If Andy Warhol’s queer cinema of the 1960s allowed for a flourishing of newly articulated sexual and gender possibilities, it also fostered a performative dichotomy: those who command the voice and those who do not. Many of his sound films stage a dynamic of atonement and loquaciousness that produces a complex and compelling web of power and desire. The artist has summed the binary up succinctly: ‘Talkers are doing something. Beauties are being something’8 and, as Viva explained about this tendency in reference to Warhol’s 1968 Lonesome Cowboys: ‘Men seem to have trouble doing these nonscript things. It’s a natural for women and fags – they ramble on. But straight men can’t.’9

The brilliant writer and progenitor of the Theatre of the Ridiculous Ronald Tavel’s first two films as scenarist for Warhol are paradigmatic in this regard: Screen Test #1 and Screen Test #2 (both 1965). In Screen Test #1, the performer, Warhol’s then lover Philip Fagan, is completely closed off to Tavel’s attempts at spurring him to act out and to reveal himself.7 According to Tavel,

he was so uptight. He just crawled into himself, and the more I asked him, the more uptight he became and less was recorded on film, and, so, I got more personal about touchy things, which became the principle for me for the next six months. 4

When Tavel turned his self-described ‘sadism’ on a true cinematic superstar, however, in Screen Test #2, the results were extraordinary. Here Mario Montez was able to transform his victimised position – as an ingénue auditioning for a cruel, foul-mouthed off-screen director played by Tavel – into a potent piece of performed self-exposure; the drag queen took up Tavel’s challenge and loosened her tongue as persuaded.

Warhol’s dazzling collaborations with Tavel in 1965–6 are, above all else, works of meta-cinema: despite their air of disposability and casualness, films like The Life of Juanita Castro, Vinyl, Kitchen (all 1965) and Heath (1966) are precise and probing reductio ad absurdum experiments in distilling the pungent essence of the performer–director relationship and in examining how the cinema can catalyse the exposure of something authentic and true about the individuals it records. Often a Warhol film’s potency comes from the juxtaposition of a beauty and a talker: silence cannot help but generate verbiage, and vice versa, with speaking naming self-mythologising circles of inundo around more physical being. In Warhol and Tavel’s film Horses, however – a queen, absurdly minimalised Western shot in the East 47th Street Factory on 3 April 1965 – we are left with four taciturn hunks whose lines are scripted and delivered to them on the spot by off-screen cue or ‘idiot’ cards: no improving, spontaneous ramblers – or superstars – to be found here. All beauties being rather than talkers doing, Horse is an awkwardly arousing epic of deflated masculinity and flaccid imperial ambitions. Instead of fighting over land, the ‘cowboys’ spar over the love of a horse: the only attempts at territorial and romantic conquest that we see before us are the cowboys’ failed seductions of the beast, equally aloof and solitary. Subjected to Warhol and Tavel’s whips through three protracted reels, the actors perform with a hypnotic languor that mirrors the stillness of the eponymous star, a ‘professional’ named Mighty Byrd rented by Warhol from the nearby Dawn Animal Agency, who appears alongside trainer Leonard Brook on a loose mat of hay in the busy entrance to Warhol’s Factory.

A masterful film about mastery’s undoing, Horse relocates the frontier from great outdoors to claustrophobic indoors, American West to East, from the drive for colonial expansion to the explosion of social, cultural and economic boundaries that took place day in and day out at Warhol’s Factory. It also recasts the Western, that most American of popular film genres, through the lens of the mid-1960s New York underground queer counterculture as if to say: this is America now. Scholar Chon Noriega has noted, following on from an assertion by Jonas Mekas, that ‘If Warhol is America, he is nothing less than the frontier thesis of modern art.’5 Noriega cites Richard Slotkin’s Gunfighter Nation, where he identifies ‘the process of the frontier myth as a “regeneration through violence”,’ which aptly describes Warhol and Tavel’s cinema of cruelty.6 Regarding his and Warhol’s film-making practice, Tavel has stated, “It’s so American. What will be more American than that phenomenon: dehumanisation?7 In both form and content, Horse is like a downward spiral into the abyss of white American masculinity and violence, a maddening circle that mimicked the idiosyncratic structures of Tavel’s uniquely self-destructing scenarios.8 I would suggest that this knotty, listless queer violence that plays out in the film is what Tavel is talking about when he calls Horse both his ‘best’ and his most ‘terrifying’ production for Warhol:

I fully expected it to be bigger than me, to make a statement larger than I or Warhol would be capable of articulating intentionally. And that’s why I would consider it to be the best film, because the statement it made is so terrifying, not just unexpected, but terrifying and undeniable. This is what fascinated me. Nobody can deny that it is there, happening without any calculations beyond setting up a milieu. And it’s happening in front of your eyes, in all its horror. It cannot be erased, cannot be denied.”
This question of articulation, of a violence tightly bound up with masculinity that stealthily escapes or negates verbalisation and instead is cloaked in a more ephemeral feeling of silent menace, seems central to grasping the ‘terrifying and undeniable’ potency of Horse that Tavel so dramatically describes.

Horse’s slipperiness is amplified by its scarcity, so before I continue any further; a few notes on invisibility and gossip. The late Warhol film expert Calle Angell has pointed out that Warhol’s withdrawal of his 1960s films from circulation in 1972 – as he sought financing for his more commercial productions with director Paul Morrissey – ‘worked to increase their value in the marketplace of cultural discourse, where a growing body of recollections, descriptions, and interpretations, projected on the often blank screens of Warhol’s cinema, has come to replace direct experience of the films themselves’. Accounts of both the production and actual experience of Warhol’s films vary greatly from one commentator to another, memories are faulty to the extreme and reminiscences are shaped by self-interest and the vagaries of spectatorship.

In his monograph on Warhol’s Blow Job (1964), Peter Gidal notes, ‘knowledge (what you then think you know when you see the actor, his gestures, his looks, his reactions) is always interfered with, as time continues whilst you look and whilst you realise your misapprehension – that what you thought was occurring (or imagined was occurring) is other than what it is’. Such tricks of recollection only multiply thanks to the continuing rarity of opportunities to view most of Warhol’s films, many of which are still awaiting proper preservation before being introduced into very limited circulation by a handful of institutions. Making sense of Warhol’s cosmos therefore demands a methodology of gossip: embellishing the quotidian with trappings of the mythic, fact with fiction, gossip is the traffic in unoffical information and a form of makeshift knowledge. Taking on the identity of an unrepentant gossip also puts me in fine company with the ‘talkers’ in Warhol’s films. While engaging in excessive talk has historically been regarded as a feminising pastime, it is a key form of self-fashioning, allowing the speaker to talk new identities and ways of being in the world into existence through the voice. My account of Horse and its making is therefore unabashedly fuzzy, disputable and partial as I endeavour to tell the best possible story, prioritising fantasy and fabulation above mere facts in order to do so. That said, my earnest analysis of Horse is based on primary and secondary sources, and with two viewings of the film: once, on VHS at The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh in 2003 while watching a number of Warhol’s films during research for my MA thesis, and once on 16mm (with the second and third reels accidentally reversed by the projectionist!) at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in February 2012. While a number of Warhol’s films have been released illicitly on Italian DVD label RaroVideo, the scarcity of a film like Horse for most scholars means that it maintains its status as an ephemeral fantasy object, hazily reconstructed at best. Let’s begin at the beginning, then, with Tavel’s list of props:

• guns
• two bottles of milk, four drinking glasses
• a pack of playing cards
• three land deeds
• something for the horse to eat
• Fashit tape

Drawn to extreme literalism in his early film titles, Warhol makes the word and idea of ‘horse’ his metonym for the American cinematic genre of the Western. Scholar Douglas Crimp captures the core of the film very well: ‘the [Warholian] idea that all you really need to make a movie a western is a horse.’ Horse indeed came about from Warhol’s desire to rent a horse for the day in order to make a Western, and followed close on the heels of the mock-political family portrait that Tavel had just written for him, The Life of Juanita Castro. Among its pecadillos, Juanita Castro introduced cross-gender acting – including a reluctant turn by mannish avant-garde film-maker Marie Menken, drinking beer on camera, as Juanita – as well as dialogue unabashedly dictated to the actors right on screen by Tavel. Visually, all the performers occupy the frame at the same time – as they will in Horse – and are positioned on bixachers set at an oblique angle in order to face a fictional, off-screen camera. These are just some of Tavel’s deconstructive tricks, and Horse took his brazen experimentation with establishing a ridiculous meta-cinema ever further.

Angell characterises Warhol and Tavel’s narrative and technical strategies for their films together as mutually deconstructing, which helps explain the dynamism and sign of their sources. Crimp has identified their collaborations as ‘coming together to stay apart’. What Tavel brought to Warhol’s vision was a sympathetic laying bare of all manner of cinematic conventions, from dialogue to setting, plot to performance. Tavel’s scripts are marked by heavy repetition, intentional mistakes and absurd humour, and reach dizzying heights of self-reflexivity. His experimental scenarios test the very limits of human performance, and were therefore perfect structures for developing Warhol’s cinematic vision in the mid-1960s. Speaking about Warhol’s cinema, Tavel has said ‘you feel that [these] films are very much history ... the most authentic history books we have. They record infallibly how people think, because when you watch them in those silly stories performing, what you really watch is the flesh at work.’ Essentially, Warhol and Tavel put people in banal, clichéd, ridiculous and exploitative situations in order to force their performances to transcend them. There was a cinema of revelation achieved through engineered, destabilising artifacts, almost like a laboratory for the exposure of the self under adverse circumstances. Angell describes Warhol’s conception of film in this period as ‘a kind of delineated performance space, a specific temporal and physical framing within which planned or unplanned actions might or might not unfold’. While Tavel has commented, ‘I thought we shouldn’t tell a film what it’s about, it should tell us. Set up a field in which it operates’.

All of Tavel’s scenarios for Warhol were recorded with an Auricon camera that took 1,200 ft rolls of 16mm film. Shot with a stationary camera, with sound and no post-production editing, two of Horse’s three single-take 35-minute reels feature the horse, Mighty Byrd, in profile, spanning the entire width of the
frame. M. B. is positioned just outside the Factory’s freight elevator, within which the larger-than-expected rented horse was transported up to Warhol’s studio. A payphone and a line of spectators (including Tavel’s brother) flank the back wall. Tavel calls them ‘overseers’ and ‘witnesses’ in his script, and they are largely hidden by Mighty Byrd except for their heads, which poke above the horse to form a kind of mountainous horizon line punctuated on the right by a crescent moon (created by resident soundman B. Malanga). Tavel also regularly crosses through the set, in front of the camera, to read the film’s credits – a common Tavelism – into the shadows unveiling the idiot cards, aided by Warhol’s studio assistant Gerard Malanga. Tavel also regularly tries to coax Warhol’s studly ‘beauties’ to talk when they would rather not, so La Treille tries to get the horse to open up. He seems genuinely smitten with his equine co-star – perhaps all the horse wanted was some romance, someone to buy him dinner first – and we hear M. B. is chewing as the affordable lad holds up the mic to him to establish a more ethical form of kinship than we have previously witnessed. This ‘behind the scenes’ reel interrupts the action and thus serves as a marked self-reflexive device, a shot of the ‘real’ among Tavel’s panoply of narrative put-ons.

According to Tavel, Warhol was concerned that the horse and the men in cowboy outfits signified a Western movie too explicitly at first – as and so incorporated greater evidence of the film’s own making into its mise en scène before shooting: from the row of overseers to Name’s theatrical lighting, from the visual prominence of the boom microphone held by Betty Stahl on the left to Tavel with his cue cards on the right – ‘directing from within’ – which opens the film up to include not just ‘the scene’ but ‘behind the scenes’, a kind of singularity that resonates with Crimp’s conception of Warhol and Tavel’s relationship as productively in tension. Gidal’s description of the white cat in Warhol’s Harlot (1964) could easily be applied to Mighty Byrd: ‘It has a life of its own and, as such, is a disorganising principle.’ As a disorganising principle, the presence of the horse is far more unsettling than even the most anarcho-human performer, and certainly more so than the inert mass of Warhol’s star of his 1964 B-horror Epic, the Empire State Building. The horse’s insubstantiality (what must M. B. be thinking?) creates a manner of feedback loop with its corollary – the unwavering, automatic gaze of the camera eye – and the cowboys are like so many puppets playing out their forces in the charged airspace between the two. Visually and metaphorically, the horse is a black hole into which everyone and everything must be drawn for the 100 minutes that the camera runs – and is the reason the film exists.

Around the horse, we have our four central human characters: Kid (Larry Laliberté), Sheriff (Gregory Battcock), Tex (Dan Cassidy) and Mex (Tosh Carillo), each representing a different coarse archetype of the Western movie genre. They are trapped within the confines of the set and the unmoving camera that frames it, the meagre real estate that Warhol and Tavel have designated as their entire universe. As The Life of Juanita Castro, Tavel performs the role of director on screen: to the right, we see traces of him in the shadows unveiling the idiot cards, aided by Warhol’s studio assistant Gerard Malanga. Tavel also regularly crosses through the set, in front of the camera, to read the film’s credits – a common Tavelism – into the boom mic, pulling it towards him out of screen left. We also occasionally hear Tavel verbalise directions to the cast, adding a second layer of dialogue that messes with the scripted words spoken by the ‘real’ performers. To maximise the actors’ discomfort and keep them perpetually off guard, they did not receive any directions or cues, but rather followed the voice of the director as he rambles as if auditioning the actors, who – like most Factory denizens – were to varying degrees high on drugs (in this case poppers, apparently, though typically it was amphetamines). Certain sources claim the script was developed through Tavel’s conversations with the actors, which seems unlikely, but either way the dialogue consists of short and rhythmic pronouncements, concise enough to fit on the cards. Anxieties ran high among the ‘unprepared and thus stage-frightened young men’ particularly in view of the actors’ intimate proximity to the horse – which could dash out at any moment, and does get noticeably spooked by the most heated scenes, kick out at least once – and to the equally unpredictable whims of their devilish young scenarist.

Many of Warhol and Tavel’s films are two-reelers but Horse is three, giving us a 20-minute-long intermission of sorts. The third reel, recorded after the scripted film shoot was ostensibly completed, interrupts the flow from the first to the second with a vignetted tableau of the horse alone with his trainer being fed and petted as well as visited by various Factory well-wishers. The horse is positioned in a three-quarters view – its head is not in close-up as some (like Patrick Smith) have attested – with the trainer squatting next to it, comforting the performer after the indignities and chaos of the shoot; the off-screen sounds of the Factory’s day-to-day buzz are picked up by the boom microphone, which is also still visible on camera. Sedgwick, Chuck Wein and others come into view, eating and smoking. Latrelle (now out of character as the Kid) and the boom operator play with the mic and merrily attempt to interview the horse: much as Tavel tries to coax Warhol’s studly ‘beauties’ to talk when they would rather not, so Latrelle tries to get the horse to open up. He seems genuinely smitten with his equine co-star; perhaps all the horse wanted was some romance, someone to buy him dinner first – and we hear M. B. is chewing as the affordable lad holds up the mic to him to establish a more ethical form of kinship than we have previously witnessed. This ‘behind the scenes’ reel interrupts the action and thus serves as a marked self-reflexive device, a shot of the ‘real’ among Tavel’s panoply of narrative put-ons.

Warhol and Tavel’s techniques are nothing short of ‘the means for the complete dissolution of relationships and stories as we know them’, so it is apropos that a feeling of crisis and chaos dominates. To say that the frame is densely packed would be an understatement: first off, the horse appears quite huge and – appropriately enough for its outsize presence – performs a variety of roles: star; efficient generic shorthand and prop; object of romantic come-ons; obstacle to take up space, be climbed on, obscure what’s behind and frame what’s in front; and to intimidate its fellow, far more diminutive actors. As a non-human species abjected by humans, the horse embodies an unbreachable difference from its co-stars, a kind of singularity that resonates with Crimp’s conception of Warhol and Tavel’s relationship as productively in tension. Gidal’s description of the white cat in Warhol’s Harlot (1964) could easily be applied to Mighty Byrd: ‘It has a life of its own and, as such, is a disorganising principle.’ As a disorganising principle, the presence of the horse is far more unsettling than even the most anarcho-human performer, and certainly more so than the inert mass of Warhol’s star of his 1964 B-horror Epic, the Empire State Building. The horse’s insubstantiality (what must M. B. be thinking?) creates a manner of feedback loop with its corollary – the unwavering, automatic gaze of the camera eye – and the cowboys are like so many puppets playing out their forces in the charged airspace between the two. Visually and metaphorically, the horse is a black hole into which everyone and everything must be drawn for the 100 minutes that the camera runs – and is the reason the film exists.

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Horse (1965). 16mm film, b/w, sound, 100 mins. © 2013 The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA, a museum of Carnegie Institute. All rights reserved. Film still courtesy of The Andy Warhol Museum.
Typical of Tavel’s films with Warhol, the ‘characters’ in Horse are throwaways, as is suggested by their generic names: Kid, Sheriff, Tex and Mex. For Tavel, evocating character was the most piercing way of revealing the personaliy of the performer that lay behind them:

The character is invested in my mind as someone to give this person something to do so that [he] will express many truths about himself [before the camera] and the character who needs that. That's been done. It's the unavoidable truth of themselves and the character is totally subsidiary.37

Crimp explains it thus: ‘The essential condition of “acting” in a Warhol film is that you are left to your own devices and that whatever you do will simply be the way you appear in the film.’38 The four stars were a motley crew: Battcock was an openly gay art critic who had written extensively on Warhol’s work, and a veteran of his 1964 film Batman Dracula and Soap Opera. He would also go on to star in Warhol’s comic remake of his own Blow Job in the 1966 Eating Tea Fast. Caiffo was a forerun and SIEM aficionado with so-called ‘westernish loins’ – which Tavel sought to feature in his script – who would very soon take on a more prominent role in Vinyl; Warhol and Tavel’s adaptation of Anthony Burgess’s A Clockwork Orange. Cassidy was a young poet friend of Malanga – Warhol’s key studio assistant and Tavel’s idol-card wrangler – and had attended Cornell University; one of his three short Stroom Tests had been included in Warhol’s series Fifty Fantastics and Fifty Personalities (1964–6). Latrelle, who later appears as a masochist in Vinyl, was apparently an underage French-Canadian runaway who Stevenson Watson claims was Henry Geldzahler’s boyfriend at the time.36 In his notes on the Horse script, Tavel writes that the ‘get out of town’ line was an in-joke threatening Latrelle’s deportation.40

In the mid-1960s, the Western was already seen as a muddy cultural product, thoroughly revised, parodied and taken apart. A key parameter of Horse was its classification as a Western, and Tavel insists in his notes on the script that ‘A deconstructed … western is still … a western.’41 As scholar Patrick Smith explains, Warhol’s films celebrate more than contour the artifice and dishonesty of Hollywood.42 Tavel describes Horse not as a spoof or satire but as ‘a genuine Western … Horses as sex objects’ that tells the true, repressed history of the West left out of the now passé, straight Hollywood narratives:

Horse’s lines imply … an outlook and literary themes … which, ideally, should demythologize the Western movie genre through the repetition of warmed-over devices and that whatever you will simply do, as is suggested by their generic names: Kid, Sheriff, Tex and Mex. For Tavel, evocating character was the most piercing way of revealing the personaliy of the performer that lay behind them:

Horse explores the sadism and sexual neuroses produced within all-male contexts like the Elysian, where a prescribed celluloid transforms acceptable homosexual bonding into dangerously taboo – and here violent – homosexuality. Warhol and Tavel’s queering of the Western occurs not merely in how they render explicit the amirering homosexual desire among the characters, but in the way that they degrade the iconographic trappings of the Western genre into postures, lines of dialogue and situations that are as ‘through’ as they are a card, selected in the manner as if a group of people under pressure be moved to satirical – or non-representational – between Tavel’s scenario and the film made from the scenario suggests a new condition for representation itself – a condition, that is, of our confrontations with others and with the world at large.39

As the reel winds down – we can see Warhol’s infamous white flares – Tex takes the Sheriff’s hat (all hats have a hard time staying on in the likable as a kind of drag. This sensibility was shared with Warhol’s film-making influence Jack Smith, who displayed a similarly camp-deconstructive attitude in his home spun cinema-homage to the beloved exotic and Orientalist celluloid spectacles. Horses are throwaways, as is suggested by their generic names: Kid, Sheriff, Tex and Mex. For Tavel, evocating character was the most piercing way of revealing the personaliy of the performer that lay behind them:

As Smith describes, the performers ‘present their theatricalized masculinity and … engage in combative games of bondage and domination around the horse.’ After Mex hands out pieces of paper towel representing ‘land deeds’ to the others, Tavel instructs the men to beat him up, and they all pounce, laying into him. Later, they hold their noses when Mex takes off his boots, as if his feet stink, and push him off the horse after the trio to seduce the animal himself. Most of the aggression in the film is aimed at Mex, who is the maligned scapegoat for Sheriff, Kid and Tex. Sheriff wants to wipe out all the Mexicans and Indians – the terms are used pretty much interchangeably here – so he can civilize the land. The white Americans are threatened by Mex’s advances on the horse and therefore see fit to punish him sexually, beating and stripping him. Tavel’s instruction at one point to ‘feel’ him up was apparently misinterpreted as yet another instance of ‘beat him up.’ The victimised Mex is emphatically a crude Mexican stereotype, as he so often performs for the other men’s amorous and parasitical dialogue of the ‘gringos’ and ‘asex’ variety. The Sheriff threatens to do so.’45

Beyond the heavily deconstructed mise en scène and the abundant content, Horse misbehaves as a narrative feature through its listless and lethargic temporality. There is no organic flow in Horse: we watch as the men conduplicate their idol cards, and palpably think through how they will enact them – you can almost see the wheels turning in their heads as they absorb their (oft-embarassing) directions. As an example of this, writer J. J. Murphy notes, 116 WARHOL IN TEN TAKES 9_10 HORSE 117

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Because the performers don’t know their lines or actions, they seem to exist in a curious state of tension, which lies somewhere between reality and fiction, between just being themselves and becoming performers at a moment’s notice. As a consequence, the actors often appear apprehensive and bewildered.55

Crimp notes that here, ‘Dialogue and interaction never constitute anything like recognizable intersubjectivity’, while Tavel appreciates that the actors exhibit ‘dialogic and interactive formations’ that allow the film to ‘aufheben’ the experience of time and presence.56 The ultimate effect is of exposing the Western as a landscape of the masculinist death drive, a fruitless patriarchal, imperialist pantomime without end. When the script calls for all the men to drink milk – an infantilising choice better suited for children – it pours sloppily down their chins and torsos to become a visual stand-in for the spilled semen that one would expect to result from all the ‘beat it, beat it’ taking place. Obviously, the gun is a stand-in for a cock – ‘my gun is my tool’, they proclaim – but on the rare occasion when it is fired in a altercation between the Kid and the Sheriff, no sound results, as if the shot went off in a vacuum. Wayne Koestenbaum uses a gunslinger metaphor to write about Warhol’s queer temporality: ‘Into mastication – in both form and content. Mere meat puppets, the men seem enclosed in their corporeal spaces of the Factory in 1965 as orbiting around Warhol’s film production:...’57

It was a horror to watch. It captured the essence of every boring, dead day one’s ever had in a city, a time when everything is imbued with the odor of damp washcloths and old drains. I suspect that a hundred years from now people will look at Kitchen and say, ‘Yes, that is the way it was in the late Fifties, early Sixties in America. That’s why they had the war in Vietnam. That’s why the rivers were getting polluted. That’s why there was typological glut. That’s why the horse came down. That’s why the plague was on its way.’58

Gidal too writes eloquently of the sinister temporality animating Warhol’s work, in this case Blow Job: ‘All this in the face of the running down and out of the temporal, a death-drive that (instead of being talked about, analysed, interpreted, then happily closed) “Wid, that passed the time”, and onto the anything, we are cohabitants with. Perhaps Warhol’s – and Tavel’s – films are objects of such keen, intensive study because their fantastic encounters with mortality and the mysteries of existence, the ineffable and intangible, are destined to slip away from the attentive viewer and aspirant analyst. Rather than literal objects to be eaten up by an audience, they are instead wholly consuming of those who fall into their depths. Is the source of what is so ‘terrifying’ in Horse located in the Factory? Angel describes the social space of the Factory in 1965 as orbiting around Warhol’s film production:

the shooting and screening of movies... became the main attraction in an extraordinary social scene that grew around the artist and his art-making activities... The newly shivered Factory became, in part, a
functioning film studio, with cameras, lights, and backdrops set up… and with an expanding population of visiting celebrities, potential actors, technicians, and assistants available.

The anything-goes atmosphere of the Factory is a wild frontier populated by people who wanted to be on film, to be myth. Kosstenbaum characterises it as ‘a workshop for miscommunication, tabula rasa, exhibitionism, hysteria’. While socially and sexually wide open, the Factory as a whole resembles the Factory that acts as a set in Horse is spatially constructed; by contrast, the wide-open spaces of the Western film genre were closed socially and sexually, with heterosexual gender roles rigidly enforced in line with the genre’s norms and the imposed morality of the Hays Code. Warhol’s love of Hollywood poignantly grafts the most chauvinistic and conservative of all genres onto the bohemian space of his Factory, a remapping of American territory achieved through the camera. Daniel Steinhardt notes, ‘in Horse, the traditional homesteader mutates into the homo-steed and the continuity cutting of the plan american – perfect for balancing the prairie and the cowboy from the boot-up – transforms into the relentless gaze of the immobile plan-sequence.’

Steinhardt’s witty observation emphasises how the shift in frontiers that Warhol accomplished in Horse from so many fronts was accompanied by a shift in technique: from camerawork befitting a Hollywood Western to a thing of all walks of life who showed up at the Factory looking for glamour and adventure. The power and prestige that a public image through film promised – even an underground one by Warhol – cannot be underestimated; such transgressive, bohemian publicity resonated particularly strongly in this pre-Stonewall era of whispers and innuendo. The men’s distractedness – the fact that their attention is always aimed at the director and his cue cards, or the camera – is highly erotic. Crimp compares them to a group of men cruising in a gay bar: ‘They solicit attention. They are so pre-occupied, so distracted, so perpetually unnerved by the presence of the “other” caracters, and so Horse’s erotics are somehow awry, even haunted. Horse’s greatest secret is perhaps, then, witnessing the subjection of these men to the demands of celebrity and publicity, the burden to exist for cinema alone. Perhaps more than any other Warhol film, Horse reminds us of ‘nothing outside of this set as far as the sinistres economics of a Factory that made people into images.

Notes


3. Assuming Viva’s logic, non-rambling men anywhere on the Kinsey Scale are – for intents and purposes – ‘straight’ in Warhol’s cinema.


6. Ibid.


8. He described them thus: ‘you had both the establishment and the de-stabilisation of the vision at the same time, it worked in a circular fashion, where it kept resurrecting and deconstructing itself’ [4 cycle of endless resurrection] Tavel in David E. James, The Warhol Screenplay, p. 151.


12. See, in particular, Tavel’s confused and uncertain ramblings about Horse in his second interview with Patrick Smith (1 November 1978), in Smith’s Andy Warhol’s Art and Films, pp. 496–500.


15. I like to think of Warhol’s films as a kind of shadow corpus to revered documentarian Frederick Wiseman’s similarly thinly-loomed oeuvres. Where Wiseman has built an encyclopedic chronicle of the United States through films like High School (1968), Warfare (1970) and Meat (1976), Warhol produces a similarly comprehensive portrait of his queer demimonde through films like Sleep (1965), Haircut (No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3, all 1963), Suicide, Drunk and Camp (all 1965).


17. Angél, Andy Warhol, Film Maker, p. 131.


22. Accessed 28 June 2012. Tavel’s introduction to the script, which reflects on the making of the film, is not dated.

23. Tavel also claims that Warhol had dismantled a ‘painter Western setting that looked terriably real for being too authentic, but I’m not sure if this is true. Tavel quoted in Jean Stein, with George Plimpton, Edie: An American Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 238–9.


27. This is before she took on a leading role in several of them, with the Sadeghian film becoming virtually its own mini-genre later in 1965.


31. J. J. Murphy suggests this is a possible reference to the popular 1960s television show Miler Ed, which starred a talking horse; J. J. Murphy, The Black Hole of the Camera: The Films of Andy Warhol (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 71. Wayne Koestenbaum, meanwhile, silences Mighty Byrd in his reading of the horse as a Warhol surrogate: The beast horse’s irrelevance to human sex seems a figure for Warhol’s pretended remoteness from erotic reciprocity. Indeed, he allows the horse to be his vocal stand-in, for a microphone is positioned, in the film, by its mouth, as if the beast were going to break into song or give an interview. Actually, Latremille claims to Edie that the horse was telling him dirty jokes, which suggests that its awareness of matters sexual is greater than Koestenbaum’s neutering pronouncements give M. B. credit for. Koestenbaum continues, 'The horse, like the cow, wallpaper, allows
Andy to parody his own public personas as a mute who can’t explain himself. The onscreen silver-painted pay phone rings several times during the course of filming Horse, and Andy, not stopping the camera, appears within the frame to talk on the phone. The horse’s microphone picks up Andy’s words. That’s as close as he will get, in his films, to vocal self-portraiture. Wayne Koestenbaum, Andy Warhol (Penguin Lives) (New York: Viking, 2001), p. 152. Ironically, the microphone picks up the horse’s ‘voice’ more than once throughout the film, and especially in the intermediary reel.


35. Tavel on Latreille in his notes on the Horse script: ‘Larry Latreille, playing Kid, was jailbait, a French-Canadian runaway who had fallen in with the rotten Rita S-M drug groups on the Factory’s periphery’. ‘The line is a half humorous admonition and not so humorous (almost blackmailing) threat put to Larry...’ (For source, see note 22).

36. Ibid.

37. Smith, Andy Warhol’s Art and Films, p. 143.


39. ‘Tavel’s script actually encourages the men to ‘make love’ to Mighty Byrd: Kid, Tex, and Sheriff will proceed to make love to the horse, rubbing its mane, kissing its muzzle, massaging [sic] it along the flanks, kissing its back, legs, and behind’ (For source, see note 22).

40. Smith, Andy Warhol’s Art and Films, p. 165.

41. Crimp discusses at length this scene and other on-screen ‘rehearsals’ in Warhol and Tavel’s cinema, in ‘Our Kind of Movie’, p. 55.

42. Ibid., pp. 57–8.


45. Stranded in Arizona, Ramona and her Nurse coax the five faggot cowboy brothers (played by Joe Dallesandro and Eric Emerson, among others) in Warhol’s sex comedy, relentlessly questioning the nature of their fraternal relationships, their masculinity and their prowess, in the same way that Tavel torment the cowboys in Horse.

46. Tavel quoted in Smith, Andy Warhol’s Art and Films, p. 166.

47. Murphy, Black Hole of the Camera, p. 69.


50. In this way, Horse anticipates the paradigmatically Pop Kitchen (1965), where, in the narrated credits, human actors are presented as no more or less valuable than their fellow cast members: mixet, fridge, newspaper, coffee, mattress, table, etc.

51. In his 1973 The Screwball Asses, Hocquenghem writes, ‘We do not have children. We do not secrete that kind of surplus value... We are thus the strongest remedy to the natalist pollution of the planet. If we were the only ones here, humanity would immediately cease; no one would be born, there would be no children or adolescents, and we would become peaceful nihilistic old men sodomizing one another’ Guy Hocquenghem, The Screwball Asses (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2010), pp. 25–6.

52. Eidelean writes against ‘reproductive futurism’. His influential conceptualisation that every political is ultimately about enshrining a future Child (and therefore the ongoing reproduction of the species), and that non-procreative queerness is the site of a ‘death drive’ that places us in a position to resist the Child. Lee Eidelean, No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2004).


54. Ibid., p. 25.


58. Koestenbaum, Andy Warhol, p. 22.

59. Daniel Steinart, programme notes for Horse, 8 March 2006, The Crank Film Society, UCLA. Thanks to Daniel Steinart for providing an electronic copy of these notes.
