



A DIAMOND JUBILEE
FOR ANDY!

A Tribute to
Andy Warhol
on his 75th Birthday

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A TRIBUTE TO ANDY WARHOL ON HIS 75TH BIRTHDAY

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EXCAVATING ANDY WARHOL'S FILM LEGACY

My personal contact with Andy Warhol was fleeting, but my professional involvement with his cinematic creations was intimate. I recall observing him at a Paramount Pictures tribute in the 1970's at The Museum of Modern Art. He was face-to-face with Gloria Swanson, capturing her every word with an audio recording apparatus in his hands, while maintaining his usual silent public persona. Little did I realize that later I would be materially involved with bringing his cinematic legacy back to life.

A mythology had already developed by the mid 1970's surrounding Warhol's films, which by then had been withdrawn from circulation. Did they still exist, or did Warhol have them destroyed in one fell swoop? Because it was only possible to read about his films (in such books as Stephen Koch's *Stargazer*), I was intent upon tracking down as many Warhol films as would surface in clandestine fashion. In my business travels, I attended an underground showing of *Kitchen* in Rome, as well as a midnight screening of *Couch* in Paris. I still clearly recall the exotic pleasure of witnessing those light and shadow film projections.

In the 1980's, John Hanhardt, who was then Curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, reached an agreement with Warhol to mount a retrospective of his works. In his farsighted fashion, Hanhardt recognized the need to preserve Warhol's films in conjunction with the forthcoming exhibition, so he approached The Museum of Modern Art as a partner in this ambitious project. As I was actively involved in archiving experimental films for MOMA's permanent collection, I was placed in charge of overseeing the preservation of these films.

I still recall in vivid fashion the day when we retrieved Warhol's films from a remote storage facility in Fort Lee, New Jersey. Innumerable boxes of film elements, comprising thousands of reels of film, were subsequently deposited in MOMA's film storage vaults. As I later came to realize, Warhol, acting as a film producer, had treated the legacy of his film works in similar fashion to more mainstream, commercial film production companies. Once the immediate economic life of these properties had been exploited, the physical materials were boxed, and ferreted away to remote storage, where they remained untended for years. Therefore, our primary challenge in preserving Warhol's films was to transform this collection of disparate material into an archiving system which would enable orderly access. We brought the original camera footage from dead warehouse storage together with prints previously generated in the 1960s (many of which were housed at the Factory), and then assembled a detailed technical inspection record for every reel of film that had been produced.

Donning the lab coat of my brother, the doctor, I began the surgical procedure of sorting through and assessing this material. It was an absolutely thrilling experience to project vintage prints of these films for the first time in twenty years. I was immediately struck by the extraordinary historical and artistic value of this body of Warhol films, which were produced over the course of five years, from 1963 to 1968. In terms of the sheer volume of films shot, the method of their production, the stable of actors and collaborators which Warhol employed, and the structural elegance of the films, Warhol's cinematic output rivaled the productivity and complexity of D.W. Griffith's, who worked for five years (from 1908 to 1913) as a producer and director at the Biograph Company.

For the first Warhol film retrospective, which was organized by John Hanhardt at the Whitney Museum in 1988 (shortly following Warhol's untimely death in 1987), we selected more than a dozen films to be shown, using original prints from the Warhol collection. The public exhibition of these films was such a revelation that Jim Hoberman, the film critic of the *Village Voice*, listed *Beauty #2* as one of the ten best films of 1988, even though it was made 25 years earlier! We simultaneously preserved these films in MOMA's archive, working from Warhol's camera originals. A second set of negatives and distribution prints were made available through MOMA's Circulating Film Library.

In 1990, I had the good fortune to travel yet again to Italy, this time to introduce a selection of Warhol films, which were showing in Turin. As I sat on the banks of the Po River, thinking about my introduction to the films, Andy's spirit came to me. It dawned on me that multiple prints of Warhol's films were now being shown simultaneously in different parts of the globe, and I felt that I had helped further Andy's mission of making his Pop Art creations more accessible to the world at large.

Subsequent Warhol film retrospectives have taken place at the Whitney and other institutions, now most recently at BAM, with pristine prints provided by The Andy Warhol Museum, the current owner of the Warhol films, from materials preserved by MOMA. Since my departure from MOMA in 1991, Callie Angell, Director of the Andy Warhol Film Project at the Whitney Museum, has been making a detailed analysis of every reel of film that Warhol produced. The completion of her catalog raisonne of this material should shed the authoritative light on Warhol's filmmaking career.

Jon Gartenberg