, a scanning of the camera-original Zapruder film, necessarily new in its ability to "cleanse" or stabilize the image. This goal was mostly accomplished by Groden's original composite of the film broadcast on *Goodnight America* in 1975. In terms of adding to the already seen copy, MPI's digitization does include a new dimension of the film only seen by technicians until then. Those sections of the exposed film cropped out of earlier copies, the so-called "sprocket-hole" images to the extreme left of Zapruder's original negative.

Figure 76. Frames 162 & 266 of the Zapruder film as shown in *Image of an Assassination*

However, these reformatted versions do little beyond Groden's original image enhancement of 1975. Whether in close-up, full, medium, or wide frame, on a large screen with zoom functions enabled, in slow motion or frame-by-frame, MPI's DVD release did little to quash the numerous existing debates over the authenticity or evidentiary value of the Zapruder film. In fact, it started just as many debates among those more technologically savvy critics who took issue with the digital remastering, just as their counterparts decades before had taken issue with the mismanagement of the analog copies.[149]

In both its documentary and reproduction sections, along with pages of charmingly outdated onscreen text, *Image of an Assassination: A New Look at the Zapruder Film* shores up a Maginot line of technical arguments for its uniqueness as a historical document. In truth, the exaggerated claims of the DVD's cover fit conveniently into the already existing canon of assassination literature. The easy assimilation of this installment of the digital Zapruder film into endless assassination debates is evidence of its missing a key intervention already discussed in reference to experimental and fiction interventions: namely that the Zapruder film is more important for what it conceals rather than what it shows. The ultimate goal of all these processes is paradoxically by adding epistemological value to their product, they are already confining it to its historical, technological and political epoch. By freezing the Zapruder film in 1997, MPI Home Video hoped to create a cultural artifact with the impact of the original, or something akin to a time capsule. In truth, what their version ends up retaining and replicating are the doubts and frustrations endemic to the promises of all mechanical recordings of the visual world.

[149] Many different authors and critics have gone into great detail on this subject to prove that the Zapruder film, widely available, and with which Groden worked, was a forgery. See Bugliosi, 450-512 for a good roundup of all these theories.

Paradoxically, the release of the DVD for purchase, so heralded as a bid for public access to the Zapruder film, spawned the release of an immense number of digital bootlegs, available for free online. From two years after the its release on DVD, [150] any computer with an internet connection had access to the Zapruder film for viewing, download and manipulation ad infinitum. As a by-product of its DVD release, MPI virtually assured the public ownership and archiving of the Zapruder film, albeit in a proliferation of dubiously sourced copies. No longer do we need crass barkers bellowing at passers-by hawking the material, as Zapruder feared. A modest search for information on President Kennedy on Google or Wikipedia will quickly lead to a multitude of clips from the film.

This assimilation of the Zapruder film into the content flow of digital environments is hardly the kind of visibility alluded to in this project. The "more is better" logic of the marketplace here meets its ideal companion in the digitally truncated structure of the film. Those arguing for years with LMH Corporation, *Time/Life* and the federal government for access to the footage have now very much become victims of their own success as discussions over the killing of a president take place cheek by jowl next to discussion of the latest celebrity wardrobe malfunction.[151] The way in which the Zapruder film reveals the gap between what the camera sees and our expectations of that vision is inherently misread in the very structure of the digital medium. The "original sin" that MPI's digitization proliferates through its digitization has nothing to do with disrupting the evidentiary value of the film, which they are keen to maintain. It is in the way that that digitization is structured to resolve the unresolvable holes in the original that truly defines the undying return. While proposing itself as an opening up of the Zapruder film as a text, a laying bare of its full implications, MPI is only successful in perpetuating the problem. As we will see, a series of digital interventions will take a similar approach to remove the limits from the Zapruder film, only to curiously re-construct them as part of their intervention.

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[150] The original release date of the DVD was June 1, 2002, though the development and shooting were all completed 5 years earlier. Online copies began circulating widely around 2004. See Vågnes 136-152 for a discussion of this proliferation.

[151] The crass connection may seem strange, but YouTube searches self-select on the basis of previous searches and corporate investment. Serious subjects are often mixed in a list of more prurient material.

Beyond Conspiracy: The ABC News Reconstruction (2003)

As if in answer to the, by then, widely-available digital clips of the Zapruder film, ABC News entered the digital Zapruder debates in 2003 with a special on the Kennedy assassination called *JFK: Beyond Conspiracy.* This special feature-length broadcast was ambitious in its scope: to dispel all conspiracy surrounding JFK's murder. Peter Jennings and his crew sought to finally prove the single bullet theory, and generally-speaking the Warren Commission's assessment, as the only rational and acceptable explanation for the assassination. Moving, dismissively at times, through theories about Cuban expats, mob hitmen, the CIA's "men in black," Texas police incompetence, etc., they bring witnesses and testimony from a variety of sources to discount each in succession. The logic of the news special incorporates the Zapruder film as an essential piece of visual evidence associated with the assassination, yet paradoxically proposing that it must be analyzed anew in the age of digital-image processing. There is little to no discussion of MPI's digital reproduction of the original Zapruder film, instead what is featured is a full digital reconstruction of the event. This reconstruction is important for the way in which it delivers, in the most spectacularly misguided way, on the extension of camera vision into digital environment.

The one-hour special *The Kennedy Assassination: Beyond Conspiracy* was originally broadcast in November of 2003, 40 years after the assassination. The avowed goal of Peter Jennings and the ABC news team from the beginning was to prove beyond all doubt who killed John F. Kennedy and lay to rest the various theories that abound concerning the assassination, such as Russian interests, Mafia involvement, the CIA cover-up, various Cuban connections, etc. As such the report stays very close to the Warren Commission's assessment of the facts.[152] The context for this proof is a long and emotional introduction that narrativizes not only the events of the day, but their emotional impact on the American people. This set-up takes a notably paternalistic tone in its acknowledgment of the desire and even need for conspiracy. This perspective is summed up in the words of Evan Thomas, a Robert Kennedy biographer, saying: "When something terrible happens in the life of a nation, there has to be a reason for it. It's not good enough to say: 'Some nut with a rifle killed JFK.' Such a monstrous thing must have a

[152] To be clear: Lee Harvey Oswald, unaided or abetted, fired three shots from the window of the sixth floor of the Texas School Book depository at a car moving 11.2 mph away from him at distance of 81 m and an angle of 17 degrees in 5.6 seconds. He hit President Kennedy twice, the first bullet missing, the second wounding both the President and Governor Connally, and the third hitting the President in the head killing him.

monstrous plot [behind it]..."[153] Over a montage of now familiar images of Kennedy taking the fateful ride into Dallas, interviewees continue the conciliatory yet patronizing tone. "At a time of emotional rupture...a time of tragedy...conspiracy theories offer purpose and meaning. Purpose and meaning that make tragedy more than a simple twist of fate at the hands of, in this case, a lone gunman…"[154]

The Zapruder film enters as the report's central piece of evidence and is introduced by the Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist and famous single-bullet theorist Gerald Posner. He attests to the evidentiary validity and even the necessity of the film. As it runs on screen, he says: "The Zapruder film is a visual record of the assassination. To think that if the film did not exist...that home movie of the assassination did not exist, we would *never* be able to prove with *any* certainty what happened at Dealey Plaza." At this point the TV special takes a turn for the dramatic. As Kennedy, stricken, bends forward to receive the death blow, the voice of Dale Myers, unseen, says "...ninety percent of what is out there is conspiracy-oriented..." The shot cuts to the animator, computer in the background showing his reconstruction, concluding dismissively, almost combatively: "Talk about all the theories you want... This thing only happened...one...way." One could easily add "...and I'm going to show it to you."

Figure 77. Stills from *JFK: Beyond Conspiracy* (ABC News 2003)

The digital reconstruction, looking disturbingly like one of the first-person shooter videogames for which the software is often used, then jumps onto the screen. The effect is jarring compared to the mostly archival and interview footage we've seen so far. Jennings then introduces the reconstruction and the arduous task of capturing all of the relevant detail from the geography of

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[153] "The Kennedy Assassination: Beyond Conspiracy," *ABC NEWS,* November 20 2003. Available on YouTube: URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qi14A20MJbE. This link presents a re-broadcast of the special through the BBC service in the United Kingdom.

[154] Robert Goldberg interviewed in the same ABC news special.

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the Dealey Plaza and the buildings therein: length of the road and its angle, width of Elm Street, the height of the school book depository, the speed and dimensions of the vehicles involved, etc. right down the infinitesimal details of curb height, cant of the grassy knoll, etc.[155]

Figure 78. Stills from *JFK: Beyond Conspiracy*

These details were then fed into a digital design program, LightWave 3D. This program, usually used in the design of virtual models for commercial and entertainment purposes, created a three-dimensional model of the location and the objects involved. The idea was to enable a three-dimensional view of the space of Dealey Plaza and relevant buildings and objects from any angle, as in a game simulator or design program. Trajectories could be calculated, speeds and times slowed, all with constant relationships between the variables. Notable for this project, any position at any point in the Zapruder film could be pinpointed and the "camera" position changed to put the president in longshot, close-up, low or high angle, along with those physically impossible at the time, (i.e., directly above the president's limousine, directly behind the shooter, etc.) These views are presented as having considerable evidentiary value in that they present a factually accurate, "scientific" in the words of their creator, 3D model of the event in full motion and in real time. The digital augmentations are here embraced as the indisputable proof of truth because of the intensified or augmented 'cinematic-ness' of its construction. The president's limousine proceeds smoothly through the three-dimensional environment. There are no onlookers to obscure the view, only JFK and Governor Connelly are in the car, no Jacqueline Kennedy, no driver, no secret service agents clambering into the reproduction to distract from the key elements. All elements are removed except for those that relate directly to the assassination.

[155] From his own website, Myers lists the following sources: A survey map of Dealey Plaza, Blueprints of the Texas School Book Depository, the original body draft of the modified 1961 Lincoln convertible, prepared by The Hess & Eisenhardt Company, Rubber molds and plaster castings were created from life-size clay busts of President Kennedy and Governor John B. Connally. See www.jfkfiles.com for more details.

Not only can it do everything that film can do, it has the precision detail of a digital program to back up its conclusions. Measurements of space and time hitherto only guessed at on the basis of a comparison between the photographic record and the space of the plaza become actualized as specific and unquestionable quantities. Thus bullet trajectories are established, travel times and distances covered could be calculated, all conclusively "proving" the single-bullet theory of the Warren Commission.

The special continues to consider, in bad faith I would add, the most notable conspiracy theories associated with the assassination: KGB involvement, Cuban expats, Mob hitmen, the CIA itself, a Texas police cabal, etc., all to prove its case, with the addition of a number of other witnesses, authors and associated experts. However, it is the digitization of the Zapruder film as digital panorama that remains the cornerstone of its case, and its main attraction. This conviction is based in a certain accepted value of Zapruder's footage, but entails a critical misreading of the nature of film itself. While ABC News may think that they are laying demons to rest, they only resurrect them in a new form. The digital reconstruction here makes material on screen the fictional cinematic environment unattainable through previous mechanically recorded means.

First, the Zapruder film is overstated in its evidentiary prominence and importance. Gerald Posner's grandiose pronouncements that we would "have no idea what happened in Dealey Plaza..." without the Zapruder film, are belied by the extension and expanded functionality of the reconstruction. For *Beyond Conspiracy*, the "most important 26 seconds of film in US history" is only improved by the digital expansion; the evidentiary value of the original is not drained by its digital makeover, only enhanced. This gap, on the surface, may seem to point to only the insufficiencies of the latter. But, in the light of previous discussions, we must take seriously the perspective that it put the value of the original in doubt as well. If the Zapruder film needs a digital supplement, in addition to all the other analog supplements it has received over the years, perhaps this fact only proves its evidentiary lack. Such teleological thinking is always a danger in this form of remediation.[156]

The reconstruction's detail, correlating every spatial and temporal element in exact relation to every other, is held up as the fundamental proof of its own and the TV special's

[156] Here I am invoking, of course, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's concept of remediation. The way in which new media can shape or re-interpret the texts made with older analog media. This remediation can be done to productive or to reductive ends. See their introduction for the broad strokes of the argument. Bolter and Grusin 2-19.

conclusions. This detail is, in effect, augmentation by the addition of a spatial continuum, to go along with the temporal continuum of the original Zapruder copy. Just as we can run the original back and forth, breaking down the event to the base rate of $^{1}/_{18}$ of a second, a digital reconstruction can break the event down to a three-dimensional panorama that can account for fractions of inches and degrees of elevation. [157] To slow down the Zapruder film's 486 frames, in effect to make a greater number of frames, to increase the frame rate from 18.3 fps to a much greater number, extends the film. But it does not create any more frames than Zapruder exposed on that day. It takes more time to watch but it does not extend the time of the event. To digitize the image and increase the number of pixels per frame in order to blow up the image the size of a bus shelter, does not increase the clarity of the images taken by Zapruder. Small blurs become big blurs. Manipulation of the image that seeks to make it speak beyond its capacity here gives way to the creation of one that will.

Dale Myers may well never have heard of Bazin's "Myth of Total Cinema," however his digital space of Dealey Plaza expresses it in a shockingly concrete way. His reconstruction, by the author's own assertions, speaks louder than the original ever could. The limitations of the analog Zapruder film (single viewpoint, limited temporal manipulability, blurry, grainy visuals, etc.) are hardly a problem for Myers. They are simply the raw material from which he is able to reconstruct his "scientific" proof. Thus whatever ABC's intention in propping up the evidentiary value of the original Zapruder film, Myers' reconstruction is not meant to support that claim, but to replace it. Though Robert Groden could only use the analog originals as sources in his video studio, Myers can shear the limits away from those sources to create his own document; adding evidentiary value "à la carte" in terms of functionalities of the frame (360 degree views, superimposed trajectories, etc.) His fictional space *proves* in a way that Groden's can only *suggest*. But, of course, what the reconstruction proves, beyond anything else, is the hole at the center of the camera's relationship to the world. It is the gap alluded to by the Zapruder film in the first place which the reconstruction seeks to surmount. While confidently filling the evidentiary lacunae that are so painfully lacking in the original as no other text before, Myers succeeds only to highlight what our desires were for that original and its medium in the first place. As such, the specials' claims hold no more water than any of those based on full-scale reconstructions of an analog nature, including the official (and most legally consequential) one

[157] Not to mention the conventional 1/30 frame rate of digital image creation.

done by the Warren Commission in 1964 or any of those discussed in this work. [158]As such, *Beyond Conspiracy's* reconstruction holds the conviction that a film like Zapruder's is still an open text after his supplementation and augmentation explicitly closes it.

For all the fears of analog cinema being swallowed up by the next generation of digital imaging technologies, the desire to control time and space through increasingly complex devices, lives on. The camera is not replaced, in the reconstruction of *Beyond Conspiracy*, by a different kind of vision. The difference is simply one of degree in the relationship between the image produced and what the device that produces it is expected to do. In frank terms, the Myers' reconstruction, rather than looking like the Zapruder film, looks like what we want the Zapruder film *to do*. For this reason, it is incredibly important as it materializes on screen the kind of environment where the "limitations" of the original film seem to disappear. However, its own limitations are even more immediately visible. With all its use of three-dimensional rotations, lines of sight and trajectory highlighted, the ability to scrub forwards and backwards in time, it still only offers the same information that the Zapruder film offers in the first place, only in a new visual format. The anchoring relationship it establishes to this primary visual evidence here becomes an unbearable weight. Myers can only gesture towards the advancements his digitization makes without being able to deliver any more than the original; continually attempting to multiply higher and higher numbers by zero in order to achieve a positive result.

A Coup in Camelot (Stephen Goetsch, 2015)

Like two lawyers arguing different interpretations of the same evidence, ABC's *Beyond Conspiracy* and the 2015 documentary *A Coup in Camelot* (Stephen Goetsch) use the same material in defense of diametrically opposed positions. The latter film boasts a case for conspiracy, using "advanced imaging and forensic techniques." Proudly announced among these methods, in the film and its promotional material, is a new scan of the Zapruder film at 6K or 6000DPI, squarely supplanting MPI's lowly 1500 DPI scan. However, this higher quality reproduction plays an oddly offhand role in *Coup,* and in a way that belies its importance to the film's perspective on the assassination as a whole. We can, once again, see here that the level of

[158] Here we may think of The Ant Farm Collective's *Eternal Frame*, Keith Sanborn's *The Zapruder Footage: An Investigation of Consensual Hallucination*, the fictional reconstructions of Groden's composite, *Executive Action*, *JFK* et al. discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

detail and the wielding of ever more sophisticated modes of reproduction do not alter the film's original value. What the film does, however, is develop ever more sophisticated simulations and more detailed self-referential environments wholly divorced from the reality they depict.

A Coup in Camelot takes its place among many films made over the years that offer evidence, opinions, theories and proofs of one form or another around the assassination. Since most do not touch on or add anything particularly to the Zapruder film beyond its evidentiary value, they do not form part of this project. However, what sets *A Coup in Camelot* apart, at least as far as its own promotional material is concerned, is this new scan of the Zapruder film. "…Analysis of the Zapruder film using never-before-seen 6K digital scans at 10 times the resolution of high definition." What is surprising after this statement is how little the film actually talks about the process of creating the new scan. Clips of the Zapruder film run throughout the documentary, behind description of events of the day, through eye-witness testimony, or even unrelated information that simply links to the assassination. Indeed, it is well after we have seen the film in excerpt several times, before the narration indicates how the scan was created and how it was used.

> This 3rd generation negative is the forensic copy of the film obtained from the national archives. It's as close to the original film that can be viewed. Also shown here is the de-scratched cleaned version of the film. Both versions are presented here utilizing 6K digital scans a process in which the film negative is scanned into digital film form…This allows the Zapruder film to be viewed at a level of detail and clarity previously unavailable.[159]

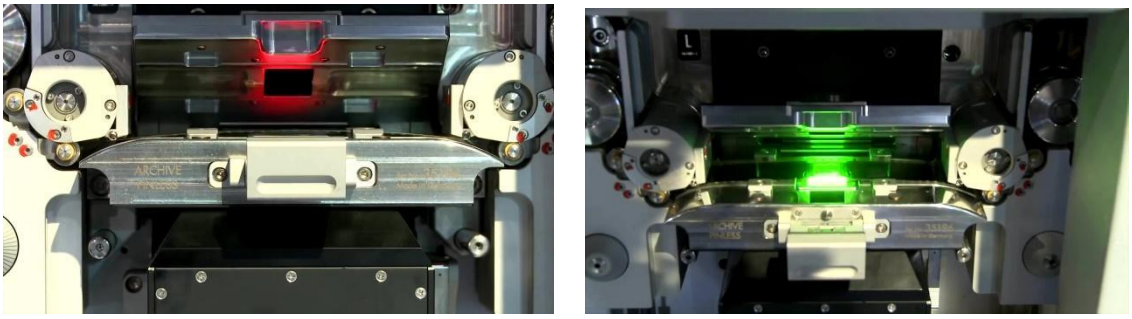

Figure 79. Stills from *A Coup in Camelot* (Stephen Goetsch 2015)

[159] This quote is directly from the narration to the "Renewing the Image" section of the DVD. *Image of an Assassination - A New Look at the Zapruder Film*. Directed and Produced by H. D. Motyl, MPI Home Video, 1998.

Beyond this statement there is little else to compare to MPI's overwrought description and justification of their process. With this earlier scan maintaining the truth value by way of its relation to the original was essential, by contrast *A Coup in Camelot* makes comparatively little of what is essentially a giant leap forward in the reproduction of the film. More notably, the film plainly avows that they only had access to a 3rd generation print. Though emphasizing that it is the "forensic" copy and the one available at the national archives, it is clearly inferior to those available before the transfer of copyright from the LMH Corporation to the government.

It must be said that despite the vast step forward in digital scanning technology from the curious hybrid approach at MPI, and the centrality of Zapruder to the film's forensic case, it takes a comparatively casual attitude to the scanning and deployment of the Zapruder film. The documentary takes a similarly casual attitude to the use of its high quality version in the film. After only a few moments of the Zapruder film playing on screen, the shot fades into a digital reconstruction of the site. Gone is the detailed and meticulous case of the evidentiary value of the reconstruction that ushered in Myer's 2004 reconstruction. *Coup in Camelot* barely mentions how the digital environment was created as it leaps directly to a discussion of the trajectory of the assassin's bullet and the forensic evidence of the damage to Kennedy's skull. [160] Despite a lack of acknowledgment the presentation is very similar to Meyer's work in set up and execution. As evident in the images below, the rendering is far smoother than the earlier reconstruction. Though already dated by the time of this writing it follows the same aesthetic of digital environments associated with contemporaneous video games.

Figure 80. Digital reconstructions from *A Coup in Camelot*

[160] There is an allusion to a CBS News reconstruction, and the complementarity of such analysis, but the film certainly does not mention Meyer, or how the current reconstruction was created. The special features on the DVD contain some information, but it is remarkably absent from the feature film.

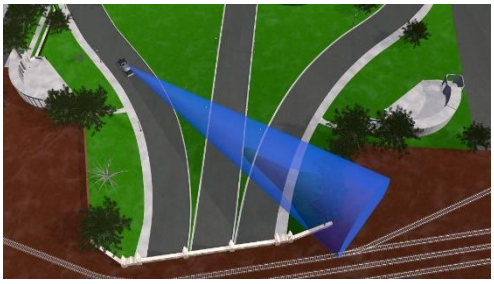

Figure 81. Digital reconstruction from *A Coup in Camelot*

Important to this investigation is that fact that, though diverging completely from the conclusions of Meyers and his team for ABC news in the early 2000s, *A Coup in Camelot* follows essentially the same game plan in its reconstruction. The digital site is completely barren of anything that does not indicate or relate directly to the timing, placement and perspective of the shooters. Below is the beginning of the digital tracking shot that will establish us in the space where the fatal shot occurred. The place is featureless apart from all of the layers of topography, elevation and the objects that will be essential to computing the shooter's position. The Stemmons freeway sign here does not indicate the highway on-ramp, the lampposts do not light the way, the bridge does not bear the weight of any trains passing; they are merely placeholders designed to time the transit of an equally sanitized digital object (the reconstructed limousine, bearing only the president). Reading this image as some kind of original document would be pure folly, and it is not designed to act in this way. What gives it its currency is, again, the document that it imitates, and simultaneously divorces itself from: The Zapruder film.

Figure 82. Digital reconstructions from *A Coup in Camelot*

What is more, this model is almost entirely unheralded as a digital reconstruction in the documentary's justification of its forensic evidence and overall theory. The reconstruction flows seamlessly on screen from the 6K Zapruder film copy, to the digital reconstruction. This

situation is wholly different from the ABC News/Meyer's reconstruction which forms the centerpiece of *Beyond Conspiracy*. The entire context of that film shifts in order to integrate the AutoCAD sequence. An entire section is devoted to its justification and to the clear and deliberate relation of the digital images to the timing and placement of objects in the Zapruder film. In *Coup* such techniques are simply a part of "forensic technology."

It could be said that the later film simply assumes a more tech-savy audience for whom digital technology is simply a part of their media environment in a way that it was not at the dawn of the twenty-first century. This is most certainly the case, but this perspective would miss the very important degree to which the different media are here homogenized into a single stream. While in the ABC News special the digital environment is clearly acknowledged as a supplement to the more "real" footage shot on the day, in *A Coup in Camelot* there is no such acknowledgment. In *Beyond Conspiracy* the Zapruder film is a source from which the reconstruction must draw its authenticity, the break between the two media must be acknowledged and bridged. In *Coup* there is no gap to bridge; the reconstruction is both figuratively and literally an extension of the Zapruder film, now made "real" as a three-dimensional space.

The superficial aesthetic differences between the renderings of these two environments, then, are of little consequence to this project. The departure presented here, in these two reconstructions, that sets them apart from those discussed previously, is the promise of the digital to create an entirely new environment that can live up to the dreams the analog camera could not satisfy. Thus, in the place of an antiseptic, muted, studio space, the digital is a *tabula rasa* upon which to build from the ground up a time and space not drained of contingency, but where none ever existed. The same environment, manipulated differently, can propose either the case for the official version of events, or a case for conspiracy. As both are building their digital environments from the same flawed original, the validity of their cases is comparable. The ambivalence of original evidence, shorn from any connection to the physical world, is here sincerely proffered as the solution to that very ambivalence. These images do not propose the original gap, but attempt to occupy precisely that space.

However, digital images do not have to declare their sovereignty in relation to the world. A wholly different piece of image manipulation from a very unlikely source, will show how analog images can be made digital in a way that maintains their uncanny otherness. Not

surprisingly, for the connections this project makes between media at the turn of the nineteenth century and concepts that still underpin representation in the twenty-first, these images come from a hybrid between old and new. The New Zealand digital technician Antony Davison has achieved these striking images through the digital reconstruction of a comparatively ancient form of artificial vision: the panorama.

New Digital Interventions: The Davison Panoramas

In 2013 a series of videos appeared on YouTube that reformulated the already widely circulated images of the Zapruder film and remounted them in a very interesting way.[161] A satellite imaging expert from New Zealand named Antony Davison created what he called "mobile panoramas" of the Zapruder film. This technique is quite common in the animation of still images of objects or weather events and involves using a series of frames to create a panoramic composite against which certain frames are animated into motion. Davison's contribution was to retain frames from before and after the animated ones to create what looks like a frozen tableau.

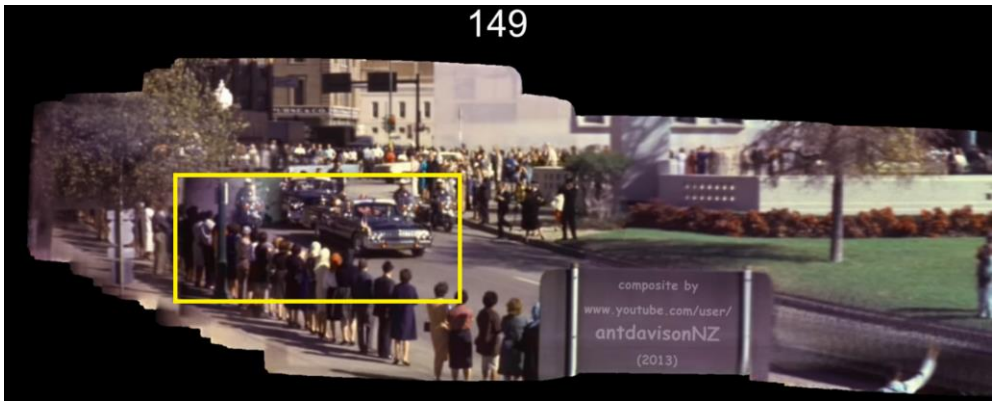

Figure 83. Antony Davison's digital panorama of the Zapruder film highlighting frame 149

An animated frame (above in yellow) then moves across this tableau, animating just one section of the overall panorama. This is a common enough process in the creation of digital maps and satellite imaging, as well as the layering involved in online spaces and video games;

[161] As of this writing, Davison's YouTube pages contain 7 mobile panoramas linked to footage of the assassination. The original was posted in 2013 and the most recent 2015. Exact URLs for the panoramas are listed below. Davison's YouTube page is: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWKi8yXJNOdb0XYa0iYCWiQ

however in the world of analog media restoration it is still uncommon.[162] The effect is similar to moving a handheld lens across a contact sheet, or picking out detail in a much large photo as was so common with the blow ups of the Zapruder stills. Davison's working process involves beginning with the right source material. He originally tried to use the MPI DVD version. But the level of compression and some missing frames made this very difficult. In the end the Australian Zapruder critic John Costello made his version available to Davison, including the missing frames as still JPEG images scanned at high definition from material received from Robert Groden's widow. [163] Davison uses Adobe Photoshop to stack the JPEGs one onto another in chronological order, layering them in the program. Then he arranges the images in temporal sequence from left to right so that they create a reasonable match. In this sense the images are laid out on a virtual workspace in the same way one might spread a deck of playing cards out across a table. They create a long line of superimposed frames, each one slightly to the right of the last to create a spatial arrangement of frames over time. Thus the panorama created at the end of this process is approximately 10,000 pixels wide, the pixel width of each overlaid slice of JPEG multiplied by the 486 frames. At this stage, Davison begins orienting this series of still frames, which are still arranged in a straight line, to follow the more natural flow of the original camera's movement. To do this he must orient the series around certain "landmarks," objects in the environment in relationship to which Zapruder's shaky movements can be tracked. Davison rotates and moves each frame slightly, to maintain the vertical of lampposts and buildings for example, arranging the frames to follow the left to right of the original pan. Below, in close-up, the blurring effect created by the superimposition of frames is clear. The dark blur at the bottom is the speeding limousine as it passes in front of Zapruder and towards the triple underpass.

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[162] In a personal interview (July 11 2016) Davison cited an animation made of still images of bigfoot animated by a man called M.K Davis, which gave him the idea for the panorama. This attached clip is quite crude, but it gives a good impression of how the frames are layered on each other to create the panorama.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MICxS6kEzUA

[163] This material is from a personal interview conducted with Davison on July 11, 2016.

Figure 84. Davison's close up of Figure 82 showing the blur created by the digital superimposition

At this stage Davison has a massive and massively detailed digital panorama. Imagine a panoramic painting so large it would have to stretch the length of several rooms to be seen at a comfortable size. To manage this problem Davison uses another program to create a pan along this much larger image, making the image viewable and shareable.[164] It is this overall pan which removes the shaky motion from the original footage. As such, the Zapruder film effectively hovers in the elastic borders of Adobe's digital workspace it moves up, down, back and forth at its own pace without creating what, in a fixed frame, would create jitter. It is then only a single step to animate a section of that panorama, what I will refer to as a "frame of motion," that passes across the JPEGs at a steady rate[165] mimicking the motion of the original film. In essence the work is less a film as it is a massive flip-book with selected elements (in this case the president's limousine) animated, however unlike a flip book or a film we see all the visual information from before and the after the current frame of motion.

Each of the panoramas bears a functional name common in an age of titles designed to net online traffic rather than read smoothly. The focus of this analysis will be his first: "JFK Assassination Zapruder Stabilized Motion Panorama HD plus SloMo - 50th anniversary" published May 6 2013, but a short discussion of the other films in the series will be helpful for purposes of clarity.[166] Three of Davison's videos concern the Zapruder film exclusively.

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[164] Davison says that he could not possibly post this original panorama on YouTube in its original state. The program he uses, AfterEffects, and the animation it created were thus a series of compromises on image quality to be able to share his work.

[165] Frame rate is a vexing problem for anyone working with the Zapruder film. The 18.3 fps is nowhere near any current standard frame rate and as such has to be approximated for viewing on conventional devices. Davison interpolates the Zapruder film at 30 fps (duplicating certain frames as I explain later), which gives one version of the mobile panorama a much smoother feel. He also replicates the film at 18 fps which duplicates none of the footage and creates a much truer copy, only to sacrifice some of the smoothness.

[166] For reference, Davison's Zapruder-related panoramas and their publishing dates as of July 2016:

Published between May and November of 2013, they each bear some technical difference. The first includes a slow motion section and uses a smoother interpolated frame rate of 30 frames per second.[167] The second uses the same footage as the first, but is a much truer copy in that it contains only the original Zapruder frames, no duplication and is shown at the original 18fps.[168] Davison's last Zapruder-centered work, is a digitally enlarged version of the earlier clips and presents the Zapruder film in the uninterpolated 18 frames per second and a truer slow motion of 6 frames per second.[169] Davison's original panorama will be the focus of my analysis here as it bears all of the visual elements that make his work a unique addition to this discussion.

Belying its prosaic title, the clip is truly striking to watch; even for those who have watched the Zapruder film countless times. The viewer is confronted with a letter-boxed screen with a blurred and jagged panoramic view of Elm Street and the green of Dealey Plaza beyond. The conservatively dressed onlookers line the left-hand sidewalk along the three-lane thoroughfare as they always have, but with Davison's intervention we can now see the near side of the North Peristyle (the small concrete dais that occupies one half of the image and the small green leading up the hill towards it.)

Figure 85. Davison's digital panorama of the Zapruder film, highlighting frame 177

May 6 2013: JFK Assassination Zapruder Stabilized Motion Panorama HD plus SloMo - 50th anniversary (No longer available) May 6 2013: JFK Assassination Zapruder 18fps no interpolatation [sic] HD stabilized motion panorama - 50th anniversary. Nov 7 2013: JFK Assassination Zapruder 18 fps + 6 fps Stabilized Motion Panorama HD - 50th anniversary The URL for Antony Davison's YouTube page and all of his current videos is: https://www.youtube.com/c/antdavisonnz/videos

[167] The program renders the video at 30 frames per second digitally duplicating certain frames much the same way as analog frame rates reduce flicker. Davison stated in our interview, though, that this process is not exactly the same as the duplication of frames for the standard 24 fps projection rate as interpolation takes an average of the pixel relationships, rather than copying full frames. However, for this discussion it serves the same purpose vis-a-vis what appears on screen.

[168] The frame rate of the camera-original Zapruder film is, in fact, 18.3 fps as written earlier. 18.3 is perhaps technically possible in a digital environment, but Davison was not interested in splitting this particular hair in his work.

[169] This slower motion avoids removing any frames and stays as close to the original as possible. Antony Davison, Personal interview July 11, 2016.

As the frame marked in yellow animates the still images, it takes the eye a few moments to realize that this area of the tableau is still. Though blurry and indistinct, the right half and lower edge of the panorama are not in motion. Only after a few seconds is it clear that a small frame of motion, a small rectangle jerkily moves over these still elements, following the aspect ratio and path of Zapruder's original camera. Another clue is the white-on-black frame counter in the top center of the image. The motorcycles round the corner and proceed down Elm Street, followed jerkily by the frame of motion which hesitates momentarily before returning to the top left of the panorama. Davison's panorama brilliantly illustrates in this moment, Zapruder following the motion of the motorcycles as they turned onto Elm Street anticipating the fast approaching motorcade only to realize that the president's car was in fact second in the motorcade. This jump is translated into Davison's panoramas, but is indeed softened by the constancy of the surrounding images. It is merely the frame of motion that jumps and the president's car appears to proceed on its fateful journey.

Figure 86. Davison's digital panorama of the Zapruder film highlighting frame 165, showing the active window in the YouTube viewing platform

The frame of the panorama itself then begins to shift to the right as the motorcade reaches the Stemmons Freeway sign (Frame 150 or so). The president's limousine remains center-frame as a long slow pan follows the frame of motion. Within the frame we see the familiar images of the motorcade proceeding placidly and then disappearing behind the traffic sign only to emerge with President Kennedy already reacting to the first shot. As we approach the fatal frame 313,

the viewer can see a panorama of green behind the president and the car's occupants as they reel in response to the attack. A waving onlooker is frozen with his arm stretched upward in a cheerful greeting. Scattered families are frozen in unknowing applause as the stricken president passes by. As the fatal bullet hits at frame 313 the presidential car is isolated, there are now very few people around who see this event up close. The speeding up of the convertible now blurs the panorama on both sides of the motion frame as the car rushes to reach the underpass. We see Secret Service Agent Clint Hill clambering over the vehicle's spare tire and over the trunk to reach the First Lady who is reaching out for him. They pass behind a tree as the expanse of Dealey Plaza shows a line-up of cars headed the opposite way up Commerce Street behind the motorcade's path. The convertible passes under the highway overpass as the sign for the turnpike to Forth Worth seems to hang in the air behind them.

Figure 87. Davison's digital panorama of the Zapruder film highlighting frame 445 showing the active window in the YouTube viewing platform

The effect of the panoramas is as undeniably shocking as it is intriguing. The first realization is that elements of the Zapruder film that pass by in a few frames in the original now hang in suspended animation around the moving tragedy; onlookers waving, clapping or holding their hands to their faces in shock. The second shock is how unreal the video appears. Part-moving, part still, the frame of motion hovers, almost ghostlike, over the panoramic composite. The image is not wholly legible as digital or analog, but an eerie combination of the two. On the other hand, the image also gives a greater sense of coherence than previous iterations of the Zapruder film. Seeing the event take place *in situ* is indeed shocking, but also renders a much clearer sense of the space of Dealey Plaza. In doing what the digital software was originally designed to do, it creates a virtual environment out the fragments of the original film. This has

the function of situating the viewer in a much more expansive view from Zapruder's original position. The panoramas thus, interestingly, eliminate the "camera jitter" that has dogged so many Zapruder reproductions in the past. Because the "frame" is not that of Zapruder's original camera but, in effect, the boundaries of each frame's movement. Thus, the jumps and whips of the frame of motion are less jarring. The impression for the viewer is like that of eyes darting across a canvas. As such, the composite creates an uncanny simulation of a pair of eyes intently focused on the presidential limousine. The simulation includes a blurring of sections of the actual space: i.e., the background and foreground (near, mid and far peripheral vision) while the frame maintains its point of focus (the macular part of vision, paracentral and central) in sharpest resolution.[170] As a result Davison's mobile panoramas do not just create a virtual sense of space, but a genuine sense of *place* as well. The effect of using digital software to supplement human vision in this way is uncanny in the extreme.

Davison's panoramas must be understood, most coherently, as a way of *looking at* vision. Their simulation makes one conscious of the camera's gaze and the act of watching the product of that gaze at the same time. The framing of the panoramas, laying upon a black field, a digital workspace essentially, is key because it presents the images viewable as inherently "framed." Compared to the earlier digital environments, Davison's panoramas lead to a greater understanding of the importance of situated vision and the interpretive value of limitations placed on device-assisted vision.

Dale Meyer's reconstruction and the similar effort in *A Coup in Camelot* by contrast, are digital spaces where the frame of vision is inescapable. Their visual design creates a spartan, sanitized Dealey Plaza, where only the variables linked to the president's shooting are available and controlled. Davison's Dealey plaza, on the other hand, scoops up all of the contingent details caught by Zapruder's camera and presents them as a constant hum beyond the frame of focus. Under the guise of "improving" the vision of Zapruder's camera, Myers and others shackle their reproductions to a reductive logic where the trimming away of all contingency is the only way to

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[170] This discussion of vision and its history as part of cinema is fascinating, but I hardly have the space to discuss it here. Interesting reading on the subject as it relates to the viewing and understanding of film includes work on "Neurocinematics." The most accepted of this work in Film Studies would be the cognitivist work of David Bordwell beginning with *Narration in the Fiction Film*, U Wisconsin P, 1985. Also, a recent edition of the journal *Cinema & Cie*, vol. XIV, no. 22-23, 2014 was devoted to the subject "Neurofilmology. Audiovisual Studies and the Challenge of Neuroscience" Even more interesting as it relates to the field of forensic psychology, witness testimony and court proceedings: "The vision in "blind" justice: Expert perception, judgment, and visual cognition in forensic pattern recognition." Dror, I.E. & Cole, S.A. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* (2010) 17: 161.

get at the heart of the mystery. As such, his creation erases, rather than resolves the tension in representation left intact by Davison's panoramas.

Davison's space maintains the incredible power of the filmed event precisely because it is so un-panoramic. In making the process visible, Davison's images separate themselves from the kind of vision promised by the title. These original panoramic devices were designed to very much replicate a single point of vision over a large vista, first through painting, then later with photography. The key element was to replicate human vision. "…relentless illusionistic unity [forbids] even the faintest hint of the frame and required negating the pictorial character in any way whatsoever…"[171] The Myers reconstruction, and those that came after, are much stronger candidates for the label. By putting viewers in a position where they are always conscious of the act of looking, the tableau presents a reading of the images rather than a direct conduit to the event. As such, Davison's work here shows a marked continuity in dealing with the kind of issues discussed through this research about the gap between vision extended by devices, like the camera and its digital kin, and the lived vision of the moment. While the hard solutions offered by the Dale Meyers of the world appear as fruit of a poisonous tree, Davison proposes a subtler and more rewarding discussion of how the power of representation is often in what it is *un*able to show. Though situating viewers inside of a digital Dealey Plaza, the solutions offered by the former are no more obvious than they were when Robert Groden revealed his first composite of the Muchmore, Nix and Zapruder films in 1975. Such solutions, far from expanding the truth the film bears, only detract from its power and lasting effect. Precisely because the solution to the mystery of the assassination is not the kind of truth the original film provides.

Conclusions or "Other subscribers have enjoyed the assassinations of..."

In conclusion, any consideration of the digital after-life of the Zapruder film must begin and end with an understanding of how its iterations frame vision. And this framing must also extend to the context in which they are seen. The images discussed here are all available online and any time. They are part of the constant flow of rumour, innuendo, myth and conspiracy. Anonymous video uploaders and guests make more or less any comments they like in the

[171] See Dolf Sternberger's, *Panorama of the Nineteenth Century*, Translated by Joachim Neugroschel, *October* (1977), 8-11.

relevant sections about them with near impunity. As such, the deluge of Zapruder and Kennedy assassination-related material is astounding, even if filtered down to visual media alone. Equally astounding is the way logic, discussion, and open-minded interchange turns into vitriolic and often unrelated rants, in very short order.[172] YouTube has a policy about the posting of illicit or harmful material, but this policy, so far, has extended more to the comments made about these videos than to any rendering of the Zapruder footage itself.[173] The myopia that guides this deluge of babble about these images is comparable to the myopic framing of the images themselves. Being less about the gap between what we see through screens and the world around us and much more about extending the boundaries of that augmented vision, digital renderings of the Zapruder film are material evidence of long-standing undercurrents that ignore the bridge between representation and the world.

In the comment sections below the endless iterations of the Zapruder film where assurance dissolves into confusion, frustration boils over into rage; it seems the fears of two of film's most disparate figures, Abraham Zapruder and André Bazin, are lived out. Those of Zapruder, admittedly the less articulate and under-theorized of the two, speaks out of mid-century prudishness in relation to the decency of showing death on screen. Bazin, on the other hand, makes a more profound statement about the nature of film itself. However both share a suspicion of the cinematic medium that has been washed away in the age of digitally fungible content.

As Bazin says of *The Bullfight*, a film that in many first year seminars has come to stand for the traumatic realism of film: before cinema there was only the profanation of corpses and the desecration of tombs. Thanks to film, nowadays we can desecrate and show at will the only one of our possessions that is temporarily inalienable: dead without a requiem, the eternal "dead-again" of the cinema![174] Cinema's repetition does not profane life in the way pornography may profane love or desire. Bazin here conveys that death on screen breaks a more fundamental law, one of time.

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[172] Even short reading of the discussion boards at the bottom of Zapruder and assassination comment sections disqualifies them for inclusion in the current investigation. Links to Hitler, UFOs and Communist infiltration of the media are the most popular.

[173] For more information on the extensive policies of YouTube visit the "Policy Center" at www.youtube.com/yt/policyandsafety/policy.html

[174] Original text implies a pun on "re-morts": "dead-again" but also "regret." See Bazin 31.

> Doubtless no moment is like any other, but they can nevertheless be as similar as leaves on a tree, which is why their cinematic repetition is more paradoxical in theory than in practice. Despite the ontological contradiction it represents, we quite readily accept it as a sort of objective counterpart to memory (Bazin 30)

Just as digital reproduction smooths out the visual peaks and valleys, reducing the scratches and dust of its analog counterpart into a smooth procession of one and zeros, it smooths out as well the jagged ontological and epistemological questions that so conditioned its primary viewings. It is not just the political, social and historical contexts that have melted away, but the fundamental existential "nausée" that Bazin so well articulates. The shock of the Zapruder film and similar assassination videos profusely available via any online video sharing platform's suggested videos are as similar as "leaves on a tree."[175] These distinct, unrepeatable, singularizing moments become interchangeable through their repetition, one of a series, rather than unique. A fundamental difference in kind is commuted to a difference merely of degree.

However, the offense goes further in that this levelling of reproductions makes them stand in more easily for the event itself. The comment sections endlessly refer not to the Zapruder film, or to the footage as a reproduction or image of the president's death, but to the event of the assassination itself. What they are watching is the death of the president—unmediated. There is none of the paradox Bazin suggests in this practice, only in his theory which has been long forgotten. It is on YouTube, and in these message boards, that we can find the "material eternity" to which Bazin refers when he says: "The cinema has given the death of Manolette a *material eternity*. On the screen, the toreador dies every afternoon" (emphasis added, Bazin 31). Only there is an important difference: without magnifying the "quality of the original moment through the contrast of its repetition." Such repetition does not, as Bazin states, "confer...additional solemnity" (31) to the process. Every day, every hour, every minute, every second, Zapruder's film (and any number of clipped, redesigned and re-positioned copies) means less as a unique object and more as a commodity, like Zapruder's nightmare cinemas advertising calling punters in to see the screening of a lifetime.

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[175] Here I am making reference, perhaps only obliquely, to Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblance" where the idea of meaning must not rely on any exact mirroring (of words in this case) but on common features that arise through familiarity.

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, the ignored crisis implied by this epistemological gap is perhaps best articulated by Jean Baptiste Thoret's book on the Zapruder film. In his examination of the inherently manipulated nature of the film he articulates that:

> The Zapruder film is a film *of* or *about* the murder of the president… But it is not enough to show the murder and offer proof that it really happened in order [for us] to grasp its machinations or its motivations... The link between a filmed criminal act and the manipulation of images associated with the film of the assassination of Kennedy is one of the central problematics [introduced by Brian de Palma]. How can a film so tampered with show a real death? What is a real murder if the images that show it are false? When film is itself a crime against the real, how can it act as witness? "[176]

These are the exact questions that these digital interventions, save Davison's panoramas, seek to assuage. Though they make ur-cinematic claims to outdo what can be done with their tools, they in fact simply blot out the lacunae that make the cinematic document unreliable, while proliferating those gaps wholesale.

It seems clear that this nightmare world of Zapruder's needn't give us the only metaphor for the current discussions of digital media and online distribution. However, the questions presented by Bazin and Thoret, to name only those two writers, are far more prominent in the texts inspired by, symbolically echoing and explicitly linked to, the multiple framings of the Zapruder film discussed so far. The conclusion of this chapter must then be less directed towards a lament about the current state of online discussion and more towards an understanding of the persistent currency of questions around the evidentiary quality and value of images. This currency is fostered and nurtured by artists and technicians such as Antony Davison, Keith Sanborn and the innumerable digital amateurs who continually re-form and re-contextualize Zapruder's images for the next generation.

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[176] Original text: "Le film d'Abraham Zapruder...est d'abord un film sur le meurtre. Mais il ne suffit pas de montrer le meurtre et d'apporter la preuve qu'il a bien eu lieu, pour en saisir les rouages ou les motivations… Le lien entre l'acte criminel filmé et la manipulation des images fondée par le film de l'assassinat de Kennedy constitue l'une des problématiques séminales du cinéma de Brian De Palma… comment un film trafiqué peut-il montrer un vrai meurtre? Qu'est-ce qu'un meurtre réel si les images qui le montrent sont fausses?" See Thoret 92.

Conclusion

Alexandra Zapruder in her 2016 book *Twenty-Six Seconds: A Personal History of the Zapruder Film*, tells the reader about her very personal excavation of the life and legacy of her grandfather. In many ways the book represents the turning of a page, past the bemused attention that the film received in the wake of the Kennedy assassination's 50th anniversary, past the vitriolic ranting of conspiracy-minded pundits still wrangling on air and online over its meaning, to a centered place of family history. Zapruder herself is aware of the contradiction between the position of family and public historian and is very quick to acknowledge the document her grandfather created as "The Zapruder film" a text already separated from its author and their family.

The distinction is important for more than her alone. The title of her book belies the fact that the nature of her grandfather's film has created a plethora of "personal" histories. The scope of this profusion of shock is matched only by the profusion of ways people have responded to it and assimilated it into their understanding of the American nation, its political history, but also their relationship to that union. For many, it was a turning point of political consciousness, where hidden and corrupt machinations of governance and power were made real for the first time. For others, it was vital confirmation of the official investigation and proof of the events as they had stated them. But more fundamental to all of these shifts in perspective, were those histories that sought to explore what the Zapruder film meant to the nature of representation itself.

This dissertation has demonstrated that the impact of the Zapruder film cannot be contained to simply the historical, legal or political realms. Its impact there has been significant and may continue to be so. However, this project has equally demonstrated that the film's impact goes deeper than the genre and stylistic classifications films studies has used to define it in the past. Fundamentally, beyond all of its roles as a document or visual evidence of an event, the Zapruder film draws attention to the fundamental gap that exists between the camera and the world.

As a historical artifact, the film has been tied to its production and distribution context. It is a film of an event in 1963; it is a piece of evidence in an investigation into that crime. Read in a wider context it is an example of the limitations of the technology of its day, and of the laws of ownership and copyright that kept it from public access for so long. But more basically, when looked at as a film text, it shows us something about the fundamental desires that condition the

understanding of camera vision as a simple extension of human vision. If any one of us were standing with Zapruder witnessing the shooting with our own eyes, we would have a significantly different and richer experience of the event, even excluding historical hindsight. Our view would include peripheral vision of the space around us and also sounds and smells. Without a camera, our attention could be drawn by sights and sounds other than what Zapruder caught with the camera. We would, in a word, have a more holistic "eye-witness" sense of the event. Our memory of that event, however, might be confounded by any number of gaps, or lack the information relevant to the crime. The Zapruder film shows us more than can be communicated through a simple witness statement, but it at the same time shows less than those who were with them would have experienced. This fundamental, perhaps paradoxical, disjuncture is key to understanding the strain of thought in film discourse that emphasizes the constant supplementation and amelioration of camera vision to fully capture or more resemble human vision. It is just this disjuncture, the impossibility of this dream, that the Zapruder film makes concrete.

The desires that would develop and shape a machine that can replicate human vision, replay events and retain that vision as a permanent copy, can be addressed through an understanding of the effect that such a machine had at its introduction around the turn of nineteenth century. Thus this dissertation investigated examples from early cinema and the way these films shaped the vision that cinema presented to audiences. Attraction, indexicality and contingency played central roles in this discussion, defining the way those early films affected our understanding of vision and the unique perspective of those seeing it for the first time. These concepts, when not applied exclusively in the efforts of historical periodization, can teach us much about how they underpin the essential relationships that connect viewers and screens. Looking at them in the context of the other spectacles and thrills with which they were associated, new perspectives on these concepts promote additions of the effect of risk and the depiction of death onto these concepts. In a way, while attraction defines the theoretical perspective that this dissertation takes on the Zapruder film, indexicality contingency, risk and death are essential addendums that shape and further deepen our understanding of that concept.

In light of these considerations, a return to some of the most significant filmic texts of the early period helped to focus the use of these concepts and the way in which they can inform and

make concrete the links they share with the representational implications of the Zapruder film in the latter part of the twentieth century. Particularly important to this investigation was the shaping of cinematic time and the parallel "event" created by the camera. The disruption of the direct link between the spectator and the live experience was obscured by many factors, including the camera's novel ability to make visible the previously unseen. The shaping of perception of the cinematic event thus created a bridge between organic and camera-extended vision. In many ways, devices of vision earlier than cinema pre-figured this extension and already played a role in the latter medium's popularity and the assimilation of this extended form of vision.[177] Though as many early and later film theorists have noted, film also had the ability to reveal the instability of the bridge it had created, making part of its thrill the treading of that often dangerous gap between the world represented by the camera, and world outside the theater walls. The crisis thus presented by the Zapruder film is the revelation of this gap long after the superficial thrill of its attraction had faded.

The most common and consistent engagement with the ongoing crisis between film and world was in the area of experimental film. This dissertation thus dealt with the ways in which the cinema of attractions connected to the attitude of these filmmakers in their efforts to problematize and question the link between eye and camera. Films discussed in Chapter 3 were specifically chosen for their use of the camera as a way of revealing the nature of vision and the productive limitations that should necessarily condition our understanding of its extension. Through their various manipulations of the frame, these filmmakers necessarily questioned the comfortable ways we see images as mere extensions of human vision and thought. Making that relationship uncomfortable, showing how the camera can lie and manipulate, are critical to their interventions.

Subtler, however, were the manipulations of fiction film. Here we saw a divide between films committed to preserving the link between camera and world, employing narrative and visual devices to shore up and protect that connection and those that pointed towards the insufficiency of cinema to capture the world of living events. These films forestalled the cozy

[177] Here I am referring to the work of Gunning, Gaudreault and Dulac already mentioned, but informative texts that also refer to these issues include Elsaesser; Gunning, Primitive Cinema 3-12; Kittler; Musser.

assimilation of camera vision and drew attention to the gap between seeing and believing in numerous ways.

Likewise, the divide persisted into the world of the digital afterlife of the Zapruder film. The new methods and materials of the digital age have also looked to shore up and protect the division between assisted and organic vision, though inherent in the material structure of that vision. We saw how the Zapruder film took on a panoramic shape that simultaneously, as with the devices discussed earlier, showed both more and less of the environment created. In an interesting turn, it was a curious hybrid of digital and analog techniques that preserved the shock and otherness of the Zapruder film in a world so confident in the creation of exclusively virtual spaces. Thus, technological interventions aside, this study presented these approaches as endemic to two separate logics connected to the understanding of vision that defined its theoretical perspective and the findings of previous chapters.

The Zapruder film is more than a piece of visual evidence, a historical or cultural artifact, a fragment of visual culture or a touchstone for visual artists and technicians. This dissertation has tried to argue for it as a fundamental revelation of the unpredictable nature of cinematic representation with regards to the desires and expectations that essentially underpin it. This work is by no means meant to close the book on these issues, or even to disrupt the work already done to explore them. Rather it asks the reader to look at the Zapruder film as a lens through which we can view something much more than the traumatic event that defined November 22, 1963. When looked at in the context of the issues discussed here, perhaps the reader can begin to see it as an essential addendum, not to the study of history, politics, culture or even aesthetics, but to the way in which the discipline of film studies treats the gap between the camera and eye: between the world and its representations on our screens.

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