

The Movie of Andy Warhol's Movie "Sleep"

excerpt from "You Got to Burn to Shine" by John Giorno

Where were you in '63, when JFK was shot? I was with Andy Warhol. We sat on the Tiffany couch amongst the clutter, watching the live TV coverage from Dallas. We heard Walter Cronkite say, "President Kennedy died at 2 pm on November 22, 1963." We started hugging each other, pressing our bodies together and trembling. I started crying and Andy started crying. We wept big fat tears. It was a symbol of the catastrophe of our own lives. We kissed and Andy sucked my tongue. It was the first time we kissed. It had the sweet taste of kissing death. It was all exhilarating, like when you get kicked in the head and see stars.

I didn't particularly like Kennedy and I had never voted. Even though he was charming and sympathetic, to become President he had to have made all the bad deals and compromises, and be the most corrupt among the worst of them. We all knew how corrupt his father Joseph Kennedy was, bootlegging and passively supporting Hitler, and it was his father's money that had bought the White House. JFK and Jackie were glamorous, a definite plus, but he was just another dumb, ambitious politician, even though his heart presumably was in the right place. He had the vitality of youth, after all the old men Presidents who came before him. Everything seemed possible; but I never thought about it when he was alive.

His assassination changed everything. He became an instant deity. "They shot my man!" I said exuberantly. "His death is the best thing he ever did!" Jackie was live with JFK's blood on her skirt. I had a rush of bliss watching the live TV coverage and hearing them talk about the blood and brains on Jackie's skirt, and how she refused to change her clothes. She was a world class act. It was the first blood sacrifice of the decade.

I heard it as the death knell of the 1960's. There was so much unexpressed optimism, the moment of JFK's death seemed the absolute indication of the complete failure of everyone's aspirations, portending what was to come. The omen.

Andy and I went into the front room. Everything brilliantly radiated disaster. "I don't know what it means!" Andy kept saying in his inimitable voice. We tried to think about continuing the day. The telephone rang and Andy answered it. I went home and that night we met at 8 o'clock and went to a party. The first person we met was Bea Fitler. It was an electrifying night in New York.

Two days later in the afternoon on the Sunday after Thanksgiving, Andy and I went to a party at Billy Kluver's in New Jersey. Billy was a laser engineer at Bell Labs, who also worked with artists and technology. Wynn Chamberlain drove us in his car. Andy me, Marisol, Bob Morris, and Jill Johnston. We were on a winding suburban road in the freezing cold, getting near to Billy's. I had a small transistor radio pressed to my ear. This was almost two

decades before the Sony Walkman and lightweight earphones were invented. I was trying to listen to the Ronettes and the Shirelles, "It's my party and I'll cry if I want to," when through the static noise came the news bulletin from Dallas that Oswald had been shot. "Somebody's been shot," I said, but everyone in the car kept talking. "Somebody else has been shot in Dallas." Nobody listened to me. They were talking art world gossip. "Andy, someone else has been shot, beside JFK, just now in Dallas." At that moment with the radio pressed to my ear, I heard a replay of the shot that killed Oswald minutes before. "I just heard the shot!" Andy was the only one listening to me.

When we arrived at the party, Billy greeted us at the door, and said "Oswald, the guy who killed Kennedy, just got killed by someone called Ruby!"

"Oh, I don't know what it means!" said Andy. We were all laughing. It was stunning.

There were about thirty of us in a ranch house, most of the Pop Artists (this was before they became famous): Patty and Claes Oldenburg, Jim Rosenquist, Bob Indiana, George Segal, Yvonne Rainer, among others; Bob Rauschenberg and Steve Paxton had just left. Olga, Billy's wife, gave me a Bloody Mary. Everyone was drinking Bloody Marys. Andy had a can of Coke. Everyone was wide-eyed and exhilarated. I had a slight attack of paranoia and I said to Andy, "I don't know why I'm here!"

"I don't know why I'm here!" said Andy.

Everyone was laughing scattered about the house. We spent the

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afternoon taking turns in the living room watching the live TV coverage from Washington of the casket with JFK's body being moved from the White House to the Capitol. Jackie Kennedy wearing the black suit with the black veil over her face, walking in the

freezing cold at the head of the cortege, leading the Heads of State and dignitaries, Charles De Gaulle taller than anyone, Emperor Haile Selassie, Queen Fredrika of Greece. It was so electrifying. Andy kept saying "I don't know what it means!" The image of Jackie walking with the black veil seemed so incredible and so strong, it was burned in our hearts, later giving rise to Andy's paintings of Jackie with the black veil. "She's so fabulous!" said Andy. "It's the best thing she's ever done!"

The next morning I got to Andy's house at 11 o'clock for the JFK funeral. We sat on the couch in front of the TV, in the back room on the first floor, watching the whole thing for hour after endless hour, the casket being carried from the Capitol to the Cathedral to Arlington Cemetery. By then it was deadening and the first media OD, for me and for everyone, the first every. Andy answered the telephone every once and awhile, and a few people came by and visited briefly (Robert Frazer and Irving Blum, separately, among others). Every so often Andy went downstairs to see his mother, who was watching on her TV in the kitchen where she slept. Andy said she was very upset.

After they lit the eternal flame in Arlington, I went home and spent the rest of the afternoon in bed. I met Andy at 8 o'clock that night and we went to a party. I liked being with Andy, more than being at the parties. ■