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 aloofness 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’ 2 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.’ 3

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. 5 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. 6

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 persauded.

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 Hedy (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 railing self-mythologising circles of innumable around mere physical being. In Warhol and Tavel’s film Horses, however – a queer, absurd minimalist Western shot in the East 47th Street Factory on 3 April 1965 – we are left with four tautly hunky whose lines are scripted and delivered to them on the spot by off-screen cue or ‘idiot’ card: no improvising, 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 whims 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.’ 8 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. 8 Regarding his and Warhol’s film-making practice, Tavel has stated, ‘It’s so American. What will be more American than that phenomenon: dehumanisation? In both form and content, Horror 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. 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.’ 9
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 scariness, 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 misperception – that what you thought was occurring (or imagined was occurring) is other than what is there.

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 mythical, fact with fiction, gossip is the traffic in unforthcoming information and a form of make-shift 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 fabrication 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
- Faust 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 reticent turn by mannish avant garde filmmaker 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 bleachers 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 even 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. Tavel 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 artifice, 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 reels 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 ‘oversseers’ and ‘witnesses’ in his script, and they are largely hidden behind Mighty Byrd except for their heads, which poke up above the horse to form a kind of mountainous horizon line punctuated on the right by a crescent moon (created by resident Juanita Castro). Tavel very poetically described the mise en scène in his notes on the script:

Better still, the horse occupies a significant position amidst the factory’s usual object-scape. A few weeks prior to shooting, Warhol had a new blonde Bang and an xs body to work with, and the horse is an ideal companion. He is as beautiful as he is obese, and his features are accentuated by the horse’s relentless pacing in front of the camera. Tavel’s conversations with the actors, who – like most Factory denizens – were to varying degrees high on drugs (in this case poppers, amphetamines). Certainly 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, an idiosyncrasy 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 anarchic human performer, and certainly more so than the inert mass of Warhol’s star of his 1964 B-horror epic Empire, the Empire State Building. The horse’s incalculability (what must M. B. be thinking?) creates a disquieting feedback loop with its corollary – the unwavering, automatic gaze of the camera eye – and the cowboys are like so many puppets playing out their roles in the charged atmosphere between the two gazes. Visually and metaphorically, the horse is a black hole into which everything and everyone must be drawn for the 100 minutes that the camera runs – and the reason the film exists.

The central human characters: Kid (Larry Lebelle), Sheriff (Gregory Battcock), Teen (Danny Castellane) 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 unrolling camera that frames it, the meager 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 idiosyncratic 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 Tavlesian invasion into the boom mic, pulling it toward extinct screen left. We also occasionally hear Tavel verbalise directions to the cast, adding a second layer of dialogue that meshes 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 their lines beforehand and instead read them for the first time as they are revealed on the camera. As with many of Tavel’s scenarios, Horse was designed to be both absurd to the hit and humiliating to the actors, who – like most Factory denizens – were to varying degrees high on drugs (in this case poppers, 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 lash out at any moment, and does get noticeably spooked by the more heated scenes, kicking 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 violent 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 three-quarters view – his head is not in close-up and 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. Laterline (now out of character as the Kid) and the boom operator play with the mic and vacuously attempt to interview the horse: much as Tavel tries to coax Warhol’s staid ‘beauties’ to talk when they would rather not, so Laterline tries to get the horse to open up. He seems genuinely smitten with his equestrian co-star – perhaps all the horse wanted was some romance, someone to buy him dinner first – and we hear M. B.’s chichi as the affable 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.
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.
games of bondage and domination around the horse'.

After Mexico hands out pieces of paper towel the Kid and the Sheriff is naturally, between the men and the iconic horse. A nearly directive from Tavel to the actors on the idiot cards (cowboys.) In the enclosed set, Tavel also choreographs homoerotic interactions among the men and, true, repressed history of the West left out of the now passe, straight Hollywood narratives: describes Horse not as a sop or satin 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:

Horses' lines imply... an outlook and literary themes... which, ideally, should demythologize the West as 'not so' Western.

As Smith describes, the performers 'preen their theatricalized masculinity and... engage in competitive dialogue clichés -- 'one of you two guys is a murderer,' 'get out of town,' 'the Indians did it,' 'there'll be one of us --

Besides Tavel's trash minimalism and devious self-reflexivity -- which leave the frame in a constant state of non-sequitur. A horse burlesques the West -- a horse genealogy through the repertory of warned orportunities.

As Smith says 'I'm not a celluloid' and 'I'm an onairist,' arguing that at some point in the movie it was played, with Mex rising up and

In the last line of Tavel's script, Tex proclaims that they were just 'having good cowboy fun! all along. The horse' the title of which can also refer to 'horse play' or 'horseing around,' a common allusion for homosexual intentions in the period under the cover of aggression and 'boys being boys' rough and tumble play. Tavel had been a dresser Canby, writing in The New York Times, described Warhol's 1968 Western Lonesome Cowboys as 'not so much homosexual as adolescent. Although there is lots of nudity, porrnity, swash dialing, and bodily contact, it all has the air of horseing around at a summer camp for arrested innocents. Horses in many ways a kind of nascent, bare-bones sketch for Lonesome Cowboys, but with the feminine element enhanced by Visco and Taylor Mead (as Ramona and Hurse) mostly mute and attention paid to fantasising how men alone with one another out on the range might behave.

Reading other commentators on Horses, I find the brutality of its physical violence generally overstated concerning a far more insidious an early directive to the men and the horrific to the sense of creeping menace. What I really wanted to say, Tavel has explained about Horse, was how easily would a group of people under pressure be seduced to -- to genuinely inflict acts toward each other and perhaps the horse -- under pressure... merely by telling them to do it. Beyond the heavily deconstructed mise en scène and the absurdist 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 coordinate their idiot cards, and palpably think through how they will enact them -- you can almost see the wheels turning in their heads as they absorb their (often-embarrassing) directions. Writer J.J. Murphy points out, 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 put him off the horse after the horse tries to seduce the animal himself. Most of the aggression in the film is aimed at Mex: he is the maligned scapegoat for Sheriff, Kid and Tex. Sheriff wants to wipe out all the Mexicans and Indians -- the terms are 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 'teell him up was apparently misinterpreted as yet another instance of 'beat him up.' The victimized Mex is emphatically a crude Mexican stereotype, he performs for the other men's amusement and parrots dialogue of the 'gringos' and 'ass! variety. The Sheriff announces to him, 'To think I could have killed you a thousand times,' one of Tavel's favourite melodramatic lines, and one he recycled often in his work. Mex replies, 'I'll bet you glad you now that you didn't.' This interaction calls to mind the pathological repetition that takes place in order to stabilize cinematic genre structures: the stock Mexican has indeed been killed a thousand times in the annals of American film history, and must continue to be killed until the frontier myth is secured for the nation by the forces of Hollywood.

Early in the second reel, Sheriff declares, 'this is a horse opera,' and a tape of the notoriously bad opera singer Florence Foster Jenkings as Marguerite in Gounod's Faust is played, with Mex rising up and prancing around as Marguerite. He reaches up to the heavens, gesticulating wildly and laughing as the Sheriff hangs off him, 'parody[ing] the role of Faust,' as Tavel describes it in his notes on the script. The Kid observes approvingly when the spectacle is over: 'That's what we need around here. A little civilization and culture.' This injection of operatics is a rare moment of excessive energy in the proceedings, as if expressing the theatricality and vocality that is largely repressed throughout the film. To emphasize this rupture, Tavel directed the other two characters -- the Kid and Tex -- to look at the opera performers as 'if they were stone nuts.' The opera signals the intrusion of the talker, the feminine and the expressive voice into the film.

After Tavel walks on set and drops off a pack of playing cards, the men play strip poker to determine the rightful owner of the horse. Mex and the Kid ultimately undress to their underwear -- the other men yell 'take it off!' at them, while Tavel urges them to undress 'very, very slow,' like a striptease -- before they all attack the Sheriff quite brutally, including whipping him with belts, when he ends up with a losing hand. In a satisfying moment towards the end of the film, the opera tape returns and Tavel comes on set to coach Carillo in the proper operatic gestures required to emulate the diva. Creep notes that in Horse and other films for Warhol.

Tavel's scenarios come to an end before the final reel runs out... The deliberate discrepancy -- or non-relation -- between Tavel's scenario and the film made from the scenario suggests a new condition for relationality itself -- a condition, that is, of our confrontations with others and with the world at large.

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 litless as if they are a hard hat of drag. This sensibility was shared with Warhol's film-making influence Jack Smith, who displayed a similarly camp-deconstructive attitude in his homepun cine-homages to the beloved exotic and Orientalist pupilen that he later learned to the actress Maria Montez.

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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.\(^\text{17}\)

Crimp notes that here, ‘Dialogue and interaction never constitute anything like recognizable intersubjectivity,’\(^\text{18}\) while Tavel appreciates that the actors exhibit ‘striking “searching” adjustments (as if searching for what to say)’ as they read the script cards.\(^\text{46}\) With very little of the improvisation and spontaneity that make Warhol’s talkers so memorable, we begin to regard the men here as mere beasts like the horse apprehensively awaiting their next indigestion, their gazes always directed off camera more than towards each other or the viewer (as in the many Warhol Screen Tests, where the subjects stare out at you).\(^\text{15}\) The actors are often visibly bored and distracted, and typically take up positions of leaning or collapse as they barely stay awake through the lengthy reels. By the final moments, everything on set is a mess.

Like the Kid’s song, which describes going ‘round and round’, the film has no momentum or plot that progresses, one has the sense of spinning in a void. Another scene takes place throughout the film ‘beat it, beat it’, which involves both monkey and battery; it stands as the film’s battle cry of sorts for its enmeshing of sex and violence. The drumming rhythm of ‘beat it, beat it’ casts the entire production as an exercise in 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 nutritious meal for the audience, they are instead wholly consuming of those who fall into their laps.\(^\text{19}\)

According to Angell, Warhol’s ‘Horse’ is a study of the mid-1960s American midwest, which ‘lies somewhere between reality and fiction, between just being themselves and becoming performers at a moment’s notice’.\(^\text{16}\) But he also notes that ‘it is not clear to what extent these figures are actual rural Americans. 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.\(^\text{17}\)’

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functioning film studio, with camera, lights, and backdrops set up ... and with an expanding population of visiting celebrities, potential actors, technicians, and assistants available.11

The anything-goes atmosphere of the Factory is a wild frontier populated by people who wanted to be on film, to be myth. Kosstbaum characterises it as ‘a workshop for miscommunication, tableaux vivants, exhibitionism, hysteria’.12 While socially and sexually wide open, the Factory created an atmosphere that acts as a set in Horse is spatially constructed; by contrast, the wide-open landscapes 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 chauvinist 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 homestead mutates into the homo-stea[d] and the continuity cutting of the plan american – perfect for balancing the praise and the cowpoke from the boots up – transforms into the relentless gaze of the immobile – perfect for balancing the praise and the cowpoke from the boots up – transforms into the relentless gaze of the immobile plan-sequence’.13 Steinhardt’s wry observation emphasises how the shift in frontiers that Warhol accomplished in Horse on so many fronts was accompanied by a shift in technique: from camerawork befitting a Hollywood Western to that of a New York underground film, and thus from the exposition of a generic narrative to the deconstruction of a narrative genre.

Near the film’s end, when Moe has brought the milk back out and is splashing it over everyone, Cassidy as ‘Tex breaks character and goes rogue, quipping – no doubt ironically – ‘this wasn’t in my contract’, thereby setting a boundary distinguishing what ridiculous acts he is willing and is not willing to do for the film. From this point, Horse descends into utter chaos, as if the film needed its performers’ (reluctant) suspension of disbelief to maintain its power over them. The economy of Horse – so precisely summed up in this uncaptured moment, where one of the male beauties asserts his own voice – is that of the reluctant straight man, performing sexually for a gay client tricks both real (the director there in front of you) or virtual (an audience you might not ever encounter), and typically more for money than for aesthetic uplift or the sheer fun of it. Thomas Waugh, building on Richard Dyer’s work postulating the queer and the hustler as the ‘primary icons of Euro-American gay-male culture in the ’60s’, conceptualises what I have been calling the taker/beauty dynamic in Warhol’s cinema in terms of the queen and hustler. He explains, ‘If the queen is effeminate, intense, decked out, oral, desirous, and, to use [Parker] Tyler’s 1960s word, “offbeat”, the hustler – or “trade” – is a butch, laid-back, stripped bare, taciturn, am-bivalent, “straight”.’14 The gorgeous ‘straight’ performers’ subjection to the will of the flaming gay makers – who are scripting their words and actions on the so-called ‘idiot’ cards in Horse – images an exploitative economy. An artist like Warhol understands the appeal and the erotic iconics of the casting couch, considering numbers of young things from 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.

Men’s distractedness – the fact that their attention is always paid ... I am indicating that you want only to the extent that I am showing you how desirable I am by demonstrating that I am capable of complete indifference to you.15 But there is horror too; considering their toros and their crotchets, leer at and fight with each other, the men are always and only ever being and giving to the camera, and every detail of the production is there to remind us of this. We as viewers are placed in a position where we can pretend that these beautiful but Chileans are acting out for the pleasure of the other ‘characters’, and so Horse’s erotics are somehow awry, even haunted. Horse’s greatest horror 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 that there is no ‘outside’ beyond this set as it foregrounds the sinestres economics of a Factory that made people into images.

Notes


3. Assuming Viva’s logic, non-rumbling 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-stabilization of the vision at the same time, it worked in a circular fashion, where it kept reconstructing and deconstructing itself’ – [4 cycle of endless reinscription] Tavel in [David] E. James, ‘The Warhol Screenplay: An Interview with Roland Tavel, Persistence of Vision, no. 11, 1995, pp. 56–7].


11. Angel, Andy Warhol, Film-maker, p. 131.


14. Ibid. Tavel’s introduction to the script, which reflects on the making of the film, is not dated.

15. Tavel also claims that Warhol had dismantled a ‘painterly Western setting that looked terribly 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, 1968), p. 238.


20. Ibid.


22. Ibid.


26. 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 Kosstbaum, meanwhile, silences Mighty Byrd in his reading of the horses as a Warhol surrogate: ‘The horse’s inhumanity to human 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, Latréille claims to Edie that the horse was telling him dirty jokes, which suggests that its awareness of matters sexual is greater than Kosstbaum’s neuretic pronouncements give M. B. credit for. Kosstbaum continues, ‘The horse, like the cow wallpaper, allows...
Andy to parody his own public persona 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’s <i>Penguin Lives</i> (New York: Viking, 2001), p. 112. Ironically, the microphone picks up the horse’s ‘voice’ more than once throughout the film, and especially in the intermediary reel.

33. Crimp, <i>Our Kind of Movie</i>, p. 51.
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 admonishment 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.
38. Tavel quoted in Crimp, <i>Our Kind of Movie</i>, p. 154.
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 <i>Our Kind of Movie</i>, p. 55.
42. Ibid., pp. 57–8.
43. In his analysis of Horse in his monograph on <i>Brokeback Mountain</i> (2006), Gary Needham reminds us that the title no doubt also alludes to the characterisation of a well-endowed man as ‘hung like a horse’. Gary Needham, <i>Brokeback Mountain</i> (American Indies Series) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 69.
Accessed 28 June 2013.
45. Stranded in Arizona, Ramona and her Nurse cajole the five flagging 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 torments 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.
49. Tavel quoted in Crimp, <i>Our Kind of Movie</i>, p. 53.
50. In this way, Horse anticipates the paradigmatically <i>Pop Kitchen</i> (1965), where, in the narrated credits, human actors are presented as no more or less valuable than their fellow cast members: mixer, fridge, newspaper, coffee, mattress, table, etc.
51. In his 1973 <i>The Screwball Asses</i>, 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, <i>The Screwball Asses</i> (Los Angeles: CA: Semiotext(e), 2010), pp. 25–6.
52. Eidelman 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 Eidelman, <i>No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive</i> (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2004).
54. Ibid., p. 25.
55. Malek quoted in Jean Stein, <i>Edie</i>, p. 234.
The Rambling Cowboy. Take me through your private garden, need not be afraid I promise not to get hooked, as I have to be on my way. The sun is bright, the air is humid, my mind is confused I just need to be assured that I’m not going insane. It’s been so long since I’ve been with a beautiful soul. Someone who knows all about learning as you go. My horse Harley, by my side is all I really need. I mean no offense, but he’s had my back. As I leave you and thank you once again, please don’t judge me, that’s just the way I am. I’m a rambler, I do this alone, just how I was raised. As I ride into the sunset, know that I’ll remember you. Written by.