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Reva Wolf

The friends are forever involved in the ‘family photo,’" a line by the poet Gerard Malanga, who was a close associate of Andy Warhol during the 1960s, alludes to the dynamic connections that exist between portraits and social interaction. Understood in this broad sense, the line would be a fitting epigraph to the book of 1967 in which it appears, Screen Tests/A Diary, a collaboration by Warhol and Malanga that consists of a collection of stills from film portraits, or “screen tests,” each with a poem on the facing page by Malanga (fig. 1). Inclusion in this compendium, like being in the “family photo,” is a person's declaration of social affiliation.

The strata of processes involved in the production of Screen Tests/A Diary were in themselves statements of social affiliation. These processes begin with Warhol and his associates' filming of the screen tests, and include their selection of the screen-test stills that would figure in the book and even their acquisition of legal rights to reproduce the images. In this instance, collaboration ought to be regarded as a series of social interactions, in which public and professional affairs tend to be inseparable from personal and sexual relationships. And these social exchanges not only affect the outcome of the book, but also parallel its content.

By providing a sense of the social complexities involved in this collaboration, we can begin to take a fresh look at what the roles of Warhol’s associates were, and to consider how misconceptions about the social element of his work have led to the omission of Screen Tests/A Diary and other, similar projects from both the literature on Warhol and studies of the history of collaboration between poets and visual artists in the twentieth century.

The fifty-four stills of Screen Tests/A Diary—which picture actors and poets, socialites and thieves, models, consumers of amphetamine, painters, filmmakers, and musicians—are frame enlargements from short black-and-white silent-film portraits made between 1964 and 1966 by Warhol with the assistance of Malanga and/or Billy Linich, also known as Billy Name, who lived at the Factory. Each still consists of one or two entire frames from the film footage, and part of either one or two additional frames. The idea behind such cropping is to provide visual evidence that the photograph comes from a moving image (bringing to mind Gertrude Stein’s comparison of her literary “portraits” to cinema, in which “one second was never the same as the second before or after”). Conceptually, the moving-picture portraits correspond nicely to the “diary” format of the poems, as both are meant to signify records of particular moments in time.

The design of Screen Tests/A Diary is apparently by Warhol, and in its original conception, the connection between film and poetry was to have operated compositionally as well as metaphorically. To underscore the origin of the images in film footage, they were to have been printed on acetate, rather than on the semitransparent vellum-type paper that, as a compromise, was actually used; the poems were to have been positioned underneath the sheets of acetate. This collagelike layout, in which Malanga’s words were to appear across the faces of those to whom they are written, would have served as an apt visual metaphor for Malanga’s tendency to absorb others into his own identity, in his poems as well as in life.

One of the most readily discernible ways this absorption occurs in Malanga’s poetry is in references not only to the ostensible subjects of his poems, but also to Benedetta Barzini (fig. 2), with whom he remained obsessively in love following a brief relationship that ended shortly before many of the verses were composed in August 1966; Screen Tests/A Diary is dedicated to Barzini. Facing John Ashbery’s portrait (fig. 3), for example, are the lines, “But the Italian / collections for Fall are notable,” alluding to Barzini’s then successful career as a fashion model.

But the first line of this same poem—“What had you been thinking about”—does concern Ashbery; it is the first line of Ashbery’s own poem “The Tennis Court Oath.” This brings us to a second, rather curious device employed by Malanga in his literary absorption of others: appropriation. Such self-conscious copying has multiple significations in Malanga’s verses: it is a verbal parallel to Warhol’s well-known technique of appropriating existing visual imagery; it is a way to flatter the poet being copied—which, in the case of Ashbery, operates dually, since Ashbery himself relied heavily on appropriation. This flattery, in turn, is a means of...
Is the first movement of the will
power toward keeping a secret
an effect of grace
or simply a free, autonomous human act
and why is there analogy
between two types of being
complex when we do not know
what the meaning of our language is?
What are the relationships between the swapped destinies?
What light does the use of the diary text reveal the crucial ideas,
and the loss of heaven in life is authentic.
The rain becomes rain again.
The friends are forever involved in the "family photo."
8/28/66

Such appropriation is also a form of theft, or of denying
another’s privacy. To take another example, the line “Today
not much happened,” which is found in six of the poems, was,
according to Malanga’s recollection, copied from an entry in
the diary of a former girlfriend, Debbie Caen, who also
figures in Screen Tests/A Diary (where the routine thefts of the
amphetamine culture to which she belonged are alluded to by
the poet—“the illegal / transactions, the hot / bicycles stored
in the hall”). Appropriation here, aside from posing problems
of aesthetic judgment, signifies an unstable social environment,
in that it implies a lack of trust, and an unstable artistic identity, in that it suggests a struggle in finding a
“voice” of one’s own.

A blatant and constant stream of self-reference runs through the poems, announced immediately by the cover of
Screen Tests/A Diary (fig. 4). The front cover consists of a still
from a color screen test of Malanga. Here, through the poet’s
rather cocky gaze, his vanity is made to speak for itself. The
same image is found on the back cover, but printed in


FIG. 2 Billy Name, Benedetta Barzini posing for a portrait film at the Factory, 1966, photograph, 14 x 9 1/2 inches.
negative. Warhol frequently used the photographic negative iconographically, as a symbol of death, from the mid-1970s on, in variants of the traditional vanitas theme that seems to have already been in his mind here. It certainly is a suitable motif for the back cover—or the close of the book, which might be understood as the end of the author’s temporal existence. Similarly, the white dots that traverse part of Malanga’s face on both front and back covers can be viewed as markers of time, for these dots were created by the perforations at either the beginning or end of a standard reel of film (and were a routine aesthetic and conceptual feature of Warhol’s early films, beginning in 1963).

While some individuals, such as Malanga, tend to advertise their vanity, and others to downplay or to disguise it, vanity is fairly universal (however much we may not want to admit it). This is why flattery is often an effective tool in so many areas of human negotiation. The very act of producing screen tests, as well as their subsequent inclusion in Screen Tests/A Diary, was, like Malanga’s use of appropriation in some of the poems in this book, a form of flattery, on the giving end, and vanity, on the receiving end (two components of portraiture that the essayist William Hazlitt, for one, had already acknowledged in the early nineteenth century). This flattery-vanity dialogue is apparent in the description by the art critic Robert Pincus-Witten of his experience of sitting for his screen test: “I remember, Gerry Malanga and Andy were there, and Andy would say things like, ‘Isn’t this wonderful! Isn’t he terrific! He’s doing it!’ As if one is really doing something wonderful by simply remaining static and unmoving before the lens, but the hype was very, very exciting.” The power of flattery largely explains why Warhol and his associates succeeded in getting several hundred individuals to sit for screen-test films.

A person’s willingness to sit for a screen test is a form of vanity, but is also part of the collaborative process that determined the content of Screen Tests/A Diary. Indeed, it is a commonplace in the literature on portraiture to term the making of a portrait a collaboration, the result of an interaction between painter or photographer and sitter.

In certain portraits included in Malanga and Warhol’s book, sitters took full advantage of their end of the job. At the Factory, they were instructed to have a seat, usually in a cubicle-like area set up expressly for the purpose of making screen tests. The camera rested on a tripod, one or two lights were temporarily installed, and at times a white or black backdrop was added (see fig. 2). Warhol generally framed the composition of the head shot. Most often, sitters were instructed to gaze, without moving, directly at the camera lens.
although examples also exist of profile and three-quarter views (see fig. 1). Warhol, on his side of the collaboration, often aimed for particular effects.\textsuperscript{15}

Sitters responded to Warhol’s standard screen-test setup in various ways. Salvador Dali confronted the camera rather aggressively; he opened his eyes as wide as possible (it seems), in an affirmation of his public image of being outrageous (fig. 5). Malanga, on the other hand, gazed at the camera as if to seduce it (and us), playing out his role as sex object (of both women and men).

Vanity might lead one to sit for a portrait film, and the nomenclature “screen test” might conjure up nothing more than the superficiality of appearances.\textsuperscript{16} Nonetheless, the intensity of gaze that often resulted from Warhol’s instruction to sitters to stare directly into the camera lens had the capacity to communicate more meaningful associations in the minds of sympathetic viewers of projected screen tests. In a 1966 study, cultural critic John Gruen described the screen-test film as “an intense study in involuntary character revelation.” Amplifying on this impression, he observed:

\begin{quote}
The most probing aspect of Warhol’s nearly immobile facial studies is the acutely personal discomfort felt by the spectator as he realizes, perhaps for the first time, the nature of his own habitual visual censorship. It is suddenly too shocking to face the face, and the spectator becomes as involuntarily vulnerable as the giant visage on the screen.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Gruen had every reason to be struck by the “visual censorship” to which he referred, since the face of his wife, the painter Jane Wilson, was among the fourteen screen tests he viewed, in a series put together by Warhol in 1964–65, entitled The Thirteen Most Beautiful Women (the miscount of portraits has its own significations). Such personal associations affected a person’s understanding of the films, and also of the stills in the Screen Tests book. As one viewer of The Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys—the male pendant to the Most Beautiful Women series—remarked, regarding the screen test of dancer Freddy Herko, who had committed suicide in 1964: “the footage became excruciatingly moving as I uncontrollably invested Herko’s glowering expression with meanings brought from outside the film.”\textsuperscript{18}

Outside associations are also a characteristic feature of the verses Malanga composed to accompany the screen-test stills. In some cases, these associations are highly personal (such as his references to Barzini); in other cases, they are artistic; and in still others, both—as in the verse that attends the extraordinary visage of experimental filmmaker Marie Menken (fig. 6), which alludes to her role as his mother, a part she played in Warhol’s 1966 film, The Chelsea Girls, and as a surrogate, at times, in life.\textsuperscript{19}

On another level, the presence of Menken in Screen Tests/A Diary, along with her husband, poet Willard Maas, and filmmaker Jonas Mekas (the foremost supporter of Warhol’s early films), is a means of paying homage to three individuals whose ideas about film—notably the film “diary” and “notebook,”\textsuperscript{20} and the “film poem,”\textsuperscript{21} a virtual synonym for experimental film during the 1950s and early 1960s—were key sources for Screen Tests/A Diary, and for Malanga and Warhol’s work overall. These sources are tightly linked to social, and sometimes sexual, relationships. For instance, Maas had been Malanga’s poetry instructor (and lover, briefly) at Wagner College prior to his introduction to Warhol in late spring 1963.\textsuperscript{22} (Such connections often translate into “sources” throughout the history of art.)

The very title, Screen Tests/A Diary, signals the confluence of public image and interpersonal relations contained within the book: “screen test” denotes a public image, while “diary” suggests private musings. What we have (in addition to Malanga’s romantic free associations) is a microcosm, composed of intersecting New York social worlds, of the desire, pervasive in society at large, to glimpse at both the outer appearances and the private lives of celebrities.
The young boy wakes up one morning. The hot day evaporates in the light source descending from heaven. There may be a tree in the desert, in the universe that would not have been possible to burn in the dream making music. This is no night mare no afterthought can hide his tracks in the snow bank and the children no longer remain children, not even pretending to forget who they are while he dreams. The adults are no help for his heart. Even in summer daylight saving time is accurate and the rain falling falls.

8/22/66


My mother’s son belongs to someone in the beginning, before she bandaged his knee as though the bruise did not heal in the same way at different times, growing up. Still it is not too late to write these occurrences in the diary notebook, provided that we could live in the sunlight all year without catching a cold, wishing to go far away from the troubles that sometimes press him into service, projects he is completely out of this world for, free for the stimulation the lives coming in contact, with each other the day after tomorrow.

8/23/66

Just as this collection creates a kind of social world (revolving around Gerad Malanga), the act of producing screen tests was often a form of bringing people together, or even of seducing them, and provided a ready-made focus of activity for visitors to the Factory. According to Warhol, sometimes these events, when the sitter was chosen by Malanga, were inseparable from the poet’s romantic literary pursuits:

He would see a girl in a magazine or at a party and really make a point of finding out who she was—he’d turn these interests into sort of poetic “quests.” Then held write poems about the girls and tell them all they’d get a screen test when they came by.

A direct link between these “poetic quests” and the book Screen Tests/A Diary was a performance piece of around 1965, entitled Screen Test Poems, in which Malanga read verses to screen tests of women while they were projected on three screens (and the lack of distinction between image and reality implied by such an arrangement has parallels in poems in the book). Malanga’s performance was, in turn, very probably derived from events such as an early 1965 party at the home of Sally Kirkland (then the fashion editor of Life magazine, where The Thirteen Most Beautiful Women (one of which pictured Kirkland’s daughter, Sally Kirkland, the actress) were projected simultaneously on three walls. (The viewing of screen tests, like their production, was often enough a social event.)

An additional, but less obvious, social exchange that should be regarded as part of the Screen Tests/A Diary collaboration occurred in the legal sphere. In order for a portrait to be included in this compendium of faces, the person pictured had to sign a photograph-release form. Failure to secure a signature meant revising the book, and a few revisions were made. In one instance, Malanga had hoped to put Bob Dylan portrait in Screen Tests/A Diary, but was unable to procure the necessary signature from Dylan’s manager, probably on account of the antagonistic relations that existed between Dylan and Warhol (which became part of each artist’s public identity).

Although the selection process, when it was not impeded by such hostility regarding image ownership, seems to have been Malanga’s domain, Warhol was not entirely aloof to his assistant’s choices. He apparently asked Malanga to include a few specific images in Screen Tests/A Diary—those of Warhol’s friend, the art critic, curator, and early supporter...
of Pop art, Henry Geldzahler, and Warhol “superstar” Ultra Violet. But Malanga omitted both Geldzahler and Ultra Violet from the volume. He later explained:

I had to be inspired by the people I was writing poems about. . . . So I wasn’t inspired to write a poem to Ultra, I wasn’t inspired to write a poem to Henry Geldzahler. Henry was very insulted that he was not included. He thought just because of his association with Andy, and that Andy and I were coauthors of the book, that he was going to be included. But I’m the one that’s writing the poems, and if I’m not inspired to write a poem about Henry, then Henry’s not going to be in the book. . . . Other than maybe Ultra and Henry being suggested by Andy, Andy really didn’t suggest anyone else.31

The divisiveness that contributed directly to the content of *Screen Tests/A Diary* emanated largely from Malanga’s relationship with Warhol, which was in fact marked by conflict throughout much of 1966. The tensions between them are alluded to, obliquely, in a few of the poems, as in the concluding lines of the verse that accompanies the poet Ted Berrigan’s portrait: “I am tempted most not to return home/or to hate another nature. But I don’t. I do.”32

Such hostile feelings may explain the conspicuous omission of Warhol himself from *Screen Tests/A Diary*. Malanga has claimed that this omission was inadvertent.33 Yet Warhol does figure in the manuscript of the book.34 Who decided to exclude him from the final product remains unclear, but this seems likely to be another case in which artistic choice can be equated with social discord.

Malanga’s repeated allusions, in his verses, to conflict among friends, especially in his recurring reference to “swapped destinies” (see fig. 1), is an anxious characterization of his social world, in which the sense of affiliation brought about by being in the “family photo” means, on the negative side, conflict, jealousies, competitive relationships (such as with Billy Name, to whom Malanga writes, “and why is there analogy / between two types of being”) and finally, perpetual instability. It is as if Malanga was attempting the impossible task of taking control of his unstable social environment by articulating it.

The fact that *Screen Tests/A Diary* is largely about Malanga’s responses to this environment, and is by both Malanga and Warhol (in addition to the individuals who sat for their screen tests), partly explains its omission from studies of Warhol’s art.35 True, another collaborative book Warhol produced around the same time does figure in some overviews of the artist’s work—namely, *a: a novel* (published in 1968), which is based on tape-recorded conversation pri-
arily with Robert Olivo, also known as “Ondine”; but α, unlike Screen Tests/A Diary, was initiated by Warhol, and only his name appears on the title page, as “author.” Warhol, of course, very much enjoyed playing such authorship games. Yet we still have much to learn about the openly human, unidealized nature of his and his associates’ activities as collaborators, as well as about the light these activities might cast on the dynamic connections between art and social interaction that exist throughout history.

Notes
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2. The alphabetical arrangement by name and the focus on portraiture in Screen Tests/A Diary are foreshadowed in A Is an Alphabet (1953), with texts by Ralph (Corkie) Warhol, a 25th anniversary edition of the collaborative books that Warhol produced while pursuing a career during the 1950s primarily in commercial art.

3. See Stephen Koch, Stargazer: The Life, World and Films of Andy Warhol, 3rd ed., rev. (New York: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1991), 45; but for a different account, see ibid., 9–11. Each screen test was filmed using a 100-foot reel of 16-mm film, and filmed at 24 frames per second but projected at 16 frames per second; the duration of a projected screen test is around four minutes, ten seconds.


6. Lita Horning, The Green Faee: A Memoir (New York: Giorno Poetry Systems, 1989); 42; Horning was the publisher of Screen Tests/A Diary.

7. Gerard Malanga, telephone interview with the author, July 25, 1980, tape recording; Malanga recalled that Harry Gantt, who is listed on the copyright page of Screen Tests/A Diary as the printer of the book, was unable to find someone who could print on acetate and thus selected the substitutemembranous paper.

8. The poems in Court Oath (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), 11. Malanga’s appropriations of Ashbery and other poets were inspired above all by his friend, the poet Ted Berrigan, who, for example, “in Personal Poem #7,” recorded (amusingly) that he “made lists of lines to steal” after reading Ashbery’s “How Much Longer Will I Be Able to Inhabit the Divine Sepulcher”; see Berrigan, Many Happy Returns (New York: Corinth Books, 1969), 7.


15. For an exposition of this viewpoint, see Yann Beauvau, “Fixer des images en mouvement,” in Andy Warhol, Cinema (Paris: Editions Carré, 1990), 102.


20. The lineage of Celebrity Register, as well as of Screen Tests/A Diary, can be traced to collections of texts accompanied by engraved portraits and, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, photographs of “celebrities,” such as Charles Pernaut’s Les Hommes illustres (1696) and the Galerie contemporaine, littéraire, artistique (1876–94).


22. The number of screen tests in Fifty Fantasies and Fifty Personalities, which possibly existed in more than one variation, remains to be determined.

23. Warhol and Hackett, POPism, 151.

24. Of course, the “author-function,” urged readers to examine not only the content and aesthetic innovations of texts, but also their circulation within society, particularly the legal aspects of circulation; such legal concerns might be extended to include the collaborative process considered here. Foucault makes his case in, for example, What is an Author? in Josué V. Harari, ed., and trans., TEXTUAL STRATEGIES: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), 141–60. Warhol had specified in a contractual letter to Kulchur Press of January 10, 1967, that the screen-test stills were his property, and that, while the publisher was permitted to copyright them, future rights to the pictures were to revert to Warhol; Kulchur Press Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.


30. Warhol’s name appears on both the contents page and on a page marked Andy/44,” indicating that a poem to Warhol and his screen test were to be included in the forty-fourth issue of the book; Kulchur Press Papers.

31. Dan Cameron has dismissed altogether the study of Warhol’s collaborations, on the assumption that these were a form of exploitation involving unequal partners, in “Against Collaboration,” Arts Magazine 58 (March 1984): 83. However, if exploitation existed, it was usually on both sides, while the blanket dismissal of Warhol’s many collaborators is, in my view, a misunderstanding of his work (which might be called “work on social exchange”), serving to perpetuate the danger of presenting the project as Screen Tests/A Diary. The routine omission of collaborations from major studies of individual artists or writers is reportedly discussed in Thomas Jensen Hines, Collaborative Form: Studies in Relations of the Arts (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1991), 11–12.

REVA WOLF, assistant professor of fine arts at Boston College, is currently writing a book on Warhol’s associations with poets in the 1960s for University of Chicago Press.