

[Back to index](#)

**[DE]CONSTRUCTING JOHN F. KENNEDY? ; HERSCHENSOHN'S "YEARS OF LIGHTNING ; DAY OF DRUMS".**

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"Years of Lightning : Day of Drums", (hereafter "Years") the USIA film released to commemorate the life and times of John F. Kennedy upon the occasion of his assassination, has received little critical appraisal [1]. This article will examine the film within the contexts of political and social memory and commemoration, and will employ a tri-partite reading of it, through the concepts of remembering, forgetting and reconstructing, to analyse the image of Kennedy presented by the film, and the manner of its construction.

**The Functions of (Social) Memory**

"Each memory is an active and new construction made from many tiny associations, not a passive process of storing and retrieving full blown objective representations of past experiences." [2]

The process of memory is perception and communication redoubled. Where conscious experience in the present relies substantially upon construction and configuration, 'recalling' information, or bringing pre-existing meanings or information to bear upon the present doubly so, since 'experience' is encoded and decoded twice. [3] Thus, as 'objective reality' is constructed by interaction between mind, perception and meanings, so too and more so is the 'reality' of the past prepared for and recalled to the present. Memories are, therefore, actively constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed. [4]

The processes of memory, recollection and remembrance, like those of communication, are not only individualistic, but also collective in nature. That is to say meanings are arrived at through discourses between individuals and groups and not simply by an individual acting alone :

"Memory...is constructed, not reproduced. This construction is not made in isolation but in conversations with others that occur in the contexts of community, broader politics and social dynamics." [5]

It is this social aspect of memory that renders its use inescapably political. [6] Notions of social identity, of belonging or affiliation are constructed not only through an awareness of current events and meanings, but through an acute awareness of the past/present relation [7] :

"Concerning social memory in particular, we may note that images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order. It is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory." [8]

"History hinges upon memory..the necessarily selective, collective remembrance that suits a society." [9]

Commemoration of the past (close or distant) has everything to do with the present. Even the very process of selecting those events to remember, to commemorate, to record as history, is ideologically charged. Memory is neither disinterested nor objective, as Jonathon Webber reminds us when he asks us to question "who is doing the remembering, and why." [10] Thus the past is always an area of contested meaning, even more so than the present since the 'actuality' of the past is even less accessible than that of the present. The past is used to legitimise the status of present affairs, and to render a dominant account of past and present events, which (it is hoped) stands simply as 'common sense' rather than being challenged as an interpretative account.

In general societal terms, Webber suggests that remembrance is used by way of an obligation to the past to render meaningful the apparently meaningless and to retrospectively imbue the past (and thus the present, and the future) with meaning. That the manner in which historical events should be remembered

has frequently been a source of bitter dispute further illustrates that the past is both a meaningful and a contested space.[\[11\]](#)

Thus, the need to commemorate John F. Kennedy becomes startlingly clear. A meaningless act of assassination had necessarily to be rendered comprehensible to those affected, or considered affected, by it. The particular catastrophe of Kennedy's death not only had implications for the United States but also around the globe. Even if his untimely death did not directly affect day to day lives across the continents, it nevertheless carried strong universal meanings, which the American government were keen to indicate and explain and in some way come to terms with.

The very singularity of the events surrounding the death of John F. Kennedy provided a surface upon which various meanings might be inscribed, upon which multiple interpretations might have been founded. The swift production and distribution of 'Years' was a concerted effort by the administration to offer their own inscription of the meaning of Kennedy prior to the attempts of others.

The USIA's own unique memorial to John Kennedy appeared in the form of a documentary film, (a suitable memorial to a man whose image had been created by the television screen) released in 1964 as "Years of Lightning ; Day of Drums". Commissioned on the day of the assassination (thus allowing unrestricted access to the events of the funeral and burial ceremonies) and produced in some forty five languages, "Years" was to stand as the official U.S. government tribute to their fallen leader :

"The U.S. Information Agency decided to produce for distribution to overseas audiences a documentary motion picture depicting the dreams and the achievements of the late President." [\[12\]](#)

A few months after its global release, the film, after some discussion, was passed for screening in the USA, under the auspices of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts [\[13\]](#). In passing the film for domestic distribution, the House of Representatives worried particularly over the impact and reception of an obvious piece of government 'propaganda' upon an American audience.[\[14\]](#)

### **Remembering John F. Kennedy**

Locating the film within its cinematic context illustrates how even in terms of filmic style, "Years" sets an agenda for the manner in which the subject is to be remembered. This preferred mode of reading is extended by the film's content which continues to encode a preferred reading of Kennedy.

Herschensohn's film occupies an uneasy position within cinematic discourse, self consciously straddling the genres of documentary and of motion picture ( the film is described in USIA material as "a documentary motion picture") in order to attempt to obscure the hand of the American government in its production. The fusion of political subject matter with diverse cinematic techniques attempts to privilege entertainment over information, or at least attempts to make the information contained in the film palatable ; This technique also pulls the audience in with dramatic techniques, to a story which is documentary in nature.

The film's base around a single leading character suggests its location within the genre of the 'biopic'. One thinks immediately of the film's similarities to 'Citizen Kane' both in terms of central character and in terms of the parallels between Kane's 'Xanadu' and Kennedy's 'Camelot'. In terms of visual style, the film's similarities to the work of Selznick and of John Ford are obvious. Ford-esque skylines (particularly of Washington) dominate Herschensohn's film, and the film's debt to Selznick is clear in its sweeping camerawork and love of expanse. The opening title sequence and sky shots that immediately follow might almost act as homage to 'Gone with the Wind', and just as 'Gone with the Wind' relies on identity through a sense of place (Tara) so too does "Years of Lightning: Day of Drums".[\[15\]](#)

Since the film begins with Kennedy's death the rest of the narrative and information within it is cast in this light, so that the logic of the film, by this fact alone, moves the audience towards a sympathetic reading of its leading figure. Even before one considers the political portrait of the film, it is clear from the filmic form and style that Kennedy is to be interpreted both as a martyr and as a hero.

The political content of the film serves these ideals still further. Throughout, Kennedy is apparently without fault. He is shown as the family man, without mention of his well known and well catalogued extra-marital activities, and as a skilled politician (the disastrous Bay of Pigs incident receives scant attention except as an experience upon the Presidential learning curve!). Arguably his most important policy achievements - those in the economic sphere - do not warrant a mention at all, perhaps because economic policy does not transfer visually well to screen.[\[16\]](#)

The voice of the film is expository and startlingly authoritative in all respects. Events are described through the straightforward past tense - "The decade was new. The dreams were high. The man was John. F. Kennedy." [17] and the visual sources are simple. (This becomes clearer still when compared with the subjunctive language and the complex visual material used, for example, in Oliver Stone's 'JFK'.) [18]

None of the form of the film is accidental. It is not merely aesthetic but is ideological, for the vision of Kennedy being created within the screen space is that of classic Hollywood heroism, to which the majestic and classical tones of Gregory Peck's narration add the final essential touch.

### **Forgetting John F. Kennedy**

The discrepancies in content already noted indicate a second, though unstated, aim within the film, the imperative to *forget* John Kennedy as well as to remember him. Contradictory as this might sound, the processes of forgetting act as crucial parallel to those of remembering. Despite this fact few, if any, theorists of memory and remembrance have paid any attention to the way in which not remembering, or choosing to forget, functions as a critical component of the discourse of memory.

The processes of memory and commemoration narrativise the past and in doing so necessarily compress events and discard certain areas of information. Since commemoration of 'x' of itself marks 'x' out as of social importance, it follows logically that everything can not be remembered or commemorated (i.e. deemed important) without devaluing the whole process. Thus certain events within social memory are privileged over others. Extending this notion to the particular subject of the film, it is clear that not all aspects are fit for inclusion.

Excluding information from popular memories may be for narrative or technical reasons - complex events are usually compressed or missed out altogether (the Bay of Pigs, for example, in the film) and some subject matter in the case of this film is visually unsuitable (this applies particularly to economic coverage).

Considering this theoretical approach from the opposite direction, film also pressures for the inclusion of available or exclusive footage. In the case of 'Years' this seems particularly applicable to the personal footage, which would have been obtained from the Kennedy family, and the funeral footage, to which other filmmakers had limited, if any, access. Herschensohn's own previous experience as a film maker for General Dynamics might well have influenced the inclusion of such a large quantity of space craft and rocket footage, which elevates the space race to such a high level within the film's account of Kennedy's policymaking.

Yet there is a third imperative at work within the film and that is the imperative of the future, which has a considerable bearing upon what the film chooses to highlight about Kennedy. Throughout the film, the links between Kennedy and Johnson are explicit and recurring :

"The Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps did not die with John Kennedy - they grew as President Johnson reinforced them."

"In June 1964 Congress voted into law President Kennedy's Civil Rights Bill... President Johnson had asked them to pass it as a continuing monument to Kennedy." [19]

The section on the space program also highlights the Kennedy/Johnson relationship, showing for example, both of them watching the Shepherd launch at Cape Canaveral. (Renamed Cape Kennedy, as we are later informed.)

At a time of national crisis and possible global dysfunction, the ideology of this film shows a smooth and swift passing of power over to Johnson, and thus a continuity of the essential 'goodness' of the Kennedy years. Johnson himself commented on this :

"Everything I had ever learned in the history books taught me that martyrs have to die for causes. John F. Kennedy had died...I had to take the dead man's program and turn it into a martyrs cause. That way Kennedy would live on for ever *and so would I*. (my italics) [20]

To forge a new consensus of purpose Johnson offered himself as an instrument for carrying forward the mission of the slain leader. Setting aside whatever differences he may have had with Kennedy, Johnson immersed himself in the mystique of the fallen leader, as the dutiful executor of the Kennedy legacy :

"Intuitively, Johnson understood the importance of being linked with Kennedy - to heal the country's anguish, to build unity behind his own legislative commitments and to win the support of those who otherwise might become his major critics."[\[21\]](#)

In a linking of past to present to future, the legacy of Kennedy is employed in the film to legitimise the incoming Johnson administration.

### **Reconstructing John F. Kennedy**

Behind the commemoration of John F. Kennedy and the attempts to use his memory to legitimise the incoming regime, the film contains another, overarching, yet seemingly unstated theme. "Years" is imbued with an agenda which attempts to promote the fundamental ideological and ethereal 'constants' of the meaning of America, across the globe, and within the United States itself.

The narrative of the film tells of historical events, but they are historical events transfigured by mythicisation into ethereal constants. This transference of meaning from the real to the hyperreal is achieved in the film through the processes of ritualisation.[\[22\]](#) The rest of the film stands alone as an adequate memorial to Kennedy and his administration, but the inclusion of the ritualistic counterpoint of the funeral exists not only to structure the whole film (as indicated by the title) but also to structurally produce meta-meaning within the film. Ritual is the mode by which a higher level of hyperreality is created and sustained, since it takes normative events and transfigures them into a metareality.

Before proceeding to examine the dual way in which ritual processes function within the film, one must consider the key meanings and elements of ritual itself.[\[23\]](#) Crucially, a ritual event is something deemed to be important within a group or society :

"Every society has marked out and demarcated certain activities which are perceived as being different from other activities, acts which are special and not everyday. Wheresoever these acts are performative in nature...these are ritual."[\[24\]](#)

In addition, a ritual practice is one which is deemed to be of greater total meaning than the mere sum of its constituent parts :

"[Ritual as] rule governed activity *of a symbolic character* which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance." [\[25\]](#)

The theory of ritual has concentrated upon the most obviously ritualistic areas of religion, and is less usually extended to consider ritualistic areas of societal activity, such as those I am discussing here. Moving slightly in this direction, David Thelen has posited the notion of a 'civil religion', as a "set of shared beliefs, myths, meaning systems and historical images forming a functionally religious structure." [\[26\]](#)

To single out key traits of ritual for the purposes of analysing the film risks essentialising the notion of ritual, but is necessary to provide a working definition and to avoid the arguments regarding the meaning and function of rituals within society. Extracting key features of ritual is also crucial if the term is to be expanded out of the religious context within which it is currently employed. Thus, drawing upon the work of Parker, I propose the four key features of ritual as follows - repetition, symbolism, ritual language and concerned with the relations between people.[\[27\]](#)

In "Years" the use of ritual is twofold. In the first place, much of the *content* of the film is concerned with ritual action, and in the second, the film itself functions in terms of *form*, as ritual.

Throughout the film, emphasis is placed upon politically important rites - the inauguration and the funeral of John F. Kennedy. The two are counterpointed against one another but also inextricably linked together, one with the other. Both are ritualistic ceremonies generally and in political terms ; little comment is needed about the ritual of the funeral ceremony, but the particularly politicised ritual of the inauguration is worth some consideration in its own right.

The inauguration ceremony displays all the key features of a ritual in a political context...the rite is repetitive, since it is enacted in exactly the same manner for each and every president. It is also clearly a symbolic occasion, which enacts the passing of political power from one leader to the next. The language of the inauguration is formulaic...as is demonstrated most graphically by the swearing of the oath of office. The whole ceremony itself is concerned with the construction of relations between people...the new president is connected to the people by virtue of the crowds who gather to watch, and to whom he speaks

his first words as president, but he is also uniquely distant from them, a fact physically emphasised by his position on the podium.

To return to the use of this and the funeral rite in the film, the two rites are linked visually and verbally through a sense of place, through the people of America and the architecture of Washington itself :

"In the early snow of 1961 an avalanche of people came through the streets of Washington with expectation and joy. They would come again in the Autumn of 1963. (pause) The same people, through the same streets, to the same building. They would come again in 1963 without smiles, without tears. For death like a thief in the night had placed a casket in the rotunda of the Capitol. The same room in which he had walked to his inauguration." [28]

In a similar manner, through the architecture of Washington, Kennedy is also linked with past Presidents of the United States...shots towards the end of the film, for example, show Abraham Lincoln (the Lincoln Memorial) watching Kennedy's cortege pass by, and earlier references to the character of the White House explained the manner in which past great leaders imbued the White House with their own spirit and personality. [29]

This use of rituals functions in two important ways. First, it narrativises the concept of 'the Presidency', through the use of reference back to earlier leaders, the use of presidential memorials and architecture and the use of Washington DC as the symbolic source of power. Kennedy's inauguration is implicitly linked with all those who have gone before him, to create, through the ritual of the inauguration, not only a sense of history, but also a symbolic meta-discourse of the continuity and honour of American presidential power.

Through ritual, the film creates a sense of American history and a sense of American identity. In this respect the film approximates other occasions upon which citizens themselves are asked to examine the meaning of their citizenship, for most of the occasions when citizens are made conscious of their membership of states are themselves modern ritual practices, such as elections. The elaboration of a theatrical idiom of public symbolic discourse continues in effect, and extends even to the collective viewing of the film produced to memorialise Kennedy.

Secondly, the use of the ritualistic funeral footage is used to overturn the power and status of the previous inaugural ritual. Thus in both the narrative and symbolic discourses of the film, Kennedy's inauguration (symbolising the highest source of both power and or honour in the United States) is negated by his untimely death at the hands of an assassin, one of his own citizens. In addition, the sentences which move each policy section to each funeral section explicitly link Kennedy's death to the negation of each of the six faces of the New Frontier. For example, in the move from the section on the Alliance for Progress to the following funeral section, the narration states " for the President would never again stand upon the shores of Latin America".

Thus the film passes a silent judgement upon Kennedy's killer. In the symbolic logic of the film, the assassin has not simply killed an American president but has interrupted the whole line of the American presidency as an institution, and has thus threatened all of American history and identity. The filmic linking of the Kennedy presidency with the city of Washington and its people means that the assassin's shot has penetrated the very core of America itself, and the links with the presidential continuum infers that the assassination threatens the history and identity of America.

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### **Encoding Meaning : Ritual Form**

"Literal recall is very rare and unimportant, remembering being not a matter of reproduction, but of construction ; it is the construction of a 'schema', a coding, which enables us to distinguish and therefore to recall." [30]

Connerton goes on to describe the three types of code which function within a discourse to facilitate recall - the semantic, the visual and the verbal. Given the close links between the processes of film and of memory, the same categories are extremely useful in analysing the way in which the film encodes the memories of John F. Kennedy it wishes to record. In each of these areas of filmic form, the semantic, the visual and the verbal, the form of the film is ritualistic.

Semantically (which I use here, as Connerton does, to suggest 'grammar' ; that is to say, in the case of film, to suggest the underlying organisational structures.) the film functions, as does ritual, in a repetitive manner. The film is divided into six main areas (plus introductory and concluding sections) paralleling the

six faces of the New Frontier which the film chooses as its structure. When this filmic clock is introduced to us, it is with six repeated Kennedy faces, which introduce their themes to the audience by way of original sound bites before disappearing one by one to reveal the mass of faces who represent "those who disagreed with the President".[\[31\]](#)

These six faces are semantically counterpointed by six following shots of the venues chosen to represent the areas of the New Frontier (see shots 93-98). The film proceeds to work through each of these areas one by one, but returning at the end of each section to footage of the funeral, so that by the end of the documentary we have not only encountered various facets of Kennedy's policy but have also witnessed the procession of the funeral cortege from Washington (the Capitol) to Arlington. The policy/funeral structure is repeated throughout the film, like the call and response patterning of a ritual mass, and provides a steady rhythmic and ritualistic organisational structure which normalises the relationship between Kennedy's life and the tragic circumstances of his death. That Kennedy's death will be the constant structural counterpoint to the events of his life has been prefigured by the narration of the film's opening section, which opens with :

"It was true that the assassin took careful aim at the President of the United States. It was true that at the precise moment the assassin waited for the trigger was pulled. And it was true that the president was killed."[\[32\]](#)

It is the ritualistic manner of this dual presentation which allows all of Kennedy's previous actions to be viewed uncritically by the film (and, the filmmakers hope, by the audience) since they are viewed through the emotional act of the assassination. This manner of presentation aims, like ritual practice itself, to privilege emotion over reason and to attempt to prohibit a critical reading of the text.[\[33\]](#)

The visual elements of the film work within the same symbolic and repetitive discourses of ritual and also construct (as does ritual) a particular set of hermeneutic relations. By a 'symbolic' visual sign, I identify those signs in which there exists a metaphorical link between the signifier and the signified ; that is to say that the relation between the two relies upon connotative rather than denotative meaning.[\[34\]](#)

Pre-eminent among such symbols is the American flag. David Thelen has described the American flag as :

"...the primary symbol of what is distinctive about the United States...it represents the core of our nationality, our declared political identity..."

The flag has assumed a moral value transcending the mundane purposes of national identification."[\[35\]](#)

The pre-existing moral meaning of the flag is brought to bear upon the film symbolically and repeatedly at key moments. As the opening narration ends the description of the shooting of Kennedy, the chiaroscuro clouds dissolve into a shot of the American flag flying at half mast.[\[36\]](#) Already the flag has been narratively associated with national mourning ("it is true that the President was killed")[\[37\]](#) and with the possibility of regeneration ("but it was also true that the assassin missed his target, for he wanted Kennedy to die and that he was unable to do").[\[38\]](#)

The flag is associated with the triumphal parades of Pennsylvania Avenue (shots 41ff) and thus with the continuum of American Presidents, history and memory, for on Pennsylvania Avenue, "memories were of Jefferson and Lincoln, of Wilson, Roosevelt, Truman and Eisenhower."[\[39\]](#) and the symbol of the nation is now passed to "John Fitzgerald Kennedy".[\[40\]](#) Perhaps the most enduring vision of the US flag as symbol is its use as covering for Kennedy's coffin. In the same room of the Capitol that he walked to on the day of his inauguration, Kennedy's body, lying in state, is symbolically covered with the flag of his nation.

In contrast to the earlier scenes of flags in Pennsylvania Avenue, later scenes are dominated by the many flags at the head of the funeral procession juxtaposed against the sombre image of the single flag draped over the coffin. Yet crucially the flag does not die with Kennedy, but is conspicuously handed to Jacqueline at Arlington. (In the final funeral section of the film.) With this symbol of both death and regeneration in her hand, she lights the eternal flame.[\[41\]](#)

Within the logic of the film, the Kennedy family themselves play a crucial symbolic role, creating a fixed set of relations between themselves, the audience (both at the funeral and in the cinema) and the events. Importantly, they are *liminal* characters, straddling the dual worlds of personal grief and public commonality of mourning.[\[42\]](#) They provide the connection between personal and collective grief and

between private and public mourning. In contrast to the stream of dignitaries who follow the cortege and proclaim Kennedy's political importance, the presence of his family as equally important proclaims his personal, spiritual, and thus universal, importance. [43]

More briefly, Kennedy is mythicised through the use of several other key symbols. The riderless horse present in the funeral scenes is conspicuous amidst the mass of other horses for its lack of rider and thus poignantly symbolises the missing, the absent Kennedy. Any suggestion of futility this may engender is banished by the parallel of hope for the future which comes through the attention paid to the thoughtful contemplation of the Kennedy children. The sky is also symbolic of the Kennedy spirit ; in the opening section , Kennedy's death is linked with dark storm clouds, which gradually lighten to become chiaroscuro as we become aware through the narration that the spirit of Kennedy persists. The supra earthly connection is maintained during the section which posits Kennedy metaphorically looking down upon the troubled world and resolving to lead it, and is transfigured by the end of the film, which closes simply with a blank screen and the voice over :

"John F. Kennedy is now silent and invisible but so is peace and freedom and so is love and faith and so are memories and dreams." [44]

In the third and final part of this analysis of the ritual processes at work in the film, I turn to perhaps the most strikingly ritualistic element of the film, its verbal and audio structures. [45] In addition to the strong visual messages of the film, the sound in this picture steers us even more in particular interpretative directions. I have already mentioned the importance of the narration by Peck - the star status he brings to the film direct our expectations towards the heroic before he even speaks. In addition, several other key features of the audio structures stand out.

Throughout the film, music acts as a repetitive symbolic motif. The music reflects the mood of each section of the film and also acts as a theme (like the recurring musical themes in *Birth of a Nation*, for example) which unites some sections of the film and contrasts others. All the documentary (policy) sections of the film, plus the introduction and conclusion are accompanied by constant music. In marked contrast, the funeral sections of the film are silent, without music and voice over. Like the ritual call/response pattern of the film as a whole, this noise/silence duality creates an audio ritual patterning in which the response to the noise of the Kennedy years is only the silence of his death. However, within this silence, two key audio symbols recur.

The first is the sound of the tolling bell, which symbolises the Angelus calling people to prayer. In the film it calls people, as to mass, to pray for Kennedy and to revere him, as they do when they file past his coffin in the Capitol, and line the streets to witness his cortege pass by. Just as the religious Angelus calls the ordinary population together to collectively experience the moment at which they are closest to God, so the tolling bell in the film calls the citizens of America and of the world to the collective experience of mourning which brings them physically and emotionally close to their leader. The bell is used in religious ritual to celebrate and commemorate the mystery of the Incarnation and is used both at celebration (mass) and at death. Symbolically within the film, the bell is audio counterpoint to the flag upon Kennedy's coffin, at one symbolising despair and hope.

Secondly, the sound of the horses hooves and the wheels of the cart over the streets of Washington is the only other allowed to substantially influence the silent funeral scenes. This links symbolically with the notion I discussed earlier of the relation between space and person, and the forming of filmic identity through a sense of place. Kennedy's identity in the film has been forged through the sense of Washington as the seat of American power and history, so that it is fitting that in his final journey it is these very streets that he traverses. In contrast to the motorcade which saw the tragic end to his life, Kennedy's body is carried upon a wooden cart/wagon which is suggestive of simplistic dignity and of a sense of American history gone by. The noise of this we hear draws our attention to all of these symbolic possibilities and networks of meaning.

Overwhelmingly, the film is controlled by the content of Peck's narration. Key terms are repeated, linked and juxtaposed throughout and the speech is heavily rhetorically patterned like the programmatic speech of the ritual process. The voice over opens with a sombre yet authoritative tri-partite statement of truth :

"It was true that the assassin took careful aim at the President of the United States.

It was true that at the precise moment the assassin waited for the trigger was pulled.

And it was true the President was killed." [46]

The tri partite rhetorical patterning is common throughout the film, assuming the form of "God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit" transfigured into political rather than religious context. The next piece of narration opens with the similarly structured :

"The decade was new.  
The dreams were high.  
The man was John F. Kennedy." [47]

The structure of this three part statement is like that of an incantation, and posits 'new', 'high' and 'Kennedy' as linguistically similar. That is to say, Kennedy is associated with the two other terms in the incantation, and his name might even be seen as a progression from the others. Towards the end of the opening section of the film, the narration parallels another three part statement with these first two, for, it is claimed - "upon the floating globe called the world there were three billion people and most of them were not happy or free or at peace." The organisation of the narrative parallels the earlier Kennedy personal qualities with the later (currently lacking) global qualities. By implication, it is the first set of qualities, embodied in Kennedy, that will bring the latter qualities to the world.

The long section which follows and which introduces the main tenets of Kennedy's policy one by one, and is contrasted semantically [48] with the immediately following section which repeatedly stresses "those who disagreed with the President". The repetition of "those" throughout this section creates the 'other' to the Kennedy/new/high/peace/freedom matrix of meaning.

The end of the opening section transforms Kennedy into the epitome of ethereal qualities such as exceptionalism and compassion :

"But perhaps man is at times dominated by the things he could see the clearest and hear the loudest. While the uncommon man is not so preoccupied with sight and sound. Instead he thinks in terms of the invisible and silent. He thinks of compassion, which is invisible and silent. He thinks of peace which is invisible and silent, not war with its bright flames and explosive roars. He thinks of freedom, which is invisible and silent, not oppression....John Kennedy was that uncommon man. And so he built his new frontier in an uncommon manner." [49]

Using the tri-partite structure again, this section, accompanied visually by the images of clouds which symbolically transfigured Kennedy into the world of myth, achieves the same effect with verbal structures. More importantly, this section establishes the pattern for the final manner in which Kennedy will be remembered by the film : With his visual identity in the final shots merely a black screen, the final analysis of Kennedy comes through the ritualistic re-use of this earlier verbal image and form, for :

"John F. Kennedy is now silent and invisible, but so is peace and freedom and so is love and faith and so are memories and dreams." [50]

This is in essence the end result of the film, for it has transfigured Kennedy through ritualisation, to create a mythological, messianic transfiguration of a political figure from the political arena to the annals of American history, social memory and identity.