

[Review of the book *Andy Warhol, Poetry, and Gossip
in the 1960s*]

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have had a stronger case, I believe, if he had addressed the issue of Day Lewis's influence. Auden's work shaped the careers of Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, and John Ashbery; MacNeice has found new importance for Derek Mahon and Paul Muldoon. Day Lewis must become relevant for writers as well as critics if he is to live beyond his time.

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Andy Warhol, Poetry, and Gossip in the 1960s. *Reva Wolf*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Pp. xv+210.

Andy Warhol registers in the American imagination like a one-man version of the classic 1950s television show *To Tell the Truth*—Will the real Andy Warhol please stand up? He was “really” Andy Warhola, from Pittsburgh, the son of Czechoslovakian immigrants, but that was an identity he chose to obscure, or ignore. He doubled himself endlessly, not only in his self-portraits but, literally, hiring a look-alike (Allen Midgette) to make appearances for him. He was a painter, but when filmmaker Emile de Antonio asked him to describe when he became a painter for the documentary *Painters Painting*, his reply was typically equivocal:

WARHOL: Well, you made me a painter.

DE ANTONIO: Let's have the truth.

WARHOL: That is the truth, isn't it? You used to gossip about the art people, and that's how I found out about art. You were making art commercial, and since I was in commercial art, I thought art should be commercial, because you said so. That's how it happened. (Transcript in de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman, *Painters Painting* [New York: Abbeville, 1989], p. 119.)

And the truth is, he was not a painter as much as he was a silkscreen artist who bragged that he never actually printed his own work. “I think it would be great if more people took up silk screens so that no one would know whether my picture was mine or somebody else's,” he admitted to Gina Swenson in 1963 (“What Is Pop Art?” *ARTnews* 62 [November 1963]: 60–61). As much as he cultivated an air of indifference about himself and his work, his was a carefully cultivated “cool” that, paradoxically, made him almost larger than life.

Into this fabric of feints and sleights, masquerades and performances, Reva Wolf attempts to describe, in *Andy Warhol, Poetry, and Gossip in the 1960s*, yet another Warhol, one that verges on becoming

if not quite a genius, then a real intelligence, if not quite articulate (he may have invented what we now think of as “Valley-Girlse”), then completely conversant, if not quite engaged with the world around him, then at least emotionally involved with it. Her book is based largely on copious research in the archives of the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, on a great deal of archival work elsewhere, and on interviews with many of the surviving members of Warhol’s generation. She describes Warhol’s movements in and among a generation of poets that includes John Ashbery, Allen Ginsberg, Ted Berrigan, Gerard Malanga, Rod Padgett, and Ed Sanders. She outlines, in sometimes stunning detail, the workings of the little magazine scene in New York in the early 1960s, largely mimeographed publications (yes, the mimeograph was so short a time ago a revolutionary technology) such as *C: A Journal of Poetry*, edited by Berrigan; *Fuck You / A Magazine of the Arts*, edited by Sanders; *The Floating Bear*, edited by Diane di Prima; and Ray Johnson’s infamous parody, *The Sinking Bear*. There are great, complicated stories here—how, for instance, Warhol got Edwin Denby to kiss Gerard Malanga for the cover of the first issue of *C: A Journal of Poetry* (a special issue on Denby) in order to get back at Frank O’Hara, who adored Denby (he’d written an essay on Denby’s poetry for the issue and also contributed a poem, “Edwin’s Hand”), but who also vehemently hated Malanga and refused to acknowledge Warhol. Wolf also establishes just how enmeshed Warhol was in the avant-garde film scene in New York in the early 1960s, especially the critical theory of the “film poem” developed by Jonas Mekas in connection with the beat generation films *The Flower Thief* (1960) and *Pull My Daisy* (1959). In Mekas’s view, Warhol’s monumentally boring films, such as the six-hour *Sleep* (1963), a record of the poet John Giorno sleeping, and *Empire* (1965), an eight-hour film of the Empire State Building shot through an afternoon and evening with a stationary camera set up on the 44th floor of the Time-Life Building, opened “to film-makers a completely new and inexhaustible field of cinema reality” (quoted on p. 128). One need not agree with Mekas’s assessment to understand the serious intent of Warhol’s film projects, which Wolf accurately describes as “the glorification of everyday reality” (p. 129).

Wolf’s research has led, additionally, to convincing readings of several of Warhol’s stock images. For instance, she connects Warhol’s *Most Wanted Men*, installed briefly on the side of the New York State Pavilion at the 1964 New York World’s Fair, to Jean Genet’s *Our Lady of the Flowers*, the hero of which cut out pictures of convicts and pasted them on his prison cell wall in order to excite his sexual fantasies. To resort to one of Warhol’s favorite puns: Wolf’s connection transforms Warhol’s *Wanted* into an “innuendo-out-the-other” kind of image. And

this same connection to Genet reveals deeper, more personal implications in Warhol's 1964 *Flowers*, an image often hung in repetition to form virtual wallpaper. She outlines Warhol's contacts with Jack Kerouac and the entire beat scene. And she usefully ties Warhol's pop icons to John Ashbery's poetry, particularly work in *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962) and especially "The New Realism," a poem tied to the landmark New Realists exhibit at the Sidney Janis Gallery in 1962 to which Ashbery contributed the catalog essay (and Wolf includes a wonderful photograph by Fred W. McDarragh of Warhol in attendance at an Ashbery reading at the Washington Square Art Gallery in August 1964). But perhaps the singularly most insightful moment in the book is Allen Ginsberg's assessment of Warhol's work, given to Wolf in a December 1991 interview: "I was interested in the Zen aspect of the taking an object of ordinary consciousness or ordinary mind or ordinary use and enlarging it and focusing attention on it so that it became a sacred object or a totemic object, mythological. And that seemed very much parallel to the notion of a kind of attentiveness you get in Zen or Buddhist meditative attitude" (p. 138). Warhol's admiration for Ginsberg is unquestioned, and one must assume that Ginsberg's assessment of his work was, over the course of their association, communicated to him. Whatever the case, Ginsberg's statement summarizes Warhol's impact on an entire generation of American intellectuals. As eloquently as John Cage, Warhol revealed the power and potential of the everyday.

For all this, Warhol still eludes Wolf, as does, I think, the significance of what she has discovered. Wolf's book is, to say the least, theoretically very thin. She misses, entirely, the central place of Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) in the cultural milieu into which Warhol dropped himself. She—and everyone else I know of, incidentally—ignores Warhol's knowledge of Allan Kaprow's Happenings, to say nothing of Kaprow's seminal distinction between "art-like art" and "life-like art." Wolf does argue, and I think rightly, that gossip is a shaping force in the history of contemporary art, and she makes a convincing case that much of Warhol's imagery is a sort of visual gossip, but her conclusions about the significance of gossip to Warhol are that it "allowed him to become, if only symbolically, a member of the 'in' social group" (p. 25), and that gossip "sharpens our sense of how highly personal Warhol's work on silkscreen could be," revealing autobiographical elements in works "formerly characterized as impersonal and emotionally detached" (p. 33). But gossip is a far more interesting phenomenon if understood as a shaping force in art history. It suggests, for one thing, that art and the history written about it depend, more than we care to admit, on a system of rumor, half-truths, prevarications, and outright lies—that as much as

Warhol was himself engaged in an elaborate performance, he also "directed" his critics, and through them public perception, as much as he directed the actors in his movies.

A case in point: in *POPism: The Warhol '60s*, Warhol's autobiography (with Pat Hackett [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980]), Warhol wrote of critic David Bourdon, "Nothing to do with the art-world was ever lost on David." In the 1980s, Bourdon would write what many consider the definitive study of Warhol, *Warhol* (New York: Abrams, 1989), and its publishers naturally chose to cite Warhol's assessment of their author on the flyleaf. But Bourdon's book makes only passing mention of Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Sanders, no mention at all of Ashbery, Berrigan, Denby, O'Hara, Ray Johnson, di Prima, or any of the little magazines Warhol was so intensely involved with. To Reva Wolf's credit, she has rediscovered this "lost" Warhol, and she helps us place him as a figure even more central to our cultural history than most of us had ever imagined.

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A Philosophy of Mass Art. *Noël Carroll*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pp. xii+425.

The plot of Noël Carroll's *A Philosophy of Mass Art* parallels that of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). Twain's novel begins with Hank Morgan time-traveling thirteen centuries into the past to enter a completely foreign, backward realm as a progressive, technocratic reformer full of ambitious projects aimed at rectifying the language, clearing away the fogs of superstition, and challenging the unexamined founding myths of this feudal culture. But, as it proceeds, the story turns the tables on its protagonist, finally developing into an extended exploration of the limits of Hank's clunky, mechanical language and of his supposedly scientific method and vision. Carroll's philosophical treatise begins with an equally explosive clash of cultures, as the progressive reformer armed with his Method from Another Planet invades what he sees as the foggy, muddled Court of Cultural Studies and finds that most of its emperors have no clothes. In many ways, this foreign perspective makes for a truly bracing and thought-provoking challenge to key assumptions (especially about mass art and ideology, or mass art and passive spectatorship) repeated too often in a rote way by both critics and celebrators of mass culture. Carroll's version of analytical aesthet-