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2011

# Andy Warhol's Deaths and the Assembly-Line Autobiography

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## ANDY WARHOL'S DEATHS AND THE ASSEMBLY-LINE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

CHARLES REEVE

Test-driving the artworld cliché that dying young is the perfect career move, Andy Warhol starts his 1980 autobiography *POPism: The Warhol Sixties* by reflecting, “If I’d gone ahead and died ten years ago, I’d probably be a cult figure today” (3). It’s vintage Warhol: off-hand, image-obsessed, and clever. It’s also, given Warhol’s preoccupation with fame, a lament. Sustaining one’s celebrity takes effort and nerves, and Warhol often felt incapable of either. “Oh, Archie, if you would only talk, I wouldn’t have to work another day in my life,” Bob Colacello, a key Warhol business functionary, recalls the artist whispering to one of his dachshunds: “Talk, Archie, talk” (144). Absent a talking dog, maybe cult status could relieve the pressure of fame, since it shoots celebrities into a timeless realm where their notoriety never fades.

But cults only reach diehard fans, whereas Warhol’s posthumously published diaries emphasize that he coveted the stratospheric stardom of Elizabeth Taylor and Michael Jackson—the fame that guaranteed mobs wherever they went. (Reviewing *POPism* in the *New Yorker*, Calvin Tomkins wrote that Warhol “pursued fame with the single-mindedness of a spawning salmon” [114].) Even more awkwardly, cult status entails dying—which means either you’re not around to enjoy your notoriety or, Warhol once nihilistically proposed, you’re not *not* around to enjoy it. “I don’t believe in [death],” begins the two-sentence chapter “Death: All About It” in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, “because you’re not around to know that it’s happened” (123). So not being a cult figure—if we accept that Warhol wasn’t—has its upside: the artist lives on, perhaps to secure a larger version of fame.

On the other hand, during the late 1970s, as they were engaged in the transcribing, writing, and redacting that would produce *POPism*, Warhol and his co-writer Pat Hackett couldn’t have missed the publicity benefits of a premature demise. In 1970 and 1971, rockers Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and

Jim Morrison, and artists Eva Hesse and Robert Smithson died in their late 20s to mid 30s; Mama Cass and artist Gordon Matta-Clark were similarly young when they followed in 1974 and 1978. Unshakable auras surrounded them all, and the odd convergence of regret and relief coloring Warhol's speculation about what would have happened if he'd met the same fate goes deeper than his playful opening allows.

After all, work started on *POPism* in the later 1970s, when Warhol *had* nearly died “ten years ago” in dramatic circumstances recounted near the book's end:<sup>1</sup>

as I was putting the phone down, I heard a loud exploding noise and whirled around: I saw Valerie pointing a gun at me and I realized she'd just fired it.

I said, “No! No, Valerie! Don't do it!” and she shot at me again. I dropped down to the floor as if I'd been hit—I didn't know if I actually was or not. I tried to crawl under the desk. She moved in closer, fired again, and then I felt horrible, horrible pain, like a cherry bomb exploding inside me. (272–73)

“Valerie” is Valerie Solanas, self-styled leader of the Society for Cutting Up Men and a disgruntled sometime Warhol hanger-on.<sup>2</sup> Following her assault, Warhol suggests, he passed through death's door but fortunately—or not—returned to the near side too quickly to launch a cult: “They brought me back from the dead—literally, because I'm told that at one point I was gone. For days and days afterward, I wasn't sure if I *was* back. I felt dead” (274). The reality of this near-death experience prompts one to wonder what Warhol has in mind with his breezy opening. Is his desire for fame so perverse that part of him wishes he'd died and thus secured it? Or does his book begin with a sensationalizing joke about Solanas's nearly successful murder attempt? Given Warhol's work-is-everything/everything-is-work ethic, one can imagine him making—or approving—a joke about his near-death experience if he thought it would sell books. It's easy to picture Warhol and Hackett pitching ledes at each other until something sticks.

Indeed, the book reads as though a sales team produced it, perhaps because Bob Colacello is right that Warhol was Hackett's co-writer rather than the other way around. In Colacello's account, Hackett proposed the book and wrote most of the best parts, drafting sections based on interviews with such vital Warhol *confidants* as Metropolitan Museum curator Henry Geldzahler and documentary filmmaker Emile de Antonio (208, 419). More modestly, Hackett reports that Warhol invited her to work on *POPism* because she helped with *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, his previous autobiography-by-committee (xiii). Either way, a pattern of group authorship emerges as we move backward in time through Warhol's literary output—from the

autobiographies *POPism* and *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol, to a: a novel* (1968), to the mid-1960s interviews fabricated with Warhol's consent by his studio assistant, the young poet Gerard Malanga.

In fact, given the size of the team that worked on *Philosophy*, any "philosophy" it contains likely is Warhol's in name only. Originally, Colacello relates, he was meant to ghostwrite *Philosophy*, and he liked this plan. "It was so much easier being a ghost writer than a real writer," he observes in *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up*. "When the 'I' wasn't me I could coast along at the typewriter, instead of worrying over every syllable" (207). Stifled by the writerly injunction to be himself, Colacello evades it by hiding behind Warhol's mask. That this evasion couldn't be more Warholian carries with it a certain irony, since Colacello fills *Holy Terror* with put-downs of Warhol as narcissistic, vicious, and clueless. Meanwhile, Warhol's inimitable—and paradoxical—strategy of being simultaneously hands-off and a control freak, both evaded the ethical issues typically associated with collaborative autobiographies and wound them up to an unparalleled tension (see Couser). (Solanis was unique in the extremity of her anger at Warhol, but she was far from alone in feeling used by him.)

Soon, though, Colacello's ghostwriting divided further as, in true Warholian style, an assembly line evolved to accelerate output. "When I finished the chapter," Colacello writes,

I handed it to Andy. He counted the pages, as he counted the ads in *Interview* [the Factory's magazine], and said, "Only twelve?" He took it home that night and read it over the phone to Brigid Berlin, taping her reaction. Then he gave the tape to Pat Hackett, telling her to "make it better." So now the ghostwriter had a ghostwriter, Factory-style. A literary assembly-line was set up: Bob to Andy to Brigid to Pat to Andy to [Harcourt Brace Jovanovich], with a quick stop at Fred's desk to make sure we didn't put in anything "funny" about Lee Radziwill or Jackie Onassis. (208)

As other duties swamped Colacello, Hackett got more involved. "Pat ended up writing more of the *Philosophy* book than I did," Colacello says, and her version of the story expands the tape recorder's role:

I did eight separate interviews with Andy on the basis of which I wrote chapters 1 through 8 and chapter 10. Then, using material from the conversations Andy had taped between himself and Bob Colacello and Brigid Berlin, I wrote the introductory chapter and chapters 9, 11, 12, 13 and 14. (xiii)

Warhol's more streamlined account focuses the writing process directly on the tape recorder. Asked in a 1977 interview with *High Times* how he wrote *Philosophy*, he responded, "I taped most of it talking to my secretary, Pat Hackett. I used to call her in the morning to tell her what I did the day before" (O'Brien 249).

Warhol probably misrepresents the situation, but his emphasis on the tape recorder highlights the importance of his tapes as fodder for the assembly line—a key consideration because, beyond requiring that Warhol only vaguely know what was going on, the Factory directive was to churn out product that would exploit Warhol’s brand, and the tapes provided endless material for books in the same way that Polaroids, Coke bottles, and Campbell’s soup cans offered endless material for paintings. (This attitude’s apotheosis occurred perhaps in 1985, when Warhol delighted in taking his first taste of Diet Coke *after* filming a commercial to endorse it [*Diaries* 637].) What products got sold seems to have been immaterial so long as checks arrived payable to Andy Warhol Enterprises—wryly abbreviated AWE—so much so that, several times, Warhol described production for production’s sake as the Factory’s motivation. And the use of Andy Warhol Enterprises as the business structure obliquely underscores the link to Warhol’s earlier days as an illustrator, along with the all-business attitude that went with that previous career, since Warhol established AWE in 1957 to support his burgeoning illustration business. Emphasizing this connection, in 1966 he described his art to Gretchen Berg as “just work . . . it’s just work” (89). Several years later, he told Lititia Kent, “We haven’t really finished a complete film. . . . We just keep busy” (190). More grimly, in 1986 he tells his *Diary*, “Really, what’s life about? You get sick and die. That’s it. So you’ve just got to keep busy” (721). And, as it happened, Warhol’s chronic gall bladder condition killed him about eighteen months later.

Initially at least, Warhol matched this indifference toward what got done with an apathy about who did it. Similarly, details like who wrote his books or checked his facts mattered to Warhol mostly to the extent that he could ensure nothing libellous—what Colacello calls “funny”—got published. (Defending libel suits costs money, and the aggrieved would be unlikely to commission a lucrative portrait.) If Friedrich Nietzsche epitomizes autobiography’s conventional expectation of sincerity and self-revelation by commanding readers of *Ecce Homo*, “Above all, do not mistake me for someone else!” (71), then Warhol opposes this ideal with a shrug and a bashful suggestion that we do as we like.

This indifference or disdain toward sincerity and other Romantic values like confession, expression, and self-revelation explains why Frederic Jameson, sweepingly assessing post-modernism during the early 1980s, characterized Warhol’s art as the *ne plus ultra* of “a virtual deconstruction of the very aesthetic of expression itself” (11). Obliging, Warhol already had produced—or dismantled—himself as the perfect post-modern subject, the paragon of shattered subjectivity, when he, or Colacello, or Hackett, wrote in *Philosophy*, “I never fall apart because I never fall together” (81). That this line comes in a passage about Warhol’s fear of being on television (“Is this a live show? It is?

Well then forget it, I'm going to faint") emphasizes the quintessentially post-modern cast of his ambivalence toward this subject position because, camera fright aside, technology obsessed him: he constructed his public persona and his artistic practice (not that the two differed much) entirely in relation to his film and sound gear, his ever-larger Polaroid cameras, and especially his telephones and tape recorders.

This last appliance became ubiquitous in Warhol's life, enabling the labor of writing to be divided and thus expediting the production of his autobiographies. Either Colacello wrote a chapter, which Warhol read to Berlin while taping her reaction to give to Hackett, or Hackett wrote the book based on those tapes along with others featuring Colacello and Warhol, or the book came from Warhol's recording of his phone calls to Hackett. One way or another, the taped conversation drove *Philosophy*, as it did his *Diaries*, his novel *a*, and probably *POPism*. The tape recorder's centrality points to three key motivations for Warhol's autobiographies: Warhol wants to hear himself; he wants to be heard; and he wants to hear that he has been heard. These doubled and tripled layers of hearing align *Philosophy* with Jacques Derrida's punning term "otobiography," coined in the late 1970s to highlight the importance of the "ear of the other" in autobiography: "it is the ear of the other that signs. . . . The ear of the other says me to me and constitutes the *autos* of my autobiography" (51). Warhol's literalizing of autobiography as otobiography supplements the fleshy ear with a mechanical one backed up with a transcript, preferably shaped into a salable book. The resulting archives attest to this obsession: the *Diaries* that Hackett edited after Warhol died, for instance, though hefty, are a fraction of the 20,000 pages of transcripts that she assembled (xviii).

This piling up of words points to the flip side of Warhol's assembly line literary production. In *The Telephone Book*, Avital Ronell suggests that the telephone sprang partly from Thomas A. Watson's dutiful infatuation with labor-saving devices (237). Certainly the phone was that for Warhol, but so was the tape recorder. Literary scholar Christopher Schmidt, apparently galled by the designation of Warhol as a writer, objects that the artist used taping so much that he never wrote a word. "Warhol's literary career was not so much a calling as a strategy," Schmidt complains, "an extension of the Warhol publicity machine, dependent on transcribers, co-authors, and the portable tape recorder" (794). The implications of Schmidt's objections matter: casting Warhol's literary production (using the term advisedly) as strategy, not vocation, positions the artist as lazy and vacuous. Indifferent rather than dedicated, Warhol just kept busy.

Nor does his reader—or listener—interest him, and herein lies an important difference (evidently not the only one) between Warhol and Derrida. By

multiplying the other's ear, Warhol devalues rather than fetishizes it. If for Derrida autobiographies speak in the ear of the other, any ear of any other satisfied Warhol. His books aren't about communication.

Granted, Warhol's first listener mattered. His *Diaries* started from his concern to document his expenses in case the IRS came calling—as they did annually from the early 1970s on. (Perhaps Warhol was right to link this unwanted attention to his support for George McGovern's presidential campaign [Hackett xvi].) More broadly, though, no conversation outweighed any other. Wanting to record everything, Warhol took his tape recorder everywhere. "My wife, Sony," he called it, and her tin and plastic ears captured every conversation—the more banal, the better—in a way that anticipated the current trend to capture every aspect of our daily lives (celebrity or not) by publicizing our activities through myriad social media (see Zuern).

The circuit that developed around Warhol, with the Factory as its control panel or power supply, sustained and shared his need to be heard. A series of otobiographical loops developed, with Warhol at one terminus and some other Factory denizen—Geldzahler, Hackett, speed freak and Warhol "superstar" Ondine, fashion designer Halston, debauched socialite Brigid Berlin—at the other. The opening of *Philosophy* diagrams this construction of the participants as ciphers in a network:

I wake up and call B.

B is anybody who helps me kill time.

B is anybody and I'm nobody. B and I.

I need B because I can't be alone. Except when I sleep. Then I can't be with anybody.

I wake up and call B. (5)

*Philosophy's* subtitle, *From A to B and Back Again*, suggests that Warhol plays *A* to his interlocutor's *B*—a presumption confirmed a few pages in, when *B* says, "Three out of five parties are going to be a drag, A" (9). Of course, "A" stands for "Andy," and mildly humorous associations spin off from there. "From A to B": the shortest distance between generic points, unquantified variables in a mathematical equation, the anonymous respondent in a Q and A. In short, ciphers; a spin on a famous Warholism from 1963. "I think everybody should be a machine," he told G. R. Swenson: "I think everybody should like everybody" (16). Then, answering Swenson's follow-up question—"Is that what Pop Art is all about?"—Warhol takes this dehumanization one more step. "Yes. It's liking things," he replies, his formulation equating "things" to "people."



As Taro Nettleton proposes, this *A* has a further basis in Warhol's desire for a smoother, less idiosyncratic name:

Despite nicely rhyming with Coca-Cola, the name of the product of which he was so fond, Andrew Warhola sounded too particular; it didn't have the neutrality of a name that could be broadly commercialized and disseminated. It was in part by dropping the graphically awkward little *a* that Warhol transfigured himself into an iconic and symmetrical capital *A* and thereby became more like the household names that were so widely admired as to not need spelling out—like *S.L.*, *M.D.*, *G.G.*, or *J.C.* (19)

This doubled significance of the *A* being the first and last letters of Warhol's name—that is, borrowed from its start and cut from its end—creates a paradox. It identifies *A* more firmly with “Andy,” making it more like the name of a specific person, Andy Warhol(a). But conversely, it also tightens that person's bond to the generic identifier, strengthening the suitability of a meaningless label for the anonymous (or interchangeable) person it identifies.

Nor did Warhol play this game only with himself. Asked by *High Times* about the *B*'s in *Philosophy*, Warhol replies, “Brigid is the only *BI* know.”

The reporter persists: “There are other *B*'s in the book.”

“Yeah,” Warhol says, “but Brigid is the queen.” (O'Brien 249)

Indeed, *Philosophy* sometimes distinguishes between *B*'s—as in, “This *B* was stubborn” (171). However, along with making a sly joke—leaving *B/bee* unsaid after “Brigid is the queen”—Warhol loops Brigid into a game of identity similar to the one he made of *A*. “Brigid” is Brigid Berlin, hence *B.B.* The doubled initial retains a certain improbability. Berlin was unusual at the Factory in that her pseudonym, Brigid Polk, sounded more real than her name. But her adopted surname played on “poke”—as Brigid often did through her jeans with an amphetamine-charged needle (Bockris, *Life* 146). Since *B* is both of her initials, using it to refer to her infuses it with her identity. Yet stripping “*B.B.*” down to “*B*” also removes its individuality, making it generic like Andy's *A*. Rather than creating an identity—a brand—this stripping down reduces the individual to a generic link in a network of signification, to an undifferentiated part in a mass of similar subjects. As Hal Foster notes, this conception of identity resembles Roger Callois's description of the psychaesthetic subject as similar: “Not similar to something,” Callois explains, “but just *similar*” (165).

Or, if Warhol's notion of identity does entail similarity to something, perhaps it's the similarity of the widget, the generic, mass-produced thing. For instance, Colacello got his name when Warhol convinced him to drop the “*i*” from “Colaciello”—thus, like Warhol, excising the letter that seemed like an excess syllable—but Warhol had wanted something more radical. Why just

remove the “i” from Colaciello? Why not remove the “I” from his identity? “Bob Cola,” Colacello recalls Warhol insisting. “It’s a great name” (47).

No doubt “Cola” struck Warhol as a great name partly for its ridiculousness. More significantly, though, it loops its bearer into an infinite, mass-produced series of identical entities. A riff in *Philosophy* on the democracy of Coca-Cola makes this clear:

A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. (101)

In one way, Warhol understates his position here: rather than being the same because they’re good, the Cokes are good because they’re the same. Warhol’s key point isn’t that the source of the Cokes’ goodness is the recipe, and that their sameness spins out from that: rather, what’s good about them is that they’re the same. Sameness means predictability, which means easiness. No variables means no choice, which means no thought, which means no effort.

And Warhol’s art at this time diagrammed the shared generic quality of the mass-produced individual and other mass-produced products, depicting rows and rows of Marilyns, Elvises, soup cans, and Coke bottles.<sup>3</sup> So it’s not surprising that, even without his “I,” Colacello was too close to being one-of-a-kind for Warhol’s taste. When Colacello tries to put Warhol off the idea of the name “Bob Cola” by suggesting a more dramatic name change to “Bob Royal Crown Cola,” Warhol replies, “Well, now *that* would be a really great name” (47).

Colacello’s resistance aside, most of the Factory’s habitués enthusiastically used pseudonyms: Billy Name, Ultra Violet, Holly Woodlawn, Ingrid Superstar, and of course Andy Warhol. The designations *A* and *B* extended this play, growing as they did from far more radical attempts by Warhol to evacuate agency not only from his interlocutors but also from himself—efforts that he abandoned perhaps because their obtuseness hurt his brand. The opening of Warhol’s first major publication, *a: a novel*, hints at this history by making Warhol *B* to Ondine’s *A*:

*Rattle, gurgle, clink, tinkle.*

*Click, pause, click, ring.*

*Dial, dial.*

ONDINE—You said (*dial*) that, that, if, if you pick, pick UP the Mayor’s voice on the other end (*dial, pause, dial-dial-dial*), the Mayor’s sister would know us, be (*busy-busy-busy*). DRELLA—We should start for the park, right? Okay Hmmm. *Coin drops. Money jingles as coins return. Car noises in background.* You’re a clunk. Are there any way stations on the way that we have to (*honk, honk*) like, uh, I, wha— (*noise*). If we go through, through the park, is there ANY place

we can keep calling your, uh, I mean right through the, uh, phone call. Is there any place we can keep call him if we— Answering service . . . Are you (*cars honking, blasting*). Are there diffERent places—are there different places where we can call your ans—oh. Want some cake? (1)

Ondine conducts one conversation by phone and another with Warhol, a.k.a. Drella, while obsessing about his inability to juggle a third. Hence his concern with checking Warhol's answering service. (Funnily enough, *Philosophy* opens with the epigram, "A: I have never called my answering service" [3].) Ondine may or may not care about the content of these conversations, but he's obsessed with and distracted by a need to be the overloaded switchboard of a conversational network. And although Warhol's at the other end of a conversation when the novel opens, we soon realize he's made himself exchangeable with anyone who can work a tape recorder and match Ondine's pace. (The exchangeability explains why John Wilcock was right to call his 1971 collection of interviews about Warhol *The Autobiography and Sex Life of Andy Warhol*, even though Warhol's not the author.)

Although published in 1968 and purportedly based on tapes that recorded the amphetamine-wired Ondine for twenty-four hours straight, *a* in fact derives from tapes made from August 1965 to May 1967 (Bockris, "*a*" 453). As such, the project overlaps with more disconcerting attempts by Warhol to hide behind a mask of himself. "[Y]ou should just tell me the words and I can just repeat them because I can't, uh . . . I can't . . . I'm so empty today," he tells film and television director Lane Slate in a conversation filmed in 1966. "I can't think of anything. Why don't you just tell me the words and they'll come out of my mouth" (80).

With interview hell on the horizon, Slate attempted to dissuade Warhol—largely successfully, though Warhol did try the formula:

Q: And then you made, uh. . .

WARHOL: And then I made, uh. . .

Q: Things like. . .

WARHOL: Things like. . .

Q: Uh. . .

WARHOL: Uh. . . (81)

More significant than its deliberate dullness suggests, this repetition both extends Warhol's experiments with anonymity and links them with contemporary avant-garde poetry—and thus to discussions of the demise of writerly intention.

The connection comes through Malanga, the poet who assisted at Warhol's studio early on. In an interview by Patrick Smith, Malanga claimed to have proposed "a novel or a book that was entirely composed from a cassette" (179). Malanga used appropriation in his writing, so his assertion is credible. For instance, his interviews with Warhol in 1963 and 1964 derived, as he said, from "readymade situations" (Goldsmith 47). The first of these took a found employment questionnaire for a script. The second also drew on a found text but—more radically and amusingly—presented as Warhol's words blocks of text cribbed from a brochure about the Empire State Building:

GM: *Andy, can you brief me on some of Empire State's vital statistics in comparison with other structures of similar nature?*

AW: The internationally known Empire State Building is the world's tallest building. Comparative statistics show that the 1,472-foot-high Empire State Building towers over such other international structures as the 984-foot-high Eiffel Tower, the 555-foot-high Washington Monument, the 480-foot-high Pyramid of Cheops, and the 179-foot-high Leaning Tower of Pisa. (Malanga, "Interview" 55–56)

By the third interview, Malanga simply made up both the questions and answers without Warhol's input. As Reva Wolf shows, Malanga's interest in the appropriation-driven poetry of John Ashbery and Ted Berrigan informed these "interview" techniques: "Warhol together with Ted Berrigan, Gerard Malanga, and a few other poets raised all the questions regarding authorship that would soon be posed in now-famous and often cited essays by Roland Barthes ('The Death of the Author,' 1968) and Michel Foucault ('What Is an Author?,' 1969), which were both published in English translation in the late 1970s" (12).

The connection to Barthes is noteworthy, as he presented himself as a distributed subject in the autobiography he wrote in the same decade that Warhol published *Philosophy* and *POPism*. Famously, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* opens with the epigram, "It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel," to which Barthes later adds, "—or rather by several characters" (frontispiece, 119). Barthes's directive that his readers see him as a constellation of constructed identities has a Warholian cast that supports Wolf's point: the link may be at one remove, but Warhol's interest in the disappearing agent engages writerly concerns that circulated at the time and have had lasting influence.

The longest shadows followed Jameson, Foucault, Barthes, and Derrida, the latter two being especially germane given their interest in autobiography at the time. However, Warhol's distributed approaches to cultural production also had implications closer to home. It linked him to the rising tendency

during the 1960s and 1970s for writers and artists to distance themselves from their work—partly through the use of collage and “found” materials, but also, particularly in visual art, by farming out production. Minimalism’s reliance on professional fabricators is the most obvious example, but as art historian Caroline Jones shows, other important instances in Warhol’s milieu include, at the start of the 1960s, Frank Stella (whom she calls an “executive artist”), and at that decade’s end, Robert Smithson (whose ambitious earth-works had to be contracted out to construction companies).

But while Warhol’s interest in “dead” authors and disintegrated subjects shared much with the contemporary artistic and literary culture, an important difference also existed. Through a macabre doubling down, Warhol added a literal dimension to the use of death and disintegration as figures for shifting notions of subjectivity. By 1962, he had started pursuing death as a motif with *129 Die in Jet! (Plane Crash)*. Based on the front page of a sensational *New York Mirror* headline, this large piece foreshadowed many death-themed works to come. Asked by G. R. Swenson why he started this series, Warhol responded:

I believe in it. Did you see the *Enquirer* this week? It had “The Wreck that Made Cops Cry”—a head cut in half, the arms and hands just lying there. It’s sick, but I’m sure it happens all the time. (19)

Warhol’s interest in death as a theme started early in his career, his use of newspaper covers and police photos feeding his interest in people as statistical constructs rather than autonomous individuals.

*129 Die in Jet (Plane Crash)*. 1962. Copyright © The Andy Warhol Foundation, Inc./Art Resource, NY.



Hal Foster notes that the corpse links to the mass subject in that the former's simplest state—the skull—is the latter's most economical representation (“Death” 79). In answer to Swenson's next question, Warhol draws out this connection by pointing to a particularly disconcerting example of the role of death's predictability in constructing statistical persons:

I realized that everything I was doing must have been Death. It was Christmas or Labor Day—a holiday—and every time you turned on the radio they said something like, “4 million are going to die.” That started it. (19)

The difference between this belief in death and the disbelief that Warhol professes in *Philosophy* suggests that an important ambivalence informs his interest in death as figurative and literal states of the contemporary subject, and in himself as exemplifying these states.

On one hand, he often portrayed himself as a dimensionless, economical image: “If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it” (90). This flattening of his identity has a particularly literary realization in his treatment of his signature, that most personal of written traces. Warhol often had other people sign his art—most famously his mother. Subsequently, the person of Warhol separated even further from the personal when his signature swung to the opposite extreme, becoming standardized and trademarked. Hence, an unironic ® now follows his signature on the cover of *a: a novel*. The trademarked signature is odd enough, but odder still is the convergence of man, signature, and brand in the back jacket bio: “Andy Warhol® was one of the most influential artists of the postwar era.” The collapse of Warhol's name and signature into a trademark augments his notion of the individual as coextensive with its industrial context, which Warhol also explored in the self-portraits made near the end of his life.

Emphasizing his lifeless mouth, sunken eyes, and hollow cheeks, these images highlight the skull-like appearance of Warhol's face. In him, the literally dead corpse merges with the figuratively dead mass subject. Then, as if the lifelessness of these pictures didn't integrate him into his background sufficiently, Warhol laid camouflage patterns over his face in several of them, sometimes nearly erasing himself.

In the opening of *POPism*, we have seen Warhol's musings on the advantages and disadvantages of an early death, and this double-sidedness ties to the final motif that Derrida argues drives autobiography: to avoid dying during one's lifetime. Autobiography is autothanatography (17). Or as Robert Smith insists in an extended reading of the word “autobiography,” in this genre life stands with death, “the two as one” (129).



Warhol's leading example of the erased or evacuated subject was himself.  
*Self-Portrait*. 1986. Image Copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.

Here again, though, Warhol eschews this figurative death of the contemporary subject by doubling it with a literal death. His recurrent anxiety in his *Diaries* about his disappearance complicates his speculation about the strategic potential of an untimely demise. (November 29, 1978: "No photographers took pictures of me, so I guess I'm not so much now" [185].) Veering between neurosis and paranoia, Warhol positions himself as dead, motivated less by role-playing or hypothesis-testing than by an instinct for mimetic defense. Clearly, Barthes's quasi-anthropological assessment of the author's death, and Foucault's lyrical conclusion to *The Order of Things* about humanity disappearing like a footprint in the sand, are not for Warhol.

More simpatico is Lionel Trilling, whose 1971 book *Sincerity and Authenticity* characterizes the febrile, fragmented subjectivity of the late twentieth century as following a decline from sincerity to authenticity. For Trilling, sincerity entails being true to oneself while paradoxically taking as proof of

this self-realization one's success in being true to others. This paradox, for Trilling, drives sincerity's displacement during the twentieth century by authenticity, a more autonomous view of truth to oneself.

However, and here is the link to Warhol, this more autonomous view of the self works only because it is more delusional. Our impatience with inauthenticity mirrors our realization that we are inauthentic. We are "fallen," Trilling says, seeing evidence of this decline in a pervasive anxiety that humans are machines. Describing a related waning of faith in narrative, Trilling insists, "A chief part of the inauthenticity of narration would seem to be its assumption that life is susceptible of comprehension and thus of management" (135). For Trilling, our distaste for narrative's construction of us as machines and of our lives as managed derives from a suspicion that this is exactly what's happening.

So if, during the 1960s and 1970s, Foucault and Trilling analyze the rise of authenticity—that is, of inauthenticity—and Barthes enacts it, then Warhol melts into it with his assembly lines for literature, film, and visual art, and his deadpan persona. In this way, his bivalent sense of the contemporary subject's death plays out the addition of a new dimension to the pop culture that fascinated him, figured in the difference between two pop superstars of the moment: Michael Jackson and Gary Numan. Jackson's 1979 album *Off the Wall* was the first record to have four singles in *Billboard* magazine's Hot 100, while Numan's record *Replicas* hit number one in the UK in the same year, followed a few months later by his single "Cars" (from the album *The Pleasure Principle*) reaching number one in the UK and number nine in the US. Despite their concurrent successes, though, major differences separated Jackson from Numan. The former adhered to the tried-and-true formula of love songs and dance hits. The latter rode a musical flood of disaffection, androgyny, and dispassion galvanized by his android persona and paranoid lyrics about humanity seamlessly submerged into, and taken over by, microchips. Jackson projected the familiar persona of the pop star living the dream, while Numan led a new movement of hit-makers whose notoriety turned on living the nightmare.

Jackson fascinated Warhol, that is to say, but Warhol's image shared more with Numan. In different ways, Warhol and Numan played out a near-future dystopia when humans would differ from machines only by being made of flesh instead of metal. Like Numan, Warhol conjured twentieth century versions of the mechanism of mimetic defense, the attempt to evade a threat by adopting its attributes. To cast Warhol in this mold, though, requires showing that he believes that one could be true to oneself, and that there's a self to be true to, far more than he lets on—that, as literary historian



Steven Shaviro suggests, Warhol's aesthetic disinterest and terminal irony laid the ground for a new emotiveness.

Certainly, when he died in 1987, Warhol's entourage quickly abandoned the notion that there wasn't a real Warhol to know. Quite to the contrary, the wave of autobiographies from this group promised to unveil the truth about Warhol: that he was snide, mean, alienated, and desperate, according to Bob Colacello, Victor Bockris, and Mary Woronov; or that he was relentlessly warm and loving, if a bit awkward, according to Ultra Violet in *Famous for Fifteen Minutes* and Warhol's nephew James Warhola in his children's book, *Uncle Andy's: A Faabbbulous Visit with Andy Warhol*, surely the most unusual contribution to this literature.<sup>4</sup>

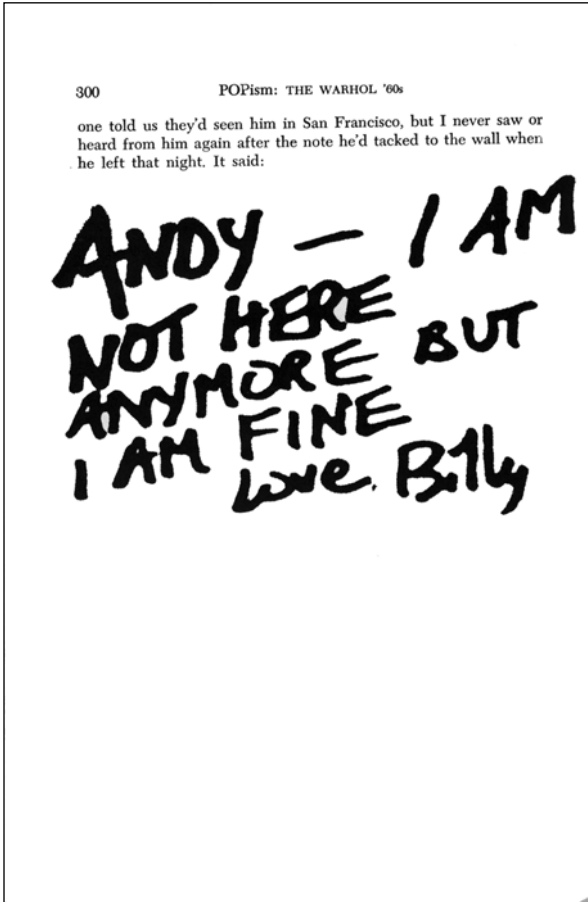
It's hard to be definitive about Warhol—ambiguity was his strength—but he did look to the side more frequently than Tomkins's salmon simile implies. For instance, compassion and concern pepper his *Diary*, as when he makes a point of helping in soup kitchens on major holidays and feels disappointed when others in his circle imply that volunteering is beneath them (*Diaries* 703).

More to the point, though, are the rhetorical indicators of sincerity with which Warhol and Hackett frame *POPism*. The book opens with a brief forward:

This is my personal view of the Pop phenomenon in New York in the 1960s. In writing it, Pat Hackett and I have reconstructed the decade, starting in '60 when I began to paint my first Pop canvases. It's a look back at what life was like then for my friends and me—at the paintings, movies, fashions, and music, at the superstars and the relationships that made up the scene at our Manhattan loft, the place known as the Factory.

Conventionally, we ask autobiography for just such a personal view, and knowing that Warhol had a co-writer doesn't disrupt this convention.<sup>5</sup> The forward sounds an unmistakable note of sincerity that the book's final lines reprise as they recount the redemption of sometime Warhol studio manager Billy Name. A toxic combination of amphetamines and seventies spiritualism drove Name into a closet at Warhol's Factory, where Name remained, unseen by anyone, for a year or more—until the Warhol gang came to work one morning to discover that, during the night, Name had left his closet for the world outside, apparently having conquered his demons.<sup>6</sup> “About a year later someone told us they'd seen him in San Francisco, but I never saw or heard from him again after the note he'd left tacked to the wall that he left that night,” Warhol—or whoever—writes, leading into the book's finale. Reproducing the text of Name's note, the conclusion is set off on the page,

printed in a blocky font clearly suggestive of a note written quickly and in large letters, slightly childlike and therefore connoting sincerity—at the least, a wave in the direction of something life-affirming, and a gesture of defiance, however mild, against the brush with death to which Warhol alludes in the book’s opening line. “ANDY,” it reads, “I AM / NOT HERE / ANYMORE BUT / I AM FINE / LOVE, BILLY” (378).<sup>7</sup>



From *POPism: The Warhol '60s*, by Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett. Copyright ©1980 by Andy Warhol. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980.

**NOTES**

1. The contract was signed in 1975 (Colacello 269); Warhol’s *Diaries* first mention *POPism* on February 7, 1977 (20). However, the *Diaries* only start in November 1976, so work on *POPism* could have been happening quite some time before that.

2. Avital Ronell brilliantly explores this history in "The Deviant Payback: The Aims of Valerie Solanas," Ronell's introduction to Solanas's 1971 *SCUM Manifesto*.
3. For classic discussions of this connection, see Thomas Crow's "Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol," and Hal Foster's "The Return of the Real."
4. See also Holly Woodlawn's *A Low Life in High Heels*, and if you can find it, Taylor Mead's scarce *Son of Warhol: Excerpts from the Anonymous Diary of a New York Youth*.
5. The classic discussion is Philippe Lejeune's "The Autobiographical Pact."
6. Name retreated into the closet partly to escape the turmoil that followed Warhol's shooting, beginning his isolation in November 1968. How long he remained cloistered is unclear, but it seems to have been at least a year (Colacello 60).
7. Many years later, Name did re-establish contact (Warhol, *Diaries* 798).

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