

EDITORIAL

If old enough, everybody remembers where they were when the twin towers collapsed, when Princess Diana died, when JFK was shot. There are moments in our shared collective and personal memory that set our perception of time to before and after the Event. As if since that moment nothing was ever quite the same. On 22nd November this year we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of a man and the birth of a legend – the assassination of the 35th president of the USA, John F. Kennedy. This issue addresses but a fraction of the multi-layered effects that this assassination had and still has on politics, culture and society.

Amongst all the dilemmas and quandaries that the Kennedy presidency left behind, there is one that is especially difficult, if not impossible to answer: is Kennedy's monumental legacy a part of him working so diligently while living so flamboyantly, or of his dying so tragically? American civil rights issues, for example: which historical event really inaugurated the notion of racial equality, commonplace (though still much a matter of form) nowadays? Was it on June 10th, 1963, when president Kennedy federalized National Guard troops and deployed them to the University of Alabama to force the ultra-segregationist governor of Alabama, George Wallace, to consent that two African American students enrolled at the State University? Or was it on November 22nd of the same year, when then Vice-President Lyndon Johnson, Kennedy's political ally and personal foe, took the Oath over his funeral casket? It would be rather interesting to speculate which – if any – of the civil rights promises made by Kennedy would have entered the legislation, had he not been killed. Has the assassination itself not proven to be the biggest boost to JFK's political program? One should remember that only a few days after the assassination Johnson gave a speech in the American Congress saying: "No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor president Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the Civil Rights Bill for which he fought so long." Today, one cannot but speculate whether Johnson's "great society program" is legacy of the JFK agenda, or a consequence of his being slain in circumstances that soon acquired mythical proportions. Or, can it be that the promotion of civil rights, as some conspiracy theory or another would surely imply, was in fact a cover-up devised by the Johnson administration to sully the waters around its own implication in the Kennedy assassination?

To set aside all of the obviously important issues invoked, upheld and endured by his administration, John F. Kennedy was actually the first American president his people could gossip about. What was there to chitchat

about his predecessor, a stern five-star General of the American Army, Dwight Eisenhower? The only juicy rumors there were, was his romantic affair with his war-time driver, some Kay Summersby. It could only raise eyebrows of curiosity and amusement if she turned out to be a he, which she unfortunately did not. Gossip, as any social theorist knows, stands for acceptance, concealed admiration and restrained envy. With John F. Kennedy, the Americans finally made their president one of their own, they worshipped him and were praying in on the many charms he had to offer: youthful looks and mature resolve, a gorgeously appealing wife in addition to the sexiest movie star for a mistress, dark mafia underworld connections and the Moon program, war-time heroism and endearing First family pictures ... John F. Kennedy had it all. The following remark from the *New York Times* should then come as no surprise: to this day, an astonishing 40,000 books have been penned on JFK and the Kennedys, and many more are to be added to this literary motherload to mark this year's 50th anniversary of his assassination. John F. Kennedy, as his legacy proves, was one of the first postmodern celebrities, so strikingly characterized by having blurred the distinctions between fame and infamy, sanctity and profanity, public and private, fact and fiction.

For the above reason is it impossible to pretend that this issue of *Teorija in Praksa* bears any complete and/or inclusive insight into John F. Kennedy living, dying and beyond. We bring before you five articles with many common denominators and one general motive: the trauma of the Kennedy assassination. We start with Fabrizio Cilento's discussion on the most celebrated, analyzed and replayed documentary footage of JFK's assassination – the so-called Zapruder video. In *The Ontology of Replay: The Zapruder Video and American Conspiracy Films*, Cilento offers an insight into the epistemological break created by a collective communicational experience of John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963, which led to an unprecedented interrogation about the ability of the image to reveal the deep nature of events. The footage of JFK's assassination, Cilento argues, is traumatic because it is highly visual in its happening, but in such a way that the raw document implicitly invokes the need for an exploration of the concealed driving forces, as a result becoming a crucial factor in the advent of social documentaries and conspiracy film in the United States of America. The subsequent endless replaying of the Zapruder video revealed that the replay offers the possibility of a different cinematic time, and thus a different way of re-constructing actual events. An article by Natalija Majsova entitled *Dangerous Liaisons: The Kennedy Assassination, Popular Culture, and the Security Dispositif*, brings forward the popular cultural dimension of the JFK assassination and examines it from the point of view of its interplay with the politics of securitization, viewing popular culture as set within the domain

of cultural governance. Majsova conclusively demonstrates how the aspect of conspiracy that is enacted in various ways and to various ends in popular cultural phenomena addressing the JFK assassination, in the context of global late capitalism, reinforces personal belief in the validity and expertise of their own judgment and investigator skills. This aspect of an individualized Western society is, says the author, fruitful breeding ground for conspiracies to come, and the proliferation of an atmosphere of constant crisis. Karmen Šterk contributes further cultural contextualization and an epistemological background against which one can additionally elaborate the notions of contemporary conspiracy culture and the state of affairs in (post) modern scientific reasoning that have also been tackled by Majsova. In her *JFK Assassination or How Not to be Paranoid in the Enlightened Age of Conspiracies*, Šterk discusses an all-prevailing contemporary paranoid attitude that elucidates the tendency of an ever rising conspiratorial ideation. She advocates conspiratorial, magical and scientific reasoning as three different emanations of the same interpretational attitude – the pursuit of truth. The next article written by Berkeley Kaite discusses the uncanny expression, which has become intrinsically linked to John F. Kennedy's presidency in cultural memory – Camelot. In her text *Camelot: The Violence and the Ecstasy*, the expression takes up meanings of the assumption of something that once was, and will never be again; it suggests something imprecise, but impossibly good. In looking at this phenomenon, Kaite argues that what inaugurated Camelot is what isn't known and can't be said about the assassination of president Kennedy. Last but not least, this special issue of *Teorija in praksa* brings forward an article by Blaž Škerjanec, *The Irreducible Chaos of the Postmodern Spectacularised JFK Event*. Introducing an anti-genealogical theoretical approach, the article reconceptualises the Kennedy assassination into a postmodern spectacle performed at Dealey Plaza, the site of the Event. The author critically contrasts Badiouian to Deleuzo-Guattarian and Lyotardian approaches to the notion of a society as a spectacle and while recognizing the JFK assassination as a never completely coherent narrative, he opens the Event to the possibility of being comparable to the Beatniks and the pop art movement of the date.

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Karmen Šterk
Guest editor