
title:
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source:

URL:
http://pismowidok.org/index.php/one/article/view/398/901

publisher:
Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences
Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw
View. Foundation for Visual Culture
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Mimicry as Depersonalization in the Factory Milieu

Translated by Arthur Barys

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.

Andy Warhol

The eye of the camera

“The real action is taking place offscreen. […] The action is
three feet below the camera,” remarks Brigid Berlin, one
of Andy Warhol’s superstars, in the opening scene of
Krystian Lupa’s Factory 2, commenting on the premiere
of the film Blow Job, originally held at The Factory in the
fall of 1964.1 This provocative and astute observation
resonates throughout the entire play. However, if we are
to believe the recollections of Ultra Violet, it was not
originally uttered by Brigid Berlin, but comes from an
exchange between Ingrid Superstar and Gerard Malanga following the premiere.2
It is a commentary on the one-and-a-half hour 1964 production comprising a static
shot of a young man’s face. His expression reflects ramping tensions and emotions
that explode in a culminating moment of erotic ecstasy, one provoked by agents
that remain beyond our field of vision, which is itself lined up with the camera’s field
of view.

One of the definitions of a symptom in traditional logical semiotics describes
a situation in which the sight of smoke is a sure signal that there is fire or some
other source of smoke three feet below the edge of the picture. In the case of Andy
Warhol’s Blow Job, the audience stares at the screen throughout the nearly
twenty-minute opening sequence, accompanying the actors as they observe every
detail of the man’s face. Meanwhile, in Lupa’s Factory 2, the symptomatic nature of
the film is complicated by the actors themselves, who are physically located about
three meters below the screen, lined up one next to the other along the entire width
of the stage. Thus, in the play, the question of where the events actually take place is constantly in the air. *Factory 2* may be read as an attempt to challenge the conventions of theatrical performance by using theatricality as a medium, which is primarily achieved by blurring the boundary between everyday life and art. In this sense, the performance offers us an insight into a new way of understanding theatricality itself, which can be seen as the result of the crisis of the character in theater, the collapse of the metaphysics of presence and the questioning of stable subjectivity, and, most importantly, the consequence of a process that was most aptly described by Guy Debord in the 1960s:

> In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation.\(^3\)

Let us explore this idea by examining the directorial strategy employed by Krystian Lupa. The play runs for nearly seven hours, developing at an extraordinarily slow pace. It is true that the director has taught his audience to expect broader time frames, but in this case there is no action to speak of, no plot. Each hour differs little from the next. The stage is occupied by Andy Warhol (Piotr Skiba) and his entourage, splayed out on couches and leaning against the walls. Present in the studio are all the regulars involved in the legend, from superstars and the artist’s numerous muses—Edie Sedgwick (Sandra Korzeniak), Nico (Katarzyna Warnke), Ultra Violet (Urszula Kiebzak)—to long-term associates: Gerard Malanga (Krzysztof Zawadzki) and Paul Morrissey (Zbigniew Kaleta).\(^4\) The sluggish pace of the performance induces in the viewer a slight state of boredom, physical weariness, and dulled attention, thus producing a paradoxical effect: the audience is permitted to “let go” and abandon any expectation of events or anything on which to focus their attention. This act of surrender marks a shift in our relation to the play: no longer “in front” or “vis-à-vis” the performance, we become a part of it. The boundaries between the stage and the audience are blurred, leaving the viewers to persist together in a state of simply permitting events to unfold, holding no expectations. We agree to self-reflexivity. There is nothing but the here and now. The theater assumes a quotidian rhythm, allowing theatricality to become a medium rather than a structure or formal framework through which action can be undertaken.
What, then, is the characteristic feature of this theatricality? I would venture the claim that the breakdown of traditional models of theatricality in the era of post-modernity may lead to the exposing of its destructive potential. By this I mean that it enables the equating of theatrical reality with everyday reality, and vice versa, which entails, on one hand, the breakdown of the character as discussed by Elinor Fuchs in *The Death of Character*, and, on the other, the theatricalization of life and the involvement of the subject in a crisis of identity.

I assume the existence of fundamental differences in the way the category of theatricality operates in modernity and post-modernity. I am inclined to adopt the perspective expressed by Antonin Artaud, who claimed that modernity marked the collapse of theatricality as a category both in theater and the public sphere, which was a direct result of realism as well as the domination of the written word and the illusion of the stage. Meanwhile, the exhaustion of the modernist paradigm, as I see it, marks the return of theatricality in a new form: post-modernity is *per se* an era of theatricality. Artaud saw modernity as the most anti-theatrical period in the history of Occidental culture. He frequently expressed radical views on the practices of his time, writing, for example:

> The contemporary theater is decadent because it has lost the feeling on the one hand for seriousness and on the other for laughter; because it has broken away from gravity, from effects that are immediate and painful—in a word, from Danger.

This bold thesis is grounded in a critique of the realist vision of theater that dominated stages at the time, one that demanded the subordination of all other media to the text of the drama. Artaud was not isolated in his diagnosis of the surrounding reality as being devoid of theatricality. Similar claims were made by Nikolai Evreinov, Edward Gordon Craig, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Berthold Brecht, all of whom charged realism with having detheatricalized the theater. Crucially, however, this process extended beyond the stage, encompassing all of the cultural and social reality.

Scholars disagree on the issue of how to define theatricality. The sheer difficulty of this undertaking is apparent in the fact that the authors of essays published on the subject in recent years have shied away from terminological precision. The books...
Theatricality as Medium, by Samuel Weber, and Theatricality, edited by Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, as well as the journal SubStance, in a special issue devoted to theatricality, all employ the word in a manner that indicates a plurality of meanings. One exception in this context is the position of Josette Féral, who attempted to produce a coherent definition in two articles published in 1982 and 2002. The first, “Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified,” defines theatricality by contrasting it with performance art, a thriving genre at the time; the former, in Féral’s view, is a narrative and representative structure that inscribes the subject in the symbolic through the use of theatrical codes. Performance, on the other hand, deconstructs those codes. Féral revises these views in the later article “Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language,” introducing a definition that I wish to take as my point of departure in the discussion below. Here, theatricality is understood as a process: the process of observing and of being observed. The reflexivity that defines the dynamic underlying the relationship between the stage and the audience becomes the essence of the theatrical situation. Focusing on the relationship between the observer and the observed enables Féral to treat theatricality as one of the many shared concepts in the humanities. This means that theatricality as a quality is no longer restricted to the theater, but extends beyond it.

The people gathered around Warhol molded their own existence to fit their roles as theater or film stars. Suffice it to mention the Factory’s most recognizable figures: Edie Sedgwick, Ingrid Superstar, and Ultra Violet. Krystian Lupa’s play Factory 2, meanwhile, is an example of the opposite process: it is an attempt to challenge the theater and its characters, and instead recreate the everyday life and atmosphere of Warhol’s studio. The resulting form may be described as theatrical performance, allowing it to be placed in the broader context of breaking with the fiction of the character. With this in mind, let us venture the following question: do these two situations—the play Factory 2 and the Factory milieu—not meet each other halfway? Does Andy Warhol’s “theater” not foreshadow the theater that would accompany the exhaustion of the paradigm of modernity? I will attempt to demonstrate that the former can be interpreted as a somewhat subversive fulfillment of Antonin Artaud’s dream of theater becoming the equal of life.
The theater of life at the Factory

The structure of the play, which is based on the repetition and impersonation of Warhol’s entourage, encourages the back and forth transition between Factory 2 and the original Factory. Lupa abandons the text in favor of context. He assumes a withdrawn position, building a field of creative activity for the actors, who essentially cease to act as they play out the script: they are simply on stage. The number “2” in the title as well as the subtitular description of the play as a collective fantasy are inspired by the work of Andy Warhol. Rather than making an effort to recreate an image of the studio, the director creates a new Factory, in a sense. In other words, it is not the dramatic text that is being recreated, but rather the situation or the principles that led to the emergence of this neo-avant-garde milieu. The drama works within the boundaries of repetition, operating in a manner that resembles a series of scientific experiments. The actors are cast in enigmatic roles that require them to oscillate between their character and their own offstage subjectivity. They must find their bearings on stage while the camera constantly monitors their efforts to strike a balance between the character and themselves, between the project image and the self.

“The first hour of Factory 2 provoked in me a desire to protest: I was watching a spectacle in which theater was impersonating life,” Grzegorz Niziołek writes in a review. Indeed, the actors have themselves revealed that instead of typical character building, the rehearsals for the play largely involved the gradual blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality. The cast and director slowly immersed themselves in the world of the Factory and its associated myth, surrounding themselves with content and objects related to the clique: they watched documentary films, read books, and started picking out characteristic props that permeated into their everyday lives.

Factory 2 is not Lupas’ first attempt to tackle the issue of how characters are played. The problematization of the condition of acting is a recurring theme in his work, including such plays as Spanish Fly and City of Dream. The director frequently provokes his actors into developing their roles based on their personal experiences. Nevertheless, in previous productions Lupa placed clear boundaries between the role and the exhibitionistic baring of peoples’ private lives on stage. This is a line that is clearly crossed in this play about the group associated with Warhol’s studio:
we are presented with an experiment positioned at the juncture where acting meets exposing the theatrical construction of subjectivity. This raises the question: what model of theater are we dealing with? Does the radical turn in postmodern philosophical reflection that resulted in questioning the stability of human subjectivity directly translate into the breakdown of the fundamental premises of theater?

Some insight into these matters may be found in the writing of Samuel Weber, who describes two basic models of theater and illustrates how the metaphor of theater can be applied to the structure of the subject. The first is tragedy, in which the dramatic conflict is described in terms that indicate its attribution to the conflicted subject. In his Poetics, Aristotle describes tragedy, above all, as a concise narrative representation of an action that is cohesive and complete. As Weber notes, this Aristotelian model is in fact merely a proposition, as the staging of a narrative is in practice never complete due to the very nature of staging itself, as it cannot exist without theatrical acting, which, in turn, “is never the pure representation of acts but rather the actualization of acting upon a stage.” This aspiration for a closed, complete form corresponds to the structure of the autonomous, active subject who is convinced that it is she who shapes her own destiny. From this perspective, the subject’s conflicts and struggles with her own self constitute the dramatic or theatrical dimension of her mental actions. The self dons a mask that enables it to obviate the conflict incited by desires whose fulfillment is not possible within the boundaries of the given social structure in a manner that is acceptable both to the subject and to others. The other model involves the reversal of this notion of masking in Freudian psychoanalysis. The efforts involved in theatrical staging are directed not toward obscuring or veiling the true self marked by conflict, but toward creating a cohesive narrative that would maintain the illusion of the autonomous subject. Here a crucial role is bestowed on the spectator, who is tasked not merely with creating, but also reaffirming, the space of deception. As Weber points out, the masking process requires the presence of witnesses, making it more akin to comedy than to tragedy.

The author’s claim that, in the wake of the breakdown of subjectivity, theater and theatricality emerge as an alternative, may be regarded as analogous—if not identical—to Elinor Fuchs’ attempt to examine post-modernity as a period marked by the transformation of reality into theater. “Postmodernism is that moment in
culture when the last ontological defenses crumble into theater,” Fuchs claims. She takes as her point of departure an analysis of the condition of character. The scholar’s thesis is apparent in the very title of her article and book: character is no longer central to the drama in theater after modernism. This results in the gradual weakening of the drama itself, as it gradually cedes its dominant position to spectacle. What then, in Fuchs’ view, is postmodern theater? Its characteristic features, she asserts, include “the collapse of traditional boundaries, an absorption with the theater’s own artifacts and techniques and styles.” She then proceeds to offer her own definition of postmodern theater, one that appears to be strongly influenced by the work of the French Situationists:

The recent works no longer worry the question of illusion and reality. The question has disappeared with the new perception that all fixed reality is a fiction. [...] all is shifting performance, and performance is the only reality.

We may conclude from the above that the traditional understanding of mimesis as representation is subverted in postmodern theater by the breakdown of the relationship between illusion and reality. The sphere of the experience of reality is completely taken over by spectacle, the only available reality. The essence of postmodern theater thus lies in the notion that that there is nothing important beyond it: there is no real world. There is only the theater, which sees itself and only itself.

Is the Factory’s identity construction model analogous to the model by which the identity of the character is constructed in the era of the crisis of modernity? A link can undoubtedly be drawn between the blurring of the boundary between fiction and reality in this neo-avant-garde milieu and the crisis of stable subjectivity in post-modernity. This diagnosis is, of course, neither new nor revelatory. On the contrary: it complements the elementary repertoire of assertions regarding the exhaustion of the paradigm of modernity. I therefore propose an attempt to present a narrative in which, following Jacques Lacan, the subject is “split” and disappears as she seeks her identity in the gaze of other people and models produced by mass culture. What does this mean? In order to explore and explain this model, I will introduce the category of mimicry, that is, disappearance by way of depersonalization and identification with the background. I will exaggerate certain
issues for the purpose of this analysis. After all, no one in the play or Warhol’s studio disappears in the physical sense. Rather, the idea is to capture situations in which the subject suspends her distinctiveness by gradually self-destructing; where the theatrical process of coming to resemble someone else, assuming a role, leads to the suspension of one’s own subjectivity, to the interception of the self by the image and, finally, to one’s submission to the domination of an external force.

**The destructive power of mimicry**

Numerous questions arise regarding the nature of similarity as well as the manner in which it operates. It is crucial to observe, however, that this phenomenon occurs and is sustained exclusively in the eye of the beholder. “Nature creates similarities. One need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man’s,” writes Walter Benjamin in the essay “On the Mimetic Faculty.” He continues:

> His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role.

To Benjamin, mimetic faculties—or the ability to imitate—constitute a sort of compulsion to become the Other. He does not make a distinction between mimetism and mimicry, however. Here, the boundaries are extraordinarily fluid. One could say that what we encounter in the former case is a performance that relies on artificiality, or pretending. In the latter, meanwhile, we operate within the bounds of imitation, which contains a shock mechanism different from that of *mimesis*. The biological understanding of mimetism refers to an adaptation present in animals, allowing certain species to take on the appearance of their habitat by modifying their color or behavior. Mimicry is a special case in which defenseless species resort to camouflage, assuming the guise of predators or poisonous plants. When taken to the extreme, it leads to self-destruction by the elimination of differences between the specimen and its environment.
Originally derived from the world of nature, the concept of mimicry was first applied to matters involving human subjectivity by Roger Caillois, who, notably, did so more or less at the same time as Emmanuel Lévinas proposed the discourses of face-to-face relations and the proximity of the Other. Caillois opens his discussion of the mimetic behavior of insects with the observation that there is no clearer distinction than the one between an organism and its surroundings. It is a necessary condition for the formation of the subject and enables the articulation of such concepts as sovereignty, autonomy, and identity. The paradox of mimicry lies in the fact that an organism acts towards its own destruction. But how are we to understand this?

To explain his position, the anthropologist describes the behavior of insects that take on the appearance of other creatures, meticulously imitating nearly every detail to the extent that, to the naked eye, the original is frequently indistinguishable from the copy. The effect of perfect resemblance is the aggregate product of numerous minute details, none of which are decisive in and of themselves. It emerges before our eyes as something recognizable, thus confirming its own efficacy. As Caillois writes:

> It has been assumed that, in order to protect itself, an inoffensive animal took on the appearance of a forbidding one: for example, the butterfly *Trochilium* and the wasp *Vespa Crabro*—the same smoky wings, the same brown legs and antennae, the same black and yellow striped abdomen and thorax, the same vigorous and noisy flight in broad daylight.

What is most puzzling about the analysis of this phenomenon is how confident the author is in the efficacy of this imitation. In Caillois’ view, mimetism involves mechanisms analogous to those found in magical practices. Prolonged observation of an immobile circle of spots results in fixation and numbness.

Relevantly, from the point of view of my argument, Caillois disagrees with the scholarly consensus on the phenomenon of mimicry, in which it is explained as a defensive strategy intended to protect the organism from predators. He provides numerous examples of insect species that are inedible by their very nature. Therefore, there are no practical reasons for them to deploy defensive tactics. Yet they are observed to display mimetic behavior, e.g. by donning the costumes of other insects or assuming the appearance of tree bark. We may therefore perceive
in mimicry a certain aesthetic surplus: decoration or ornament. It would seem more worthwhile to employ the strategy of avoiding attack by remaining motionless than by producing an optical illusion which, paradoxically—as Caillois notes—is often entirely incomprehensible to predators and fails to serve its defensive purpose:

The experiments of Judd and Foucher have definitely resolved the question: predators are not at all fooled by homomorphy or homochromy: they eat crickets that mingle with the foliage of oak trees or weevils that resemble small stones, completely invisible to man. The phasma *Carausius Morosus*, which by its form, color, and attitude simulates a plant, cannot emerge into the open air without being immediately discovered and dined on by sparrows. Generally speaking, one finds many remains of mimetic insects in the stomachs of predators.23

Is Caillois attempting to convince us that insects have developed their own aesthetics? Certainly not. His interpretation of the “luxury” or “surplus” enjoyed by certain creatures is much darker. Namely, it reveals a self-destructive dimension in behavior observed in the natural world. Caillois posits that mimetic similarity is a result of the organism’s submission to the charm of its surroundings and its desire to become the Other. He writes:

There are cases in which mimicry causes the creature to go from bad to worse: geometr-moth caterpillars simulate shoots of shrubbery so well that gardeners cut them with their pruning shears. The case of the Phyllia is even sadder: they browse among themselves, taking each other for real leaves, in such a way that one might accept the idea of a sort of collective masochism leading to mutual homophagy, the simulation of the leaf being a provocation to cannibalism in this kind of totem feast.24

In pursuing this interpretation, it becomes necessary to abandon the earlier matter of the aesthetic dimension, and instead examine the following question: can mimetic behavior be regarded as a disorder of the self-preservation instinct? It should be noted that the anthropologist draws a parallel between the phenomenon of mimicry in the animal world and what is manifested in art in the human world. Yet his analysis extends beyond the perspective of biology, in which mimicry would serve a mere practical purpose and constitute a survival strategy. He ventures the claim that mimicry can also be interpreted as a spatial relation strategy, one in
which the observation of space at once involves becoming that space. From this point of view, mimetic behavior is more than just part of the struggle to survive. Rather, it is directly tied to the perception of space, the all-embracing experience of its burden, and even its absorption, to the point where the organism becomes an indistinguishable part of its surroundings. This phenomenon is known to psychiatrists as psychasthenia or depersonalization and has been described in the work of such scholars as Pierre Janet.25

This introduction to the category of mimicry—perhaps an excessively thorough one—is intended to set up a perspective that will allow me to present the Factory as a mimicry laboratory—a space in which, at a certain level, self-destruction mechanisms are deployed. These mechanisms primarily entail the suspension of the self in exchange for entering the image or theatricalized reality.

In the remaining portion of this article, I will attempt to examine the theatrical dimension of the atmosphere in the studio, before embarking on a critical interpretation of the mechanisms governing the production of theatricality: Warhol’s experimental camera techniques and the author’s self-creative personality. Statements made by Warhol’s superstars are particularly evocative in this regard, as they confirm the idea that the Factory was a place that operated according to principles differing from those of the outside world; it was a biotope (or rather theatrotope) of sorts, one that attracted individuals who were open to experimenting with their own subjectivity or—to put it differently—who sought their own image in the eyes of others. “We were all… or most of the people were poor, but we lived inside a painting,” says Ivy Nicholson in the film *Andy Warhol’s Factory People*. Warhol attracted not only figures from the gay scene, but also people who didn’t stand a chance in the film industry. “[…] They couldn’t act, but they were amazing at what they did,” he remarked.26

**The aesthetics of boredom**

“Nothing happens”: one of the basic critical tropes leveled against Warhol’s films was that they lacked action. Yet his fascination with superficial aesthetics27 involved an interest in situations that were not in the least bit spectacular. Suffice it to mention the eight-hour film *Empire*, which consists of a slow-motion recording, shot after dark, of the Empire State Building in New York.
Hal Foster observes that “whereas his contemporary Marshall McLuhan viewed media technologies as prostheses, Warhol used them as shields, ones that could also be deployed aggressively.” It is difficult to agree with this claim. Corporeality and materiality are very important points of reference in the work of Andy Warhol. The camerawork often proceeds directly from the body, as in one of the earliest and best-known films, *Sleep* (1964), in which we watch John Giornio sleep on a couch for five hours and twenty minutes. This is a situation that was previously observed by the eye, one that involved a body sitting in a chair for several hours, observing a sleeping person. Only later is this mode of viewing rediscovered with the help of a camera. At a certain point the eye of the camera assumed Warhol’s way of seeing, becoming its extension or, to use McLuhan’s term, its prosthesis. It is precisely through this attempt to find within the medium a way of looking that is encumbered by the quotidian—hours upon hours of waiting, triviality, boredom, lack of action—that Warhol touches the boundaries of perception and confronts the banal, biological aspect of existence. He observes people, applying the methodology used in a scientific laboratory where objects—insects and other animals—are kept in specially designed glass terrariums that enable the researchers to closely observe their behavior and life processes. An example of such a device more closely associated with our everyday experience is the insect viewer, a children’s toy consisting of a box and built-in magnifying glass that can be used to examine every detail of captured bugs and insects. Unfortunately, some specimens do not survive such treatment, and it is difficult to resist the inescapable and cruel comparison to the tragic demise of Warhol’s superstars after they had left the Factory: Edie Sedgwick, who committed suicide at the age of twenty eight, the transgender Candy Darling, who died of a serious illness at the age of twenty nine, and Paul America, who died aged thirty-eight after being struck by a car. Henry Geldzahler, Paul America’s former life partner, was explicit in his accusations, stating in the 1980s: “Paul America was a wasted creature after they had finished with him. They finally washed their hands of him and let him float away. He’s a poor burned-out thing living in a commune in Indiana and trying to pull himself together.” These efforts, as we now know, were futile.

The available sources on the Factory, and, perhaps more significantly, the legend surrounding the place in which this artistic commune coalesced—a group that could only come into existence in this particular chronotope—allow us to see Warhol’s
studio as a strictly theatrical space in which the formal divisions between the stage and the audience had been abolished, and where theatricality manifested itself as the medium through which all actions were undertaken. The history of the Factory begins in November 1963, when Warhol changed studios, moving to a factory located at 231 East 47th Street. With a floor space of over 3,000 square feet, the studio provided a focal point for his artistic ventures into painting and film. But above all else, it was a venue for his social life, which welcomed members of gay, lesbian, and transgender circles. The Factory’s location on the map of New York City and the floor plan itself make up the utopian myth of Warhol’s studio. It is worth noting, however, that the milieu that emerged there differed from that of the art neighborhood of SoHo, for example, where—in the very same period—loft architecture directly affected the performative and interdisciplinary aspects of the efforts undertaken by artists associated with the Judson Dance Theater (including Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, and Robert Morris) and other SoHo locals (e.g. John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham, and Joan Jonas).

Different types of individuals and artistic practices gravitated towards the Factory, drawn by its proximity and Andy Warhol’s personality, and they established a scene whose character contrasted with that of Lower Manhattan. It was a stage on which, above all else, the theater of life played out. In the book *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol*, which serves as a point of departure for Krystian Lupa’s play, Victor Bockris offers the following description of the studio space:

> Metal columns stood foursquare defining its central area. The floor was concrete and the brick walls were crumbling. It was dark, since the windows facing south were mostly painted over black, and the ceiling was low. It had previously been a hat factory.\(^31\)

Yet it was the use of silver that triggered and compounded the theatricality: everything was painted silver, lined with silver foil, and covered with shards of broken mirrors. This act transformed the studio into a space that imposed itself upon everyone who entered it, and was at the same time entirely singular and artificial. Warhol borrowed the idea from Billy Name, whose apartment was decorated from top to bottom in silver foil; delighted with the effect, Warhol requested that it be reproduced at his East 47th Street studio. As Ultra Violet recalls:
And so Billy moved into the dark closet in the Factory and, little by little, covered every square inch of walls, floor, ceiling, toilet bowl, electric bulbs with silvery foil or silver spray paint. He even painted the silverware. And Andy’s wig went silver. The whole studio turned into a giant glaring mirror.32

The darkened windows, meanwhile, sealed the room off from natural light. Artificial light was used to effectively eliminate the difference between day and night, thus producing a space that was strongly isolated from the outside world, artificial, and, by this gesture of detachment, drawn closer to the theater stage.

I would like to examine the Factory as precisely such a place marked by theatricality at its every level,33 where the situational and social context is so clearly defined that it has the power to evoke an identity crisis in subjects who find themselves within its confines. I use the term “identity crisis” to mean the oscillation between the self and the created image of the self, as well as the effort required to maintain this image. It is worth quoting one comment by Warhol that illustrates how, at the symbolic level, the studio was transformed into a reflective surface: it was a mirror in which one would constantly search for one’s identity:

“It must have been the amphetamine but it was the perfect time to think silver,” Andy wrote. “Silver was the future, it was spacey—the astronauts... And silver was also the past—the Silver Screen... And maybe more than anything else, silver was narcissism—mirrors were backed with silver.”34

**An obsession with filming**

The actors in the play Factory 2 are placed in a space that recreates the mirrorlike qualities of Warhol’s studio, from the foil-lined walls and the ever-present camera—which records the events and often reduplicates them, transmitting live images to the audience members, who of course view the action directly, as well—to the reflections in the eyes of the other actors.35 But it is precisely this obsession with incessant filming, transported onto the stage from the interiors of the Factory, that is, in my opinion, of particular interest here. Lupa repeats Warhol's
experiments with subjectivity on stage, working with their structure and examining their logic. The actors are constantly recorded. The camera conceals its presence in a manner similar to that used by Warhol: it simply observes. By watching in silence as Warhol’s superstars fall, one after another, into downward spirals, the camera exposes human nature. More importantly, however, it is an unscrupulous machine that can record everything without being hindered by moral boundaries. By doing so, it incessantly and mercilessly tests the constructed selves of its subjects.

Applying his interest in the unspectacular and quotidian, Warhol created a space of tolerance or—to use another word—a space of inattentiveness that enabled him to record private and intimate moments. What is more, he did so anonymously. He would simply set up a camera, turn it on, and walk away, letting it capture the images without interference. By doing so, he made the camera transparent. “I must say it is not inhibiting to work with Andy in a film, for you never know if you’re on or off. You never know whether the camera is rolling or stopped.”36 We observe the same technique being used in the play, where we eventually grow accustomed to the presence of the camera and cease to notice it—we forget about it. But in contrast to the circumstances of its use, film stock is not ephemeral in nature: in its ruthless impartiality, it constitutes a form of material evidence.

*Blow Job* is the only original Andy Warhol film used in the play. However—particularly during the first half of the performance—the screen, suspended low over the actors’ heads, constantly displays a direct transmission of the actors as viewed through the camera, as well as previously-recorded footage of direct-to-camera monologues. The actors/characters are confronted with a device whose silence provokes them to speak, to say something. As they produce visibly improvised monologues ranging in length from several minutes to over ten, they lose their grasp on their roles, while the border between acting and life is blurred due to the very nature of the circumstances.

The monologues recreate the basic structure of Warhol’s four hundred and seventy-two *Screen Tests*, the series of film portraits the artist shot between 1964 and 1966. At the same time, they augment the form of the originals in that they include the characters’ voices. The *Screen Tests* were conducted in the Factory and it is difficult to describe them in terms other than those associated with a person sitting for a portrait. Andy Warhol, or whoever was responsible for production on
a given day, would seat the model before the camera and ask him or her to remain motionless for about three minutes while looking directly into the lens. Nothing more. Yet this situation turns out to be unbearable for most people. It is troubling and awkward, and provokes unexpected physiological reactions: the subject’s gaze, for example, begins to dart around. It is also significantly different from posing in a photographic studio, where the subject is given time to prepare, settle on a suitable facial expression, and assume a desired position. The “prepared” face preferred by the subject is challenged by the requirement to maintain the expression over an extended period of time. This one-on-one confrontation with the camera triggers entirely different mechanisms than the photograph, which captures an effect beyond time.

The power of Screen Tests is a function of their formal minimalism, manifested in the sterility of the situation and conditioning its successful execution. Rather than being an impartial action, the gesture of seating someone in front of a camera and filming his or her face creates a situation that contains a great psychoanalytical charge. It requires the subjects to confront the image of themselves; it places them literally “in front of” themselves and, perhaps more importantly, it requires them to reveal and expose themselves to others. Herein lies the source of the incoherence mentioned above: the ambivalent relationship between authenticity and acting. It is worth examining the “tests” closely and treating the minor inconsistencies in behavior as symptoms of much deeper processes. As we watch the series of films, we may get the gradual impression that they produce an effect contrary to the one intended. We may, therefore, subversively conclude that, rather than portraying the people sitting in front of the lens, the Screen Tests capture some sort of incongruousness, a silent struggle being waged beneath the facade of the face. Mary Woronov, one of Warhol’s superstars, observes that the Screen Tests served primarily as a sort of psychological test:

“You would see the person fighting with his image—trying to protect it. You can project your image for a few seconds, but after that it slips and your real self starts to show through. That’s why it was so great—you saw the person and the image.”

Douglas Crimp described this quality of Warhol’s film series using the term misfitting, which can be understood in the sense of incompatibility or the vicious cycle
The breakdown of identity

The most distinct film in the Screen Test series features Ann Buchanan; we see a shock of dark hair cascading over her shoulders, framing her serious and somewhat saddened face, which is directed straight at the viewer. The proximity of her face is both alarming and fascinating, embarrassing and provocative, evoking a broad range of often contradictory sensations. The film is framed in such a way that individual frames are essentially photographic portraits. Buchanan doesn’t blink once throughout the entire duration of the test. Ann’s face appears to become more beautiful as the shot progresses. This thought is inescapable. Her enormous, broad-set eyes and their dark framing, intensified by her black eyebrows, draw our attention away from other distinctive features such as her nose and mouth. Another minute passes. Her eyes glaze over and she begins to cry.

Ann Buchanan was not a member of the milieu associated with the Factory, but she did have close ties to the Beat poets, having shared a San Francisco apartment with Neal Cassady and Allen Ginsberg. Her Screen Test is said to have been one of Warhol’s favorites. We may assume that this was due to the tension produced by the actress’s bursting into tears, or because this act exhausts the convention of the entire series. In these circumstances, it is also one of the most personal—and the most theatrical—reactions we can imagine someone having in front of a camera. It is here that these two aspects converge, and we as viewers are put in a situation in which we find ourselves at once moved and amused. We are moved by Ann’s tears; we are amused by her deconstruction of the situation, which she turns on its head, exposing the seams and laughing in the face of the instigator of the tests. More importantly, however, she gives Warhol exactly what he wanted, revealing at the same time the intentions behind the camera methods used in the Factory. The camera, she explains, is a medium of exposure. It constantly records people’s actions in intimate circumstances, which are stripped of their naturalness by the camera and fluidly cross into the realm of staged events. The break between the self and the image of the self clearly leans toward the latter, as if the subject existed only through its image. This interpretation challenges to some degree Douglas Crimp’s analysis of Blow Job, according to which Warhol’s cinematic vision is devoid of voyeurism. As Crimp maintains, Blow Job “constitutes an ethic of
antivoyeuristic looking,” as the subject is not being observed in secret, and the numerous formal techniques remind the viewers that what they are watching is, in fact, a film. However, this still allows for the claim that Warhol’s films prevent us from acquiring any knowledge about the subjects depicted in them. As Crimp notes, “Warhol found the means to make the people of his world visible to us without making them objects of our knowledge. The knowledge of a world that his films give us is not a knowledge of the other for the self.”

Warhol’s paradoxically detached presence provides space for the self-presentation of others. As Victor Bockris notes, “Warhol had a way of unleashing something special in people by his very presence; they would act out fantasies, undress, and do all sorts of crazy things just to get his attention.” What did he expect of his stars? It’s difficult to find an unambiguous answer to this question from today’s perspective. But when he found out that Freddie Herko, a dancer associated with the Factory, had committed suicide by jumping from a fifth-floor window, Warhol supposedly reacted: “I wish Freddy had told us about his plans; we could have filmed it.” It is hard to say today how much truth there was in statements of this type, and how much of it was pure provocation on the part of the artist.

Warhol—a man who constantly emphasized his desire to be a machine and made various efforts to construct such an image of himself in the eyes of others, as was the case with his legendary habit of subsisting on little besides sweets—found in the camera a companion for the experiments he conducted directly on the Factory’s milieu. Hal Foster describes Andy Warhol as having a contradictory nature: on the one hand, he was indifferent and “porous”—full of holes, like a sieve or strainer through which liquids pass without causing any visible change; on the other, he was oversensitive about himself.

Warhol also possessed a weird ability, early on, to attract quasi-doubles like Edie Sedgwick (the most famous of his several companions who died young) and Nico (the monotone singer with The Velvet Underground) and, later, to pass as his own simulacrum—even when he was present, Warhol appeared absent or otherwise alien, a paradoxical quality for a celebrity. These devices became central to his persona, which is sometimes seen as his ultimate work.

In examining the contradictions that emerge in the image of the self in Warhol’s
work, the disintegration of this image in his self-portraits and its subsequent 
reintegration, and the discrepancy between his detachment, his peculiar 
bashfulness, and his magnetism and iconicity, Foster offers the interesting thesis 
that Warhol's problems with his own image opened him up to perceiving the same 
problems in others, while also prompting him to closely observe people who 
possessed the ability to effectively shape and perform their own image. Thus, in 
Warhol’s artistic practice, the portrait assumed a variety of forms, from pictures 
taken in photo booths or ones made to resemble police mugshots, to stylized shots 
of fashion and movie stars.

What is particularly interesting in this context is Warhol’s ability, as Foster observes, 
to attract doppelgängers as yet another strategy to blend into the background, 
a self-professed attempt to reduce himself to the superficial and blur his own 
subjectivity, and to treat repetition as a means of achieving an emotional void. In 
this regard, his relationship with Edie Sedgwick was particularly intense and 
entangled in contradictions that seem significant. Recall that Sedgwick met Warhol 
at the tender age of twenty-two, and had already experimented with drugs while 
studying at Cambridge, Massachusetts. She came from a well-to-do family, a fact 
that made an enormous impression on Warhol. She arrived at the Factory at the 
moment the artist had begun working intensively with the camera. Sedgwick soon 
became the main star of *The Poor Little Rich Girl Saga*, which, as the title suggests, 
was a subversive take on her own story, an “extraordinary catastrophe,” as 
members of her social circle would later describe it. What is interesting is the 
actual process of her visual transformation from the moment she joined Warhol. 
She cut her hair and dyed it silver, taking on an appearance resembling that of the 
artist. The two often took advantage of this twin-like effect in public by posing for 
pictures together. The image they maintained was so strong that it was eventually 
taken up by other people. One notable example is that of Ingrid Superstar, 
Sedgwick’s rival for the title of main superstar. Her stylized image differed, however, 
in that it largely involved copying Warhol’s appearance, producing an effect 
opposite to the one intended and making her less a copy of the artist and more 
a knock-off.

Another strategy that revealed the inner workings of mimicry as a form of 
depersonalization or a game geared toward blurring one’s own individuality was 
the artist’s well-known practice of encouraging others to “impersonate” him, as
evident in this excerpt from one of his interviews:

I mean, you should just tell me the words and I can just repeat them because I can’t, uh... I’m so empty today. I can’t think of anything. Why don’t you just tell me the words and they’ll just come out of my mouth.  

Gerard Malanga often fabricated Warhol-style interviews that he would publish as authentic, but the best-known incident of this type took place in 1967, when the actor Allen Midgette was hired to impersonate the artist at a series of lectures delivered at American universities. His charismatic talks, at which he appeared disguised in dark glasses and a wig, were enthusiastically received by the students, who failed to notice for a long time that it was all a theatrical performance concocted by Warhol. The ruse was only uncovered when a journalist called the Factory and the artist answered the telephone.

Lupa’s Factory 2 continues Warhol’s experiments with the function of the doppelgänger. The closer we examine the fabric of the play, the more similarities become apparent between the stance Warhol assumed in the Factory and the place that Krystian Lupa apportioned himself within the performance. He impersonates Warhol, taking on the gestures used by the artist in his camerawork, as well as his detached position: that of a disinterested observer looking on from a distance without interfering with the structure, but merely permitting the events to unfold. Warhol/Lupa’s eye is synonymous with the eye of the camera. A false Andy—Piotr Skiba, wearing a silver wig and striped shirt—is thus dispatched onto the stage, where he evocatively mimics the scene.

A contemplation of the presence of the theatrical metaphor in the milieu associated with Any Warhol reveals that the destabilization of the relationship between fiction and everyday life in the Factory was closely tied to the revolutionary shifts occurring concurrently in the theater. These changes centered on the status of the character as well as a focus on spectacle rather than on dramatic literature. We observe in the Factory a shift away from everyday events to the shaping of the individual’s existence to match his or her role. The opposite process is apparent in the theater in the latter half of the twentieth century: a movement toward breaking with the fiction of the character, which Elinor Fuchs calls the “death of character” and is directly associated with the breakdown of modernity as a project. As I have attempted to demonstrate, these two processes converge at the same point, as
Krystian Lupa’s play Factory 2 outstandingly exemplifies.

In this essay, the problematization of theatricality is founded on the conviction that the Factory milieu was strictly theatrical in nature. The theatrical character of Warhol’s studio was built on several levels, from the very space that housed the famous studio, through the constant presence of a camera that encouraged people to stage their everyday lives, to Andy Warhol’s own perplexing, self-creating behavior. My purpose has been to draw the reader’s attention to the observation that the breakdown of traditional models of theatricality in post-modernity can trigger the emergence of the destructive potential dormant in that category. In this sense, the Factory can be regarded as a laboratory for the study of mimicry, one whose participants studied the theatricalization of their own existence, making themselves resemble the Other, suspending their own subjectivity, and allowing their “selves” to be intercepted by images.

Footnotes


2 See Ultra Violet, Famous For 15 Minutes: My Years with Andy Warhol (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2015), 33.


4 It should be noted that no encounter between these individuals ever took place at the Factory.


6 I mainly employ the term “post-modernity” instead of “postmodernism,” as I would like to emphasize that the fundamental context to which I refer in this essay is the crisis of modernity, understood here as a civilizational project grounded
primarily in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. This allows me to situate the
discussion within the broad vista of the transformation occurring in culture and
society. The word “postmodernism” might evoke in the reader unambiguous
associations with the crisis of modernism in art, hence I use the latter term only
when referring to the output of scholars who themselves employed it. Following
Jean-François Lyotard, I set aside the issue of whether post-modernity is a new era
or a certain tendency within modernity, and therefore treat expressions such as
“late modernity” and “the crisis of modernity” as synonymous with post-modernity,
using them interchangeably in this essay. See Jean-François Lyotard, The
Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, Brian
Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

7  See Antonin Artaud, “Metaphysics and the Mise en Scene” in The Theater and its

8  Ibid., 42.

9  See SubStance 31, no. 2–4 (2002); Tracy Davis, Thomas Postlewait, eds.,
Theatricality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Samuel Weber,

10 See Josette Féral, “Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified,”

11 See Josette Féral, “Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language,”

12 Ibid., 5.

13 Weber, Theatricality as Medium, 265.

14 I use the category of self in reference to the subject as a certain symbolic or
illusory whole, in contrast to the word ego, which I use whenever I refer to Freud’s
topography of the mental apparatus. In his first model of the psyche, Freud outlines
three areas: the conscious, the unconscious, and the preconscious. His study of
hysteria led him to formulate another topography comprising the id, ego, and the
super-ego, which he presented in his 1923 paper “The Ego and the Id.” See
Sigmund Freud, “The Ego and the Id,” in The Ego and the Id and Other Works, trans.


17 Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, 170.

18 Ibid., 174–175.

19 Ibid., 175.


23 Ibid., 24–25.

24 Ibid., 25.


27 Warhol’s interest in the superficial ought not be conflated with Fredric Jameson’s assertions regarding the flatness or the waning of affect in Warhol’s art. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

29 Among the main sources that provide the basis for this thesis are accounts provided by direct witnesses who made up the Factory milieu, documented in interviews, and in biographies of Andy Warhol, that describe the artist’s everyday behavior. See Kenneth Goldsmith, I’ll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews (New York: Avalon, 2004); Victor Bockris, The Life and Death of Andy Warhol (London: Fourth Estate, 1998); Mary Woronov, Swimming Underground: My Years in the Warhol Factory (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2000).


31 Bockris, The Life and Death of Andy Warhol, 141.

32 Ultra Violet, Famous For 15 Minutes, 17.


34 Bockris, The Life and Death of Andy Warhol, 144.

35 In order to help the actors enter their roles, even the rehearsal space used for Factory 2 was lined with silver foil.

36 Ultra Violet, Famous For 15 Minutes, 17.

37 Mary Woronov, Swimming Underground, 36.


41 Statement by Victor Bockris in the documentary film series Andy Warhol’s
Factory People.

42 Ibid.


44 This phrase is used by members of the Factory interviewed in the documentary film series Andy Warhol’s Factory People.

45 Quoted in Goldsmith, I’ll Be Your Mirror, 53.