

# From A to B and Back Again: Warhol, Recycling, Writing

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I, too, dislike it—the impulse to claim Warhol as silent underwriter in virtually any aesthetic endeavor. *Warhol invented reality television. Warhol would have loved YouTube. Jeff Koons is the heterosexual Warhol. It's Warhol's world; we just live in it.* Is there a critical voice that does not have a claim on some aspect of the Warhol corpus, its bulk forever washing up on the shore of the contemporary?

However much I suffer from Warhol fatigue, a quick perusal of *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* is sufficient to pull me back into the camp of Warhol boosters. I first discovered this 241-page little red book—the paperback is designed to look like a Campbell's soup can—as a college student in the late 90s, when its sunny subversiveness and impatience with all things “intellectual” buoyed my spirits through the longueurs of New England winters. Warhol's charm, the invention and breadth of his thought, thrilled me then and delights me still. The gap between my affection for the book and critical dismissal of it begs explanation and redress.

Though overlooked as literature, *The Philosophy* is often mined by critics as a source for Warhol's thought and personal history without due consideration given to the book's form or its status as a transcribed, partially ghostwritten performance. Instead, Warhol's aperçus are taken as uncomplicated truth: from Warhol's brain to my dissertation. But what makes *The Philosophy* so canny is its stealth intervention on the notion of a stable “truth.” Rare is the pronouncement in *The Philosophy* which is not contradicted elsewhere in the book. (“I've never met a person I couldn't call a beauty” (61), Warhol muses, only to declare one page later, in a chapter devoted to the subject, “I really don't care that much about ‘Beauties’” (62).) While I can't help but commit some of the same errors of credulous citation in my discussion of *The Philosophy*, my primary goal in this essay is to describe in depth the texture and performative power of Warhol's “voice.” I also explore how his “writing” was shaped by tape recording and transcription, a process consonant with Warhol's larger aesthetic project of recycling detritus. Finally, I consider the gender dynamics of Warhol's transcription practice, which reflect the artist's need to mediate and manage waste through the use of a female, or feminized, writing machine.

A larger and more daunting argument lies just outside this essay's purview, giving it contour: that Andy Warhol is a literary artist worthy of study in his own right. *Andy Warhol, writer?* The epithet galls, considering this “author” of multiple volumes—including the experimental talk-novel *a* (1968), *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (1975), *Popism* (1980), and the posthumously published *The Andy Warhol Diaries* (1989)—never put pen to paper. Warhol's literary career was not so much a calling as a strategy, an extension of the Warhol publicity machine, dependent on transcribers, co-authors, and the portable tape recorder. Warhol notes of his first book, the “talk-novel” *a*, “A friend had written a note saying

that everybody we knew was writing a book, so that made me want to keep up and do one too" (*The Philosophy* 94-5). Mediated desire and the new media of portable tape recording propelled the artist to colonize the old media of print.

However disputable his credibility as a writer, Warhol's literary career was no afterthought. In an important sense, his entire career was born out of desire and emulation of the literary celebrity. Reva Wolf, in *Andy Warhol, Poetry and Gossip in the 1960s*, suggests that in Warhol's salad days, the late 40s and 50s, the literary realm was more amenable to homosexual expression than the art world, dominated at the time by the macho theatrics of Abstract Expressionism (7). Warhol found an early and important career model in the young Truman Capote, who used his queer sexuality as a publicity tool. Warhol notes: "I admire people who do well with words...and I thought Truman Capote filled up space with words so well that when I first got to New York I began writing short fan letters to him and calling him on the phone until his mother told me to quit it" (*The Philosophy* 148). Though Capote spurned Warhol's advances, the two celebrities would later ally in queenly dotage, with Capote providing the following blurb for *The Philosophy*: "Acute. Accurate. Mr. Warhol's usual amazing candor. A constant entertainment and enlightenment." No portrait of the artist as a young man, *The Philosophy* nevertheless records, like many a Bildungsroman, the writer's rejection and redemption by the era's reigning literary figure.

Warhol lacked Capote's fluency; his embrace of the tape recorder as writing tool was as much a practical decision as an aesthetic one. Biographer Wayne Koestenbaum suggests that Warhol was disinclined and perhaps literally *unable* to write (31). (Koestenbaum's speculation is based on his examination of Warhol's postcards to his mother and the general paucity of Warhol's writing in his archives—indication of his reluctance to put pen to paper.) Yet if Warhol was to some degree illiterate, that illiteracy was a boon, freeing him from literary conventions like description, argument, and character development. Instead, Warhol approached language as a fascinated outsider: "I'm impressed with people who can create new spaces with the right words," Warhol notes in *The Philosophy* (and I'll digress to say I know no better description for poetry: creating new spaces with words). Warhol continues:

I only know one language, and sometimes in the middle of a sentence I feel like a foreigner trying to talk it because I have word spasms where the parts of some words begin to sound peculiar to me and in the middle of saying the word I'll think, "Oh, this can't be right—this sounds very peculiar, I don't know if I should try to finish up this word or make it into something else." (147)

Despite his self-consciousness—or perhaps because of it—Warhol emerges in *The Philosophy* and elsewhere as a queer aphorist on par with Oscar Wilde: "In the future, everybody will be world-famous for fifteen minutes." "I will go to the opening of anything, including the opening of a toilet." "Don't pay any attention to what they write about you. Just measure it in inches."

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*The Philosophy*, despite its grandiose title, is no tract, but what used to be called a “waste book”—a dossier of sketches, pensées, anecdotes, and aphorisms. *The Philosophy*’s extended prolegomenon, a performatively trivial conversation between “A” (Warhol) and “B” (almost certainly Brigid Berlin, star of Warhol’s *Chelsea Girls*), serves to draw the uninitiated into Warhol’s world. This introductory conversation includes chatter about Warhol’s blanched appearance, his personal history and résumé, and his temperament, which oscillates between disaffection, prurient curiosity, and self-deprecation. (“If someone asked me, ‘What’s your problem’, I’d have to say, ‘Skin’” (8).) Beauty, or lack of it, is the announced subject of one of the book’s subsequent fifteen chapters, each organized around a pointedly Warholian theme:

1. Love (Puberty)
2. Love (Prime)
3. Love (Senility)
4. Beauty
5. Fame
6. Work
7. Time
8. Death
9. Economics
10. Atmosphere
11. Success
12. Art
13. Titles
14. The Tingle
15. Underwear Power

Chapters 3-10 are thematic containers for Warhol’s aphorisms and anecdotes, while chapters 1-2 and chapters 11-15 are what might be called *feuilletons*: short, episodic narratives that blur the lines between fiction and reportage.<sup>1</sup> As discrete entities, these latter chapters are considerably less interesting. The routine conventions of dialogue and narrative fail to capture Warhol’s deadpan sensibility—the humor in these chapters is occasionally hysterical—and betray the hand of a ghostwriter. The book is a mixed bag. But as John Ashbery (a writer Warhol claimed to admire), wrote about one of his own projects, “good things sometimes come in mixed bags” (*Other Traditions* 6).

The “philosophical” chapters that comprise the book’s middle are, paradoxically, more revealing than the “personal” chapters bracketing them.

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<sup>1</sup> The book’s first chapter, “Love (Puberty)” is Warhol’s account of his arrival in the city, and his foiled search for friendship. The second chapter, “Love (Prime)” narrates, in a prose sensational and self-serving in its moralism, the decline of a debutante named Taxi (read Edie, as in Edie Sedgwick). Here we see Warhol extricating himself from charges that he manipulated and ruined the impressionable “celebutante.” In both chapters, Warhol arranges details to his advantage, appealing to gossip-mongers, but revealing only what Warhol deems worthy of revelation.

Their material is not the “factual” stuff of story—Warhol saw facts as mutable—but Warhol’s prodigious and idiosyncratic thought. The casual incisiveness of Warhol’s aperçus betrays the prevalent view, nursed by the artist himself, that he was a Pop idiot savant. (“When I played an airport person in a movie with Elizabeth Taylor the lines they gave me were something like, ‘Let’s go. I have an important date’, but it kept coming out of my mouth, ‘Come on girls’” (83).) Another accomplished queer aphorist, Roland Barthes, declared war on *doxa*—“popular opinion,” a society’s most stiflingly conformist thought (*Roland Barthes* 71). But Warhol goes beyond Barthes and even Oscar Wilde in that Warhol’s pensées are not merely subversive. They find paradox by digging more deeply into the *doxa* in which the artist unguiltily participates: bad movies, trash TV, shopping. Warhol understands that intellectualism possesses its own *doxa*: “In some circles where very heavy people think they have very heavy brains, words like ‘charming’ and ‘clever’ and ‘pretty’ are all put-downs; all the lighter things in life, which are the most important things, are a putdown” (69).

The book’s title, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, is meant as *blague*, as put-on, with its subtitle, “From A to B and Back Again,” indicating the farcically narrow spectrum of philosophical thought contained within. (Think of Virginia Woolf’s fictional philosopher Mr. Ramsey, who in *To The Lighthouse* struggles to think past “Q” to “R”). Yet Warhol’s aperçus, for all their performance of naïveté, cut through cant with an unpretentiousness that is at once deconstructive and Pop: “I’m a city boy. In the big cities they’ve set it up so you can go to a park and be in a miniature countryside, but in the countryside they don’t have any patches of big city, so I get very homesick” (154).

Though Warhol’s politics were fluid and highly adaptable (he designed a campaign poster for George McGovern but put Nancy Reagan on the cover of *Interview* magazine), an important aspect of *The Philosophy* is Warhol’s propensity for utopian thought. Warhol’s utopia is not green; his futurism is delightfully, unnaturally perverse: “When I look around today, the biggest anachronism I see is pregnancy. I just can’t believe that people are still pregnant” (118). Invention and innovation are intrinsic to Warhol’s art, and in *The Philosophy*, Warhol’s inventions are by turns obvious and impossible, with the thorn of cynicism and hurt at their core: “[I]nstead of telling kids very early about the mechanics and nothingness of sex, maybe it would be better to suddenly and very excitingly reveal the details to them when they are forty.... Then suddenly at forty their life would have new meaning” (44).

Perhaps as a guilty compensation for his own rampant consumerism, Warhol’s utopianism extended to an interest in recycling, anticipating the ecological ethics of our current moment (which has its roots in the overpopulation fears of the 70s, when Warhol produced *The Philosophy*). If ecology emerged from a notion of the earth as a vulnerable body that must be protected from the waste of its inhabitants, Warhol’s immodest proposal keenly reverses this metaphor: “I think about people eating and going to the bathroom all the time, and I wonder why they don’t have a tube up their behind that takes all the stuff they eat and recycles it back into their mouth, regenerating it, and then they’d never have to think about buying food or eating it” (146).

A collector and packrat whose interest in recycling was all-consuming, Warhol was uniquely invested in recycling as an artistic practice. Rare is the Warhol product which can not be made meaningful through the optic of recycling: speech (in his films and books), the effluvia of consumer culture (the recycling of Marilyn Monroe's publicity shots in his silkscreened Marilyn paintings), even other people's waste (his "Oxidation Series," or "Piss Paintings," in which he cajoled a number of handsome young men to disrobe and urinate on a canvas treated with copper paint).

Warhol's interest in avoiding pollution and "leftovers" emerges in tandem with the artist's omnipresent, disfiguring fear of death:

At the end of my time, when I die, I don't want to leave any leftovers. And I don't want to be a leftover. I was watching TV this week and I saw a lady go into a ray machine and disappear. That was wonderful, because matter is energy and she just dispersed. That could be a really American invention—to be able to disappear. I mean, that way they couldn't say you died. (112-113)

Warhol's anxiety over mortality seems oddly related to his embrace of aphorism. The "Death" chapter of *The Philosophy* is comprised solely of the following statement: "I don't believe in it, because you're not around to know that it's happened. I can't say anything about it because I'm not prepared for it" (123). Does this not echo Wittgenstein's famous aphorism, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent"?<sup>2</sup>

The Warhol aphorism, while it may perform vapidness, usually has a serious bite lurking within it, packing often prescient intelligence under the guise of "confusion," "misunderstanding" or "solipsism." The narcissistic economy of the Warholian aphorism—"I never fall apart because I never fall together"—is balanced by Warhol's willingness to waste space on trivia. Sometimes the trivial somersaults into the insightful: "I don't really use makeup but I buy it and think about it a lot. Makeup is so well-advertised you can't ignore it completely" (10). And sometimes the trivial remains resolutely so: "There should always be a lot of new girls in town, and there always are" (71). Either mode would be lesser without its partner. (I don't mean "trivial" as a code-word for "feminine," but one resistance to reading Warhol seriously may be his stake in the feminine-coded realm of appearances, gossip, and sentimentality—a world made newly interesting by Warhol's trenchant analyses.)

How curious that two famously narcissistic queer icons—Wilde and Warhol—should both be so talented at aphorism, the literary form that essays universality. If narcissism and aphorism are related, perhaps it is also due to the self-reflective nature of the form. Classical aphorism is defined by an almost formulaic relationship between abstractions at once yoked together and split apart. Warhol's aphorism, "I never fall apart because I never fall together" draws power from the rhetorical torque of phrase B, "fall together," which comments

<sup>2</sup> Danto, in his essay, "The Philosopher as Andy Warhol," would indeed draw a comparison between Warhol's and Wittgenstein's shared interest in ordinary language (*Philosophizing Art* 77-78).

back and revises phrase A, “fall apart.” (The aphorism itself seems to fall together and fall apart with its unexpected reversal.) Is the narcissist skilled at aphorism because the aphorism is itself narcissistic, the tail end of the sentence gazing back at—and often biting—its head? And if aphorism depends on an almost chiasmic reversal of terms, is the chiasmic subtitle of *The Philosophy*, “From A to B and Back Again,” a commentary on the aphoristic prose contained within?

Mina Loy, a narcissistic aphorist in her own right, provides a key insight to the narcissism–universality axis in her “Aphorisms on Futurism.” She advises: “May your egotism be so gigantic that you comprise mankind in your self-sympathy” (266). Warhol is rarely arrogant. But so profound is his narcissism and so populist are his instincts, his egotism somersaults into a queer universality. Warhol, analyzing himself, analyzes America.

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“Don’t pay any attention to what they write about you. Just measure it in inches.”

If there is one figure who draws Warhol’s scorn in *The Philosophy*, it is the journalist. And yet *The Philosophy*, in a strange way, owes its genesis to Warhol’s interaction with and study of the fourth estate. Warhol notes:

I’ve found that almost all interviews are preordained. They know what they want to write about you and they know what they think about you before they ever talk to you, so they’re just looking for words and details from here and there to back up what they’ve already decided they’re going to say.... People used to say that I tried to “put on” the media when I would give one autobiography to one newspaper and another autobiography to another newspaper. I used to like to give different information to different magazines because it was like putting a tracer on where people get their information. (78-9)

*The Philosophy* is not Warhol’s attempt to “right” his story against the counter-claims of journalists. On the contrary, what Warhol learned from journalists, and began in turn to practice in his interviews, was deception and the strategic deployment of untruth. (Kenneth Goldsmith’s collection of Warhol interviews, *I’ll Be Your Mirror*, reveals Warhol to have been a master of the interview format, with an easy facility for the deadpan camp declaration as well as its close cousin, the silent feint.)

Warhol’s interview performances did a good deal to advance his notoriety and *réclame*. But Warhol also may have realized, in his relentless effort to recycle and make his every expenditure profitable, that he himself received no payment for his abundant good copy. The following passage from *The Philosophy*, in which Warhol muses on the news media, seems in this sense the book’s *omphalos*:

I’m confused about who the news belongs to. I always have it in my head that if your name’s in the news, then the news should be paying you. Because it’s your news and they’re taking it and selling it as their product. (78)

Warhol couldn't control his own news, which of course increased his fame and indirectly helped sell his products. But with *The Philosophy*, Warhol would at last make royalties off his own soundbytes. (Warhol, however, was ultimately disappointed by the book's anemic sales). With *The Philosophy* Warhol arranged to have himself interviewed, with his assistant Pat Hackett wielding the tape recorder and transcribing the results.

In *The Philosophy*, Warhol's language is performative, both in the theatrical sense of the word—the tape recorder was his audience—and in the sense delineated by speech-act theory, where saying something makes it so. Throughout *The Philosophy*, Warhol takes extreme, dandyish rhetorical positions, sometimes merely to hear how he sounds uttering the words ("If I ever cast an acting role, I want the wrong person for the part" (61)); at other times, as if to will thought into reality ("The acquisition of my tape recorder really finished whatever emotional life I might have had, but I was glad to see it go" (26)). Warhol's statements land as if wreathed in quotation marks, their irony a deflective armor protecting what may (or may not) be a core of sincerity. Camp is the word typically used to denote this performative mode, and while *The Philosophy* *is* camp, it's an advanced species whose most obvious variation is its deadpan tone ("I always go after the easiest thing, because if it's the easiest, for me it's usually the best" (83)).

Self-reflective, Warhol is perhaps most trenchant on the subject of performance itself. In proper camp mode, what Warhol embraces in stagecraft is error, excess, and "wrongness":

If I ever have to cast an acting role, I want the wrong person for the part. I can never visualize the right person in a part. The right person for the right part would be too much. Besides, no person is ever completely right for any part, because a part is a role is [sic] never real, so if you can't get someone who's perfectly right, it's more satisfying to get someone who's perfectly wrong. Then you know you've really got something.

The wrong people always look so right to me. And when you've got a lot of people and they're all "good," it's hard to make distinctions, the easiest thing is to pick the really bad person. (83)

Jonathan Dollimore has written persuasively on the deconstructive aspect of Wilde's writing, and I find Warhol essaying a similar work here. But Warhol undoes Wilde's hard hauteur by cloaking his aperçus in a fog of vagueness, by exhibiting an almost Zen indifference to excitement. The plainness of Warhol's syntax, his machinic repetitions—"the wrong person for the part...the right person for the part"—add a sense of helexical interchangeability to the categories of "right" and "wrong." When something is banally "right," the "wrong" is abolished to the shadows, invisible. But when the "wrongness" of a performance is foregrounded, the "rightness" is phantasmatically present in the viewer/reader's mind, who must summon the "right" performance to compare and correct the "wrong" one. What's "wrong" is thus more abundant and generous, if not more "truthful."

Harry G. Frankfurt, in his popular tome, *On Bullshit*, suggests that bullshit proliferates "whenever circumstances require someone to talk without knowing

what he is talking about" (63). This more or less describes Warhol's modus operandi, in movies like *Chelsea Girls* and with his talk-novel *a*: contrived scenarios in which a superstar is compelled, often unhappily, to fill up film or tape. In *The Philosophy*, Warhol is himself the bullshit artist, and he is acute on the subject:

The acquisition of my tape recorder really finished whatever emotional life I might have had, but I was glad to see it go. Nothing was ever a problem again, because a problem just meant a good tape, and when a problem transforms itself into a good tape it's not a problem any more. An interesting problem was an interesting tape. Everybody knew that and performed for the tape. You couldn't tell which problems were real and which problems were exaggerated for the tape. Better yet, the people telling you the problems couldn't decide anymore if they were really having the problems or if they were just performing. (26)

As if condensing volumes of McLuhan, Austin, Derrida, and Butler, Warhol identifies the myriad problems circulating around the intersection of media and performance. But it is precisely such problems that *The Philosophy* and many of Warhol's other works—his films most obviously—exploit. Wrongness, rightness, bad feeling, good feeling dissolve under the pressure of an all-consuming tape recorder, an audience that is "on," as long as the batteries last.

Warhol's experiments in filming and taping led him to an understanding of what performativity theorists like Austin and Derrida have endeavored in the heaviest verbiage to assert: that expression, gesture, utterance is performative, never more than when traveling under the cloak of the constative (the declarative, supposedly "factual" statement). Dandy Andy makes brilliant rhetorical play of the plainly false statement in his chapter on "Beauty":

I can never get over when you're on the beach how beautiful the sand looks and the water washes it away and straightens it up and the trees and the grass all look great. I think having land and not ruining it is the most beautiful art that anybody could ever want to own.

The most beautiful thing in Tokyo is McDonald's.

The most beautiful thing in Stockholm is McDonald's.

The most beautiful thing in Florence is McDonald's.

Peking and Moscow don't have anything beautiful yet. (71)

If a genius is someone able to hold two contradictory thoughts in his head at once, it is Warhol's particular genius to make performative play of those contradictions. The poetic economy of Warhol's litany convinces me to see the ready-made, plastic efficiency of McDonald's as beautiful, just as I swallowed the idyllic sentiment proffered earlier in the passage. As the "beauty" of McDonald's depends on its violent disregard for the natural, Nature is likewise rendered more rarefied and sublime in contrast to McDonald's golden arches. (Ashbery:



“All beauty, resonance, integrity/ exist by logic of strange position” (*Some Trees* 74.) In casting the role of “beauty,” McDonald’s is clearly the “wrong” entity for the part, a Pop wrongness for which Warhol had been much criticized—and so embraces here all the more resolutely.

In the above passage, we see Warhol’s dandyism, his capacity for the extreme self-contradictory pose, exists in close proximity to his facility with performative utterance (a performativity more startling for being expressed in violently constative form: “The most beautiful thing...is...”). Warhol’s bossy, *bull-ish* repetition exposes the performative aspects of language: repeat, repeat, repeat, until the proliferated citations become real. Where does Warhol stand? The contradictory performatives blur dandy Andy’s outlines, like the twin yet dematerialized figures in Warhol’s “Double Elvis” painting. Is one Elvis real and the other a copy? Or are they both simulacra? Like many a dandy before him, Warhol multiplies himself to hide in plain sight.

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On the dedication page of *The Philosophy*, Warhol thanks Pat Hackett for “extracting and redacting my thoughts so diligently” (v). Hackett began working with Warhol when she was still a student at Barnard College, and in Warhol’s posthumously published *The Diaries of Andy Warhol*, which Hackett also transcribed and edited, Hackett gives a fuller account of her work:

On the first book, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*...I did eight separate interviews with Andy on the basis of which I wrote chapters 1 through 8 and chapter 10. Then, using material from conversations Andy had taped between himself and Bob Colacello and Brigid Berlin, I wrote the introductory chapter and chapters 9, 11, 12, 13 and 14. (*The Diaries* xiii)

Hackett’s gender is not incidental to her role in the Warhol project.<sup>3</sup> In this final section, I want to consider what Hackett’s presence in Warhol’s literary economy

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<sup>3</sup> The amanuensis is historically female, a gendering that media critic Friedrich Kittler has made salient in his work: “Men have continued, from behind their desks, to believe in the omnipotence of their own thought, but the real power over keys and impressions on paper, over the flow of news and over agendas, fell to the women who sat in the front office” (64). Kittler’s argument opens up a valuable and necessary critique of my own position, which credits Warhol for his own literary brilliance, when his books were openly transcribed and ghostwritten by Hackett, Bob Colacello, Billy Name, and others—though it is of course the work of Hackett, occupying the role of woman in the figurative attic, that most demands acknowledgment.

Yet however much these collaborators contributed to Warhol’s books, it is still Warhol’s charisma that made them publishable and coherent. The author is still a necessary fact (or fiction) of contemporary reading practices (*pace* Barthes and Foucault, who enjoy, in death, the longevity of the traditional author function)—as the singular figure of the artist continues to dominate contemporary art practices. Fairly or unfairly, we rarely give credit to Warhol’s art assistants, unless it is to identify productions unauthorized by the artist. And if Warhol was not responsible for his literary works, why did he display such cunning in interviews predating his acquaintance with his co-writers?

reveals about the artist's relationship to writing, shame, and femininity—particularly the role of Warhol's mother in his artistic and literary *imaginaire*.

In the first, story-driven chapter of *The Philosophy*, Warhol introduces us to Warhola, who would later join Warhol in New York City and live together with her son until a year before her death. Warhol recalls, in an anecdote surely simplified for effect:

I had three nervous breakdowns when I was a child, spaced a year apart.... I would spend all summer listening to the radio and lying in bed with my Charlie McCarthy doll and my un-cut-out cut-out paper dolls all over the spread and under the pillow.... My mother would read to me in her thick Czechoslovakian accent as best she could and I would always say "Thanks, Mom," after she finished with Dick Tracy, even if I hadn't understood a word. She'd give me a Hershey Bar every time I finished a page in my coloring book. (21-2)

Memory imbricates illness, language, aesthetic consumption and aesthetic production under the sign of mother.

Though he reveals his own history of illness, what Warhol does not discuss in the passage above, but Bockris and Koestenbaum illuminate in their respective biographies, is the frightening illness that Warhola suffered when Andy was a child: intestinal cancer resulting in the emergency implantation of a colostomy bag. Warhol, ashamed of the olfactory side-effects of his mother's colostomy bag, would later pressure Warhola to have another surgery to internalize the waste-removal technology. (She declined.)

Julia Kristeva, in much of her critical work but especially in *Powers of Horror*, diagnoses our culture's derogation of the maternal abject. Warhola's colostomy bag presents a particularly embodied version of this abject, and perhaps because she reigned over Warhol's early art and language development, Warhol's later work seems charged by encounters with and systematic avoidance of the abject. Koestenbaum, in his biography, argues strikingly that the colostomy bag, and the shame and trauma Warhol suffered from his mother's illness and disfigured body, had a decisive impact on Warhol's aesthetic practice—in my view, a sublimated form of waste management. If Warhol was indeed replaying the trauma of his mother's surgery through his collage and silkscreen work (a canvas-sized version of his "un-cut-out cut-out paper dolls"), I want to suggest that the tape recorder and female transcriber also play out the trauma and shame surrounding Warhola's foregrounded waste management. Warhola and the colostomy bag—a kind of technological supplement—are recast as female transcriber and tape recorder.

For Warhol, twin shames—a) his mother's colostomy bag and b) living with his mother as an adult—are not transformed or banished in any simple or expected way, but are rather queerly performed through the complex mediation of writing. In the camp declarations which constitute *The Philosophy*, Warhol both exhibited and hid his true thought. In a sense, this stance reflects and echoes Warhol's relationship with his mother, on whom Warhol was remarkably dependent long into middle age and yet rarely escorted outside the domicile. After

Warhola moved to New York City, one would expect Warhol to have hidden his cohabitation with Warhola. Yet it is characteristic of Warhol's camp performativity that he did not hide his shame. Instead, Warhol *advertised* it, literally, by putting his mother to work as a calligrapher—a *writer*—on the many commercial art assignments that predated his Pop art work. Indeed, in 1957, an advertising guild award was presented to “Andy Warhol’s Mother” for her handwriting on an all-text album cover for a spoken-word album, *The Story of Moondog* (Bourdan 60).

Warhol's enlistment of his mother as writing machine suggests some curious ironies. According to a 1971 exhibition catalog of Warhol's early works, “Mrs. Warhola, who could barely speak English, could not write it all, but Andy liked her handwriting and so he would give her the text and have her copy it letter for letter, laboriously, missing or transposing a letter here and there, which always delighted Andy all the more” (31). The evident childishness of Warhola's script lends Warhol's precious illustrations an added dimension of faux-naïveté.<sup>4</sup> Warhol's use of Warhola as a transcriber performed and screened Warhol's own illiteracy: by relying on Warhola's errors as an aesthetic effect, Warhol's own illiteracy passed unnoticed. But the mistakes also *flaunted* the general illiteracy of the Warhol household, locating the charm and value in error.

Warhola's role as a writing machine would foretell, in gender at least, Warhol's later use of a cadre of female typists who transcribed the tapes of his first novel, *a*, as well as Warhol's later employment of Hackett as amanuensis. But Warhol's use of his mother also prefigures Warhol's obsession with the tape recorder. Warhol's tape recorder is a fetish, a relatively neutral object charged with meaning so that the subject is able to work out on the symbolic level a contradiction too intense to be resolved directly. Warhol invested his tape recorder, as is typical of the fetish, with quasi-libidinal energies. In *The Philosophy*, Warhol alleges with camp insincerity: “My tape recorder and I have been married for ten years now. When I saw ‘we’, I mean my tape recorder and me. A lot of people don't understand that” (26). This charming evocation of the cyborg love affair extends and screens the equally strange union between the bachelor Warhol and his homebound mother.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Was Warhola innocent of the sexual double entendres that Warhol's captions, such as “In the Bottom of My Garden,” often encoded? Julia and Andy's design collaborations may have allegorized or replayed the dynamics of knowingness, in the Warhol household, of Andy's homosexuality. Just how “illiterate” was Warhola to her son's sexual proclivities?—a rhetorical question, to be sure.

<sup>5</sup> When the relationship between Warhol and his tape recorder is conjured elsewhere in *The Philosophy*, it is located where the alimentary and the social conjoin, as if out of a scene from Proust's *Le Coté de Guermantes*. B—presumably Colacello, though perhaps Fred Hughes—remarks, “‘A[ndy] likes everybody except people who make him turn off his tape. It's like saying come to dinner but don't bring your wife’” (190). Warhol never took his mother/wife “out,” because he ate with her at home before heading out to “dinner,” which Warhol saw as a forum for socializing. Explaining this unusual dining practice to an interviewer, Warhol said, “You can't talk when you eat. And restaurants are dirty” (*I'll Be Your Mirror* 209), a comment I take not at face value, but as an indication of the complex ways that, for Warhol, food, speech, and society orbited the

Warhola's colostomy bag always accompanied her, protecting her from unpleasant spillage; likewise did Warhol depend on the technological supplement—most signally, the tape recorder—to mediate between his body and a clamorous Real of waste. I want to suggest, speculatively, that Warhol restaged and *performed* his shame over his mother's waste-management system—in some sense, *performed* Warhola—by fetishizing her colostomy bag *as* his tape recorder. With the tape recorder, Warhol worked through conflicts around waste, which afflict every subject but Warhol particularly so: the pull between mess and order, between retention and loss, between taking up space and emptying space. In *Popism* Warhol writes, "For me, the most confusing period of the whole sixties was the last sixteen months. I was taping and Polaroiding everything in sight, but I didn't know what to make of it all" (290). The decade was chaotic, and tape recording was one method of ordering that chaos. Yet magnetic tape often has the opposite and unintended effect of reflecting and representing *disorder*. Friedrich Kittler defines sound recording as the realm of the Lacanian Real, the medium that contains the hisses and vocables and nonsense that can't be assimilated to meaning. Warhol's first novel, *a*, indeed makes salient the difficulties of translation from the Real to Symbolic registers which bedevil any transcription project: "(beginning inaudible)" writes one typist; "(lots banging)" (335); "(noise)" (352); "[garbled conversation]" (377).

Warhol's own fascination with tape recording continued well into the 80s, long after the Zeitgeist embraced the newer media of video. I don't know how often Warhol listened to his own tape recording, but he seems to have received a quasi-erotic charge from archiving and ordering them, as biographer Victor Bockris suggests: "Before retiring to bed at the usual hour of six A.M...[Warhol] would store away his tapes with the care of an archivist" (302). Yet even when properly archived, the tape still presented an envelope of chaos and time-waste to the person forced to mine it for coherent information, as Warhol would admit: "The trouble was, it took so long to get a tape transcribed, even when you had somebody working at it full-time" (*Popism* 291). By outsourcing his tape recordings to transcribers like Hackett, Warhol was able to separate himself from the waste of talking, typing, and writing. It fell to the female collaborator (Warhola, Hackett) to handle the waste management of transcription; Warhol's

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magnetic foci of tape recording and the maternal abject. Much as Warhol shamed his mother for her colostomy bag, so was Warhol in turn shamed for bringing his tape recorder to the dinner table.

Warhol's alimentary practices were indeed complex, seemingly governed by his recycling philosophy. In *The Philosophy* he notes:

[I]f you do watch your weight, try the Andy Warhol New York City Diet: when I order in a restaurant, I order everything that I don't want, so I have a lot to play around with while everyone else eats. Then, no matter how chic the restaurant is, I insist that the waiter wrap the entire plate up like a to-go order, and after we leave the restaurant I find a little corner outside in the street to leave the plate in, because there are so many people in New York who live in the streets, with everything they own in shopping bags. (*The Philosophy* 69)

Instead of dining in the restaurant, Warhol creates leftovers, which he then leaves to a bag lady—let's assume gender for the sake of argument—on the street, or perhaps even for the bag lady waiting at home.

privilege was to enjoy the well-ordered typescript that resulted.

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At last, the clarity of a photograph. I adduce the image below not as “proof”—the muteness of photography is its principal virtue—but as an accidental emblem of Warhol’s waste making and waste management. Taken in 1966, before Warhol had published any of his transcription projects, the photograph shows Warhol caught in an unusually campy posture, wrists splayed. One hand holds a tape recorder and the other hand holds a microphone. An ironic moue plays across Warhol’s mouth as he interviews artist Harold Stevenson. Yet for me, the punctum of the photograph—what Barthes in *Camera Lucida* calls a photographic detail of accidental, puncturing poignance—is the wire of the tape recorder itself, twisting in front of Warhol’s abdomen as if tracing his viscera:



*“I’m Wife, Stop there!”: Warhol with tape recorder in 1966.*

Not only does the tape recorder *resemble* an externalized alimentary system, reminiscent of Warhol’s colostomy bag, it *is* an alimentary system, in the sense of being a self-contained ecology. Like the feeding tube from anus to mouth which Warhol imagines in *The Philosophy*, the cassette tape forms a closed loop, which both consumes (records sound), produces (plays back), and can be efficiently recycled, in two senses: In playback mode, the tape can be turned over once it has ended, for continuous playback. In recording mode, a tape can be reused—recycled—by recording over old content with the new.

That the cassette tape was itself a potent locus of creative associations for Warhol can be gleaned from the subtitle to *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again*. Ostensibly, “A” and “B” are the two personae in dialogue at the book’s beginning and end. (“A” is Andy and “B” is Brigid or Bob.) But the subtitle also invokes the medium of the book’s composition. Hackett—Plato to Warhol’s Socrates—filled tape after tape with her philosopher’s thoughts, from the cassette’s side A to side B. *From A to B and Back Again*: Warhol’s seemingly disordered philosophy not only takes up the medium as its message, but takes the medium of the cassette as its organizing system.

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