

When Life Goes to Work: Andy Warhol

ISABELLE GRAW

Introduction: Warhol Lives

Warhol seems more alive, more present, closer to us than ever. One need only think of the title of the present conference—“Andy Eighty?”—which calls him by his first name, referring to *and* questioning the assumption that we can entertain an *intimate* relationship with him. But why does Warhol’s production still seem so topical, so up to date? What is it that allows for this particular past to reach into our present with such insistence? I will begin with the premise that the border between his “work” and what could be called his public display of an “attitude towards life” is fundamentally unstable and blurred. It is indeed impossible to restrict Warhol’s production to objects, paintings, and films alone. I would like to suggest that not only the statements in his *Philosophy* (1975) or *Diaries* (1989) but also the way he constructed his public persona must be considered as integral parts of his artistic proposition. Naturally, statements made by artists must always be taken with a grain of salt. We do not find here the “true meaning” of their work. Artists’ remarks need to be decoded and interpreted, since they usually belong to a carefully designed “pose” that is staged and authentic, deliberate and accidental, strategic and unconscious at the same time. The innumerable eyewitness accounts of Warhol (by ex-assistants, ex-It girls, ex-coworkers, etc.) must likewise be treated with caution. They too are personally motivated projections that produce an illusion of proximity; but they also *reveal* something about how Warhol cultivated a certain attitude towards life and work.

Let me give you an example. According to eyewitness Bob Colacello, Warhol could not relax and hated vacations.¹ Even having fun meant working, since he used every social occasion (such as parties) in order to “get more portraits” or “more ideas” or to “sell more ads for *Interview*.” Colacello’s description is of course partly tainted by his own frustrations; it is as though he needed to retroactively justify why he was compelled to stop working for Warhol. But this

1. See Bob Colacello, *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1990), p. 167.

anecdote also sheds light on a pose that Warhol actually did cultivate, one in which *life becomes work*. His diaries not only record all these networking activities, they present going out as a way to meet rich people who would eventually—when they had enough to drink—buy his art.² What was formerly called “fun” or “leisure time” is quite explicitly represented as work. Even intimate relationships sooner or later turned into working relationships, as Billy Name recalled.³

This instrumentalization of formerly private activities and friendships resonates with how the Italian Philosopher Paolo Virno has defined our “post-Fordist condition,” in which “life” and “work” become indistinguishable.⁴ But Warhol’s merging of the professional and private spheres is also in line with how all “legendary” artists have been depicted at least since Giorgio Vasari’s famous lives of Renaissance artists. They are represented as rather exceptional beings—celebrities *avant la lettre*, if you will—who are supposed to have dedicated their entire lives to their work.⁵ Seen from this angle, the field of visual-arts production serves as a blueprint for a post-Fordist condition that aims at the whole person—or more precisely, at its cognitive, sensual, and emotional competences. There is nothing “new” about this condition, and I am far from claiming a radical break. What I would argue, though, is that this condition has intensified and expanded its reach since the 1960s due to the successful implantation of a media culture busily producing affects by focusing on people’s lives. Many theorists—most prominently Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt—have argued that we now live under a *biopolitical* regime, one in which the production of capital amounts to the reproduction of social life.⁶ This shift must be seen in relation to the struggles of those emancipatory movements of the 1960s and ’70s that insisted on a politicization of the private sphere. Without relativizing the enduring historical accomplishments of these movements, the art historian Sabeth Buchmann has aptly pointed out that an “erosion” of classical modes of production has since taken place: the difference between the spheres of leisure and work has collapsed, as has the border between the traditionally male sphere of production and the traditionally female sphere of reproduction.⁷ If the world of one’s private life looks increasingly similar to the world of one’s professional life, then society as a whole can be regarded as a “factory society” (Negri/Hardt)

2. Pat Hackett, ed., *The Andy Warhol Diaries* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1989), p. 646: “Here is how it all works: You meet rich people and you hang around with them and one night they’ve had a few drinks and they say: ‘I’ll buy it.’”

3. See Steven Watson, *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), p. 128.

4. See Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004).

5. See Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans. Gaston du C. de Vere (1550; New York: General Books LLC, 1979).

6. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 405 ff.

7. Sabeth Buchmann, “Biopolitik als Melodram: ‘Zu Yvonne Rainer’s Lives of Performers and Rainer Werner Fassbinders Warnung vor einer hl. Nutte,’” in *Der Einsatz des Lebens. Lebenswissen, Medialisierung, Geschlecht*, ed. Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky, Christoph Holzhey, Anja Michaelen (Berlin: b-books Verlag, 2009).

in which life goes to work.⁸ The leading productive forces in such a “factory society” are communication skills, cooperation, teamwork, and flexibility. This makes Warhol’s factory of the ’60s and its amphetamine-driven activities look like a post-Fordist dream put on the stage of a biopolitical theater.

But while the “Factory” certainly produced life, exemplifying what Maurizio Lazzarato has termed “the capitalist command over subjectivity,”⁹ it also allowed for different sexual identities and life-concepts to become recognized.¹⁰ New constraints were imposed, but new possibilities were created as well. It is crucial to note in this context that besides creating a space where people “performed themselves” (Steve Watson), the Factory always remained a site for the fabrication of products. To my mind, this is essential: the continuous supply of paintings was guaranteed despite Warhol’s public announcement in 1965 that he intended to stop painting, something he characteristically explained with his greater fascination for “people.”¹¹ This announcement had two effects: it caused irritation among his buyers and increased the prices of his paintings, which thus, according to Sam Green, became hard to find.¹² It endangered his market, but it also turned up the commercial heat. The quasi-automatic production process of Warhol’s silkscreen prints, a procedure that surrendered to the logic of the mass-manufactured product, has been legitimately associated with the Taylorist assembly line in Fordism.¹³ So alongside the equally exploitative and enabling production of its members’ subjectivities that is typical of the post-Fordist condition, the “Factory” also delivered products in a manner that communicated with Fordism.

In my opinion, few artists have reacted to the pressures exerted by the “new spirit of capitalism” in a more complex fashion than Warhol has in his work—if we presuppose an extended conception of the latter that also encompasses his statements and public appearances.¹⁴ To name but a few of these pressures on artists, which have only increased since Warhol’s death in 1987: the pressure to network constantly in order to accumulate “contacts,” which are considered highly valuable commodities in a “contact world” (Boltanski/Chiapello); the pressure to be successful in the market; the pressure to use and, inevitably, instrumentalize your friendships; the pressure to communicate, to produce *and* glean information; the pressure to show up in person

8. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *The Labor of Dionysos: A Critique of the State Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 9 ff.

9. Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed., Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 133–47.

10. See Douglas Crimp, “Getting The Warhol We Deserve,” in *Social Text* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1999), p. 64: “A whole motley crew of artists, actors, writers, and drag queens and other sexual deviants worked on one another’s projects and generally found mutual inspiration in a shared countercultural milieu.”

11. See Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol 60s* (New York: Harcourt, 1980), p. 113.

12. See “Interview with Sam Green,” in John Wilcock, *The Autobiography and Sex Life of Andy Warhol*, by John Wilcock and a Cast of Thousands (New York: Other Scenes, 1971).

13. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Andy Warhol’s One-Dimensional Art: 1956–1966,” in *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (London: Tate, 1989), pp. 39–61.

14. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007).

and to be present; the pressure to perform oneself convincingly; the pressure to look good, to stay fit, to be one's own product, to sell oneself, and to market one's own life.

I will demonstrate how Warhol's practice simultaneously conforms to *and* resists these pressures, ones that are not only typical of our post-Fordist condition but also result from a neoliberal expansion of the market sphere in combination with a biopolitical turn that, I believe, is exemplified by what is called "celebrity culture." The crucial question to my mind is not whether Warhol's practice mimics, theorizes, or objects to these conditions. I will argue that it does all these things at the same time. It seems crucial to me that we realize that Warhol presents the artist as someone not exempt from but in fact highly implicated in these conditions. They do not determine his practice, but if he wishes to resist them, the only obvious point of departure would seem to be the acknowledgement of his own particular entanglement.

If I am going to make all these grand claims regarding Warhol, do I not run the risk of contributing once more to the posthumous glorification, individualization, and isolation of his position? Is it really a good idea to add more hypertrophic interpretation? I am quite aware of these problems, and I will therefore present his work not as part of the solution, but as part of the problem. I do not wish to suggest that Warhol was a prophet who foresaw the advent of a neoliberal and biopolitical regime that makes us work on ourselves and surrenders the most intimate aspects of our lives to an economic logic of optimization. I would emphasize, rather, that it was due less to his prophetic qualities and more to his familiarity with the "fashion system" that he was able to reflect upon those transformations. This fashion system has been adequately described as configuring "excitement around appearances and conferring charismatic appeal on dressed beings."¹⁵ As it aims at the body and its willingness to internalize the ideals it promotes, the fashion system could be regarded as a bio-power operating via stimulation. Studying fashion, as Warhol did by registering even the slightest fashion change—new kinds of lip gloss, changes in skirt length, etc.—allowed him to understand the structural changes the art world would experience in subsequent decades. Indeed, the fashion world underwent a radical structural transformation in the late 1970s and early '80s: it turned into an industry that subscribed to the "celebrity principle" and saw the rise to dominance of corporate business structures, as exemplified by Halston selling out to the large corporate chain Penny Lane in 1983. Warhol was well positioned to study these changes, which would radically transform the art world only thirty years later.¹⁶

As a first step, I want to clarify some of my theoretical concepts and situate

15. Richard Martin, "Pre-Pop and Post-Pop, Andy Warhol Fashion Magazines," in *Who Is Andy Warhol*, ed. Colin McCabe (London: British Film Institute, 1997), p. 42.

16. See Alicia Drake, *The Beautiful Fall: Fashion, Genius, and Glorious Excess in 1970s Paris* (London: Back Bay Books, 2007).

Warhol's practice within a neoliberal market ideology and a biopolitical agenda that politicizes *and* economizes life. I want to demonstrate how "life"—I admit: an elusive and dangerously essentialist concept—was equally captured, framed, technologically produced, and rendered lifeless in the Factory of the '60s. It will become clear that what is presented to us is never "life as such." "Life" appears to be a highly mediated affair, blurring the line between the "staged" and the "authentic." In a second step, I will consider "celebrity culture" as the social form that propagates neoliberal values and correlates with the biopolitical turn. While keeping the crucial difference between "celebrities" and visual artists in mind, I will look at Warhol's practice as displaying a high awareness of what it means to become one's own product.

*When the Market Reaches Out and Grasps our Lives:
Warhol and the Biopolitical Turn*

Let me start by defining "neoliberalism" as a social order in which nearly all social relationships and aspects of life are regulated by market mechanisms. Common belief associates "neoliberalism" with a "laissez-faire" relationship between the state and the market. This is far from the truth, as the German sociologist Lars Gertenbach has convincingly argued.¹⁷ Neoliberalism differs from liberalism insofar as it in fact still presupposes a controlling state that secures market processes and constantly worries about them. Seen from this angle, the current state interventions (nationalizations of banks or desperate attempts to regulate the financial market) must not be conceived as a break with neoliberal ideology—they are in fact *compatible* with it. The state ensures the market's ability to function and "cultivates" it, as Gertenbach puts it.

Neoliberalism also means that the market reaches into areas that were formerly considered "private" and sheltered from its evaluative logic, such as the body, health, social relationships, one's looks, one's friendships, etc. These areas are now exposed to the constant pressure of economic optimization: we are interpellated to make the best of ourselves, to enhance our looks—if not by initiating a radical "make-over"—to stay healthy, to be in functioning relationships, and to have "good" sex. Warhol's diary is a case in point, demonstrating how these normative ideals keep us in check and exert a strong impact on our subjectivities. Nothing escaped his scrutinizing and classifying gaze—whether someone had gained weight, had more wrinkles, or was wearing a Halston dress on two occasions. How people looked was measured against the beauty standards set by the fashion world, standards whose enforcement has only become more emphatic since Warhol's days. But it is crucial to note that Warhol did not

17. See Lars Gertenbach, *Die Kultivierung des Marktes: Foucault und die Gouvernementalität des Neoliberalismus* (Berlin: Parodos, 2008).

only submit his social environment to these standards, he also analyzed their appeal in his work. An obvious example would be *Before and After* (1960)—a work that is based on a low-tech advertisement propagating the obvious virtues of a nose job. The work establishes a visible distance from these norms of beauty, if only by virtue of the way the image is cropped and the presence of Ben-Day dots. But the image also captures the hopes for personal improvement bound up in such an advertisement. Warhol himself quite desperately tried to keep up with these norms, for instance by undergoing a nose operation, logging regular visits to his dermatologist, and working out with his fitness trainer in the '80s. It seems as though there was no other way but to surrender to what Karl Lagerfeld has described, with his characteristic penchant for dramatization, as “fitness fascism.” While certainly capturing a sometimes terrifying regime, the term “fascism” is slightly misleading here, because this is not a repressive power that works through discipline or force. Neoliberalism operates more subtly: it makes us internalize its ideals. To surrender to them can even be experienced as “fun” or “empowering.” Warhol’s diaries are a testimony to how this internalization works, for instance when he explained his “early appointment with Dr. Li” (his dermatologist) as follows: “This is all to make myself beautiful for business.”¹⁸ What is openly acknowledged (and subscribed to, albeit in a slightly resigned manner) is that the importance of one’s looks only increases in a labor market that wants all of you.

There is one thing that neoliberalism has in common with biopolitics: both are modern forms of political power that operate indirectly, counting on our willingness to internalize the ideals they promote. The German philosopher Thomas Lemke has defined biopolitics as a “political economy of life—which means that life is not only politicized but also economized.”¹⁹ Michel Foucault introduced the term in order to describe a historically specific technology of power that aims at people’s lives. Situating its emergence in the second half of the eighteenth century, Foucault always stressed how this regulating power operates not primarily through subjugation or discipline but through *stimulation*: it is defined as “the right to make live and let die,” as he famously described its operation.²⁰ The ones who die are left to their fate while all attention is directed to the form we give our lives.

This description—“letting die and making live”—resonates with Warhol’s production: the Factory of the early '60s could be considered a machine that not only staged transgressive life practices but also capitalized on people’s willingness to perform their transgressions (and cared little when people died). His early films in particular (*Sleep, Eat, Blow Job, Drunk, Kiss*) could be regarded not only as allowing space for a different notion of sexual identity and transgressive behavior—one need

18. Hackett, ed., *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, p. 560.

19. Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitik zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2007), p. 15.

20. Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 241.



Andy Warhol. Before and After. 1960. © 2010 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/ARS, New York.

only think of the overtly sexual kisses performed by heterosexual *and* homosexual couples in *Kiss*—but also as capturing and making use of these identities. The lives of the performers are equally honored and presented as open to exploitation. There was in fact a high degree of literal exploitation taking place: the actors did not get paid. One might argue that the Factory benefited from their willingness to work for free, which increased in direct proportion to the symbolic capital and notoriety that could be expected in return. If the labor potential can no longer be separated from the person and its body—and that is what, according to Virno, happens in post-Fordism—then a certain degree of self-exploitation becomes unavoidable.

But things are a little bit more complicated than that, since Warhol's work not only allowed for different ways of "life" to be acknowledged while capitalizing on people's willingness to perform their lives, it also looked at life from the perspective of death. Thomas Crow has convincingly argued that Warhol's early famous portraits of Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, and Jackie Kennedy must be read as investigating the connection between celebrity, death, crisis and mourning.²¹ He points to the way *Sixteen Jackies* (1964) allows us to see Jackie in different poses, smiling, with her head down, nearly crying but trying to keep up appearances. Indeed, this work comes close to being a study of what Aby Warburg famously called *Pathosformeln*: formulas that transport and signify different emotional states—in this case, the state of mourning. But as a widow, she also functions as the key witness to the instability of the border between "life" and "death." If biopolitics is also "thanatopolitics," as Giorgio Agamben has suggested,²² and if biopolitics amounts to a decision between "life" and "death," then Jackie Kennedy could be seen as allegorizing the fundamental instability of this border. The more abstract and ill-defined these images appear due to the technical process of silkscreen printing, the "truer" they seem. It is also due to the seriality of this image that the singularity of her being is both emphasized *and* cancelled out. We see Jackie sixteen times—which shows singularity and uniqueness to be even more convincing when mass-produced, which is what happens under the conditions of celebrity culture. An existential and singular event of life—the loss of a person and the act of mourning—is captured and carefully examined and at the same time rendered meaningless and lifeless.²³

Warhol's filmic production can be seen as a demonstration of the fact that it was "life" that he was after. Basic activities of life such as hanging out, arguing, taking drugs, having sex, sleeping, staying awake, mercilessly interrogating others, etc., were his raw materials. Jonas Mekas adequately described these films as "meditations on life . . . almost religious . . . a looking at daily activities like sleeping

21. See Thomas Crow, "Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol," in *Andy Warhol*, ed. Annette Michelson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 49–66.

22. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 122 ff.

23. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Anniversary Notes for Andy Warhol," in *Andy Warhol: Shadows and Other Signs of Life*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Walther König, 2008).

or eating.”²⁴ In the films, these activities were accorded the “real time” they take in life, and by presenting them at the silent speed of sixteen frames per second, Warhol opted to “slow down” life as though to expose it to an even more scrutinizing gaze. Warhol himself acknowledged that his films aimed to capture “life,” pointing to the impossibility of distinguishing between his films and the lives of their performers.²⁵ Commenting on the shooting of *The Chelsea Girls*, he laconically remarked that everybody was doing what they were always doing—being themselves.²⁶ This claim to authenticity would sound incongruously essentialist were it not for the fact that this authenticity turned out to be a highly mediated, extremely artificial, and technologically produced one, if only due to the technological apparatus of film. Life in film is a highly mediatized affair, similar to life under the conditions of celebrity culture, which is itself a product of the media.

Warhol’s filmic attempts at mobilizing the ordinary and the pedestrian must also be seen in their historical context—they belong to an anti-illusionistic aesthetic that was widespread not only in ’60s underground film (Hollis Frampton, Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith) but also promoted by avant-garde dance experiments (such as the Judson Dance Theater), which clearly influenced Warhol.²⁷ But while keeping in mind that “anti-illusionism” was an artistic convention of the time, we should not forget how shocking this cult of “sheer existence” seemed at first—and this not only to the eyes of the general (puritanical) American public but also to those closely associated with the Factory scene, who were equally baffled. Stephen Shore, who photographed the Factory scene at a young age and whose astonishment is recorded in *POPism*, explained: “It is not like they’re reading, it is not like they’re meditating, it is not even like they are sitting watching, they’re just sitting—staring into space and waiting for the evening festivities to begin.”²⁸ In other words: nothing is done in the conventional sense. What the Factory exercises control over is the life-time of the people who hang out there. Their lives go to work when the evening festivities begin—parties are the central occasion for the construction of identities. It is here that their lives are put on stage. So we must consider the Factory as a kind of biopolitical theater that cannibalized people’s lives. But it also offered something in return: the prospect of underground fame and notoriety, which is all that counts under conditions of celebrity culture—especially if you don’t have a product other than yourself to sell.

24. Quoted in Robert Rosenblum, “Saint Andrew,” *Newsweek*, December 7, 1964, reprinted in Alan R. Pratt, *The Critical Response to Andy Warhol* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Greenwood Press, 1997), p. 10.

25. See Warhol and Hackett, *POPism*, p. 219.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

27. “Presenting the act of eating was one of the preoccupations of many Judson dancers, including Steve Paxton, Judith Dunn, and Carolee Schneemann,” in Watson, *Factory Made*, p. 137.

28. Warhol and Hackett, *POPism*, p. 111.

*Be Your Product: Warhol as Theorist
and Practitioner of Celebrity Culture*

Now, if the market reaches into all aspects of our lives, and if “life” not only serves as an artistic subject matter—which it always did—but becomes the object of political intervention and economic evaluation, I would claim that so-called “celebrity culture” is the corresponding form of society. This might initially sound far-fetched. But what is “celebrity culture” if not a social form that selects and rewards individuals for having marketed their lives (or what are imagined to be their lives) successfully? Celebrities are not famous for what they have accomplished—which is an indication of how celebrity culture departs from the model of a society based on achievement. They are famous for being famous, for having marketed themselves and their lives successfully.²⁹

Has “celebrity culture,” then, supplanted the oft-invoked “culture of the spectacle”? Not entirely and only in certain respects. Guy Debord famously defined the spectacle as “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images”; this definition holds true for celebrity culture as well.³⁰ But where the notion of “spectacle” implies the possibility of distance, the assumption that it is possible to look at the spectacle from a position of withdrawal, this becomes impossible once market conditions enter our lives more profoundly and directly.³¹ We are all in one way or another implicated in some aspects of these market conditions, and the distance we can claim from them can only be a relative one that needs to be negotiated in each particular situation.

Are artists celebrities *avant la lettre*? Yes and no. Take the traditional monograph on an artist: focusing in equal measure on his or her “life and work,” it suggests that the “life” also deserves our attention because of the exceptional things she or he has accomplished. Seen from this angle, the artist as an exceptional being serves as the primal scene for what came to be called “celebrity.” But there remains one crucial difference between the two that cannot be emphasized enough: while celebrities are their own products, visual artists (with the exception of performance artists) usually have a product to sell (even if it is a dematerialized product) that circulates *independently* of their persons. Such a product might be saturated with assumptions about their lives and fantasies about their persons, but it does lead an independent existence, circulating in the market or surviving the artist. This is what I consider the structural advantage of visual-arts production over celebrity culture—that it is able to negotiate the metonymic relationship between “person” and “product.” One signifies the other, but they do not collapse into one another.

29. See Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London: Sage, 2004), p. 5.

30. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone, 1995), p. 12.

31. Regarding the questionable value of the concept of spectacle and its implicit orientation toward a “problematic utopia of social authenticity,” see also Juliane Rebentisch, “Spectacle,” in *Texte zur Kunst* 66 (June 2007), p. 122.

There is a common view, reiterated by publications such as *Social Disease* (1993–94) or exhibitions such as “Celebrities: Andy Warhol and Stars,”³² currently at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, that interprets Warhol’s practice as wholeheartedly embracing “celebrity culture.” This view lacks complexity and must be contested. When Warhol notoriously posed as someone who was deeply infatuated with “beauties,” “models,” “stars,” “rich people,” and being “up there,” he provoked and challenged a consensus that was still fairly intact in the New York art world of the 1960s and ’70s, where most artists identified with an egalitarian ideal. Especially by socializing with politically dubious and extremely conservative members of the international jet set in the ’70s (from Imelda Marcus via Sao Schlumberger to the Empress of Iran), Warhol seemed to have cut all ties with the leftist and progressive ethos of the avant-garde and underground artist. But his constant and exaggerated rhetoric of praise for “beauty,” “money,” and being “up there” also functioned as a reminder that hierarchies and inequalities do not cease to exist merely because the majority of artists have declared equality to be desirable. While his enthusiasm for models such as Jerry Hall was not shared by the wider art world of his day, today’s artists, dealers, and journalists will no doubt immediately report if Claudia Schiffer is spotted shopping at the Frieze Art Fair.

If I call Warhol a theorist and practitioner of “celebrity culture,” I do so also because his work embodies the shift from the “star” to the “celebrity.” While stars were still valued for their performative accomplishments, celebrities are simply admired for their very existence. Angelina Jolie, of all people, recently nailed this shift from “star” to “celebrity” on the head, although she did so regretfully. She told *Vanity Fair* that 80% of her product consists of her private life—“silly stories or what I’m wearing”—whereas in her father’s days (her father being the actor Jon Voight) his private life only accounted for 20% of his product.³³ Jolie herself is the best example of the “celebrity principle” she so pertinently describes—her product is her life, or to put it more precisely, her product is what the mass media assume her life to be.

It seems tempting to treat Warhol as a kind of founding figure of “celebrity culture,” if only because of his famous prediction that “in the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes.” This prediction resonates today, as we face a tremendous expansion of the “Celebrity Industrial Complex,” manifested by numerous magazines (*Celebrity*, *Instyle*, etc.), countless Web sites, several reality shows such as *American Idol*, etc. These formats exploit, nourish, and mobilize the general desire for celebrity status and visibility.

Rather than turning our noses up at celebrity culture, I would suggest that we try to understand it. Celebrities are usually presented as exceptional and exemplary people who, while “standing out,” also deal with basic issues of life, such as childbirth, separation, drug addiction, etc. Considering that “life” under the post-Fordist condi-

32. Karl Steinort and Thomas Buchsteiner, eds., *Social Disease: Photographs ’76–’79* (Tubingen, Institut für Kulturaustausch) 1993–94.

33. See the cover story on Angelina Jolie in the American edition of *Vanity Fair*: “A Woman in Full,” July 2008, p. 132.

tion has become more insecure and unpredictable as exterior pressures reach more immediately into our lives, and considering furthermore that it is expected of all workers that they quickly adapt to ever changing prospects and opportunities, looking at celebrities can provide a sense of orientation. The same is true for gossip and commonplaces, which are no longer excluded from the sphere of production.³⁴ Gossip too has a consoling and securing function. Even Virno, who deplored its increased importance, was compelled to admit that gossip promotes certainties and already accepted opinions, which can be reassuring. Warhol seems to have intuited this increased need for “gossip,” which is now afforded more and more space even in serious art magazines (see: artform.com) and newspapers.

Warhol’s work certainly communicates with the laws of “celebrity culture,” but it also deviates from and even conflicts with them. There are two main ideological functions operating in “celebrity culture.” It individualizes and promotes the neoliberal belief that you can make it if you work really hard on yourself. Through arbitrary selection and brutal exclusion, it makes people resigned to the idea that only a few will hit the jackpot and if they fail, it will be their own responsibility (and not what is, in reality, a structural inevitability).³⁵

I believe that Warhol’s commissioned portraits essentially contradict these ideological messages. Celebrity status is *not* presented as a place you either deserve or were lucky enough to get. It is presented as something money can buy. You do not have to work hard on yourself, let alone on your looks—Warhol does it for you. He reportedly worked like a cosmetic surgeon for his commissioned portraits: elongating necks, eliminating double chins, boosting lips, smoothing away wrinkles.³⁶ Public recognition is even granted to those who have little celebrity potential—think of the Disaster Paintings or of *Most Wanted Men* (1964), which was denied celebrity status by World’s Fair officials. But still—if it weren’t for Warhol, these subjects would have remained more or less anonymous.

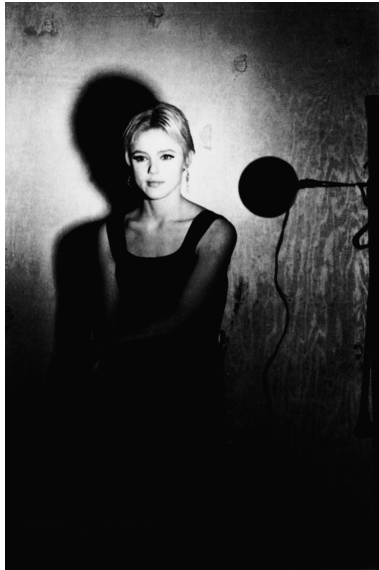
While his early portraits certainly testify to a certain fixation on mainstream stars (such as Marilyn Monroe, Liz Taylor, or Elvis) we should never forget that Warhol was soon to produce his own underground “superstars” (a term invented by Jack Smith)—even organizing his own casting with the Screen Tests, which established new criteria. By providing a “litmus test of the subject’s response to the unblinking camera,”³⁷ the Screen Tests constituted an inquiry into his or her celebrity potential. Warhol’s legendary “superstars,” such as Ingrid Superstar, Viva, Baby Jane Holzer, International Velvet, and Edie Sedgwick, all had celebrity potential but also deviated from the image of a typical mainstream star.

34. See Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, pp. 88–93.

35. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1991), p. 145: “Only one girl can draw the lucky ticket, only one man can win the prize, and if, mathematically, all have the same chance, it is yet so infinitesimal for each one that he or she will do best to write it off and rejoice in the other’s success, which might just as well have been his or hers, and somehow never is.”

36. See Hackett, “Introduction,” in *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, p. 16.

37. Watson, *Factory Made*, p. 131.



*Billy Name. Edie Sedgwick
Posing for Her Screen Test
(ST 310) at the Factory.
1965. © Billy Name/ Kymara
Artistic Management.*

Take Edie Sedgwick, for instance, who no doubt possessed a magic filmic presence quite compatible with Hollywood conventions. But when she was led to reveal her extreme psychological instability in front of the camera, as in *Kitchen* or *Poor Little Rich Girl* (both 1965), the break with Hollywood conventions became obvious. Many of Warhol's superstars were drag queens, which similarly radically challenged Hollywood's heterosexist norms and assumptions.

Consider his *Philosophy*, which could be described as a kind of *dictionnaire des idées reçues* of "celebrity culture"—full of gossip, self-help advice, and commonplaces. It is here, for instance, that an awareness of the dangers of overexposure is expressed. Like a true theorist of celebrity culture, Warhol noticed that too much media presence can cause harm, "because . . . they use you up and it's scary."³⁸ The dangers resulting from the production of one's self as a public appearance are subject to ongoing reflection, giving rise to a piece of advice that is my favorite line from Warhol's *Philosophy*: "You should always have a product that's not you."³⁹ What is acknowledged here is that the "person" and

38. Hackett, ed., *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, p. 272.

39. Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (San Diego: Harvest Books, 1975), p. 86.



Name. “Nude Restaurant” with Andy, Taylor, and Viva.
1967. © Billy Name/ Kymara Artistic Management.

the “product” should not collapse into one another, and this precisely because they are so interconnected. Since a lot of your product is you, there should be something that is not you. Warhol was an artist who carefully designed his public persona, but he also made sure that products attributed to his name were in circulation and differed from his person.

But what happens when the difference between “products” and “person” does collapse? That is not only the fate of models and actors but also characteristic of the current situation in the art market, which could not be more personalized. Works of art are treated like subjects and artists design themselves like objects. If the artist promotes a believable personality, this will confer believability upon her or his product. Warhol had the following advice for models and actors: they should count their films or photographs if they want to know what they are worth. If you only sell yourself, you end up empty-handed. This comes close to a profound belief in artistic production, which is all the more surprising considering that Warhol occasionally expressed amazement at those people who have “deep rooted and long standing art fantasies.”⁴⁰ Was he attached to such fantasies as well? I would say that it is the tension between an idealist “belief” in artistic production and an anti-idealist analysis of its conditions of production that makes Warhol so topical from the contemporary point of view.

I consider it more than telling, then, that his last public appearance occurred on the catwalk, as a model for a fashion show at the Tunnel Club a few days before his death. His expression seems to have been one of delight and suffering, as if

40. Ibid., p. 178.

reminding us that there is a high price to be paid when we put ourselves on the market. But unlike a model, Warhol did have a product to sell—a product called “art” that is traditionally defined by its symbolic value, which in turn consists of a putative meaningfulness. The symbolic value of art is based on the (not entirely unjustified) assumption that art provides an intellectual surplus that cannot be reduced either to history or to the personal life of the artist. Nevertheless, speculation about the artist’s personality—how she or he supposedly lived, whether her or his work can be associated with a bohemian or glamorous context—does enter into the symbolic value of art and is even able to raise it. But in view of a highly personalized art market that tends to personalize all artistic production, it seems crucial to keep the complexity of the relationship between “products” and “person” in mind. It is the advantage of the product that it is irreducible to the person while also not being its strict opposite. Warhol’s work is a vivid demonstration of how product and person reach into one another, especially when circulating in the neoliberal and biopolitical context of celebrity culture, while potentially also leading separate existences. **Despite his willingness to surrender to these conditions, Warhol did not allow his work to be governed by them.**