

ANDY WARHOL

It will probably be some time before people start evaluating Warhol's films for their own merits and stop thinking of them as camp sociology or decadent testimonials to the cultural and sexual revolutions. Yet I think his movies will still be beautiful even when they have ceased to be fashionable. These are some comments on what seem to me to be the more enduring aspects of his style.

From the outset it was generally assumed that Warhol's approach to film making was the most informal imaginable: just point the camera at something and let reality do all the work. The truth, however, is exactly the opposite: Warhol's movies are an incredibly formal and organic body of art, a universe with very precisely fixed principles of organization and a very personal way of seeing. If you've seen several Warhol films you can't help seeing that Paul Morrissey's imitative "Flesh" is much less constant and much less controlled than a real Warhol film. The moral is that the essence of Warhol's universe is not in the things he films, but in the way he films them.

One of his earliest films that struck me as being truly beautiful was "Mario Banana," a four-minute closeup of Mario Montez eating a banana. It reminds me of Von Sternberg in the way everything in the frame has a single texture, that Mario, the background, the banana, and Mario's hand all seem to be part of the same two-dimensional surface. It is as though the shot was really a tapestry and the objects within it couldn't escape the two-dimensional fabric and be part of a three-dimensional world.

There is also a wonderful feeling of quiet sensuality, both in the texture of the shot and in the way Mario eats the banana. The film has an infantile sense of the erotic pleasure of chewing, and beyond that an erotic kind of feeling for everything in the frame. It is also infantile in its response and in the total absence of time and place.

These characteristics of "Mario Banana" are more or less true of all of Warhol's films. Like infants, his characters are more interested in touching things and each other than they are in having orgasms, and people are de-sexualized while surfaces become erotic. Whereas melodrama shows the interaction of characters through the unfolding of a series of events at the turning points of people's lives, Warhol shows the pure interaction of very primal aspects of character, without any external events to complicate matters. People perform very simple, un-societal acts such as eating, washing, dressing, rapping (as distinct from conversing), and engaging in various kinds of sex acts. They don't behave like infants, but like adults whose infantile urges have been allowed to surface.

When Warhol first started making "dramatic" films (with people who talk to each other) his infantile world wasn't very attractive. "Chelsea Girls" is a sordid film in which people constantly abuse each other and in which his earlier tapestry-like surface texture becomes harsh flatness. Even as late as "Bike Boy" there is a level of perversity that underlies nearly every scene, and a visual feeling of entrapment in a world composed only of surfaces. In "Nude Restaurant," which is his most comic film and which isn't peopled with the lost, hateful cast of "Bike Boy", there remains this feeling of two-dimensionality. Supposedly a key difference between painting and cinema is that in the former a scene can be observed from only one place, whereas in a movie you can cut to a different point of view of the same thing. But though Warhol zooms in on things, pans occasionally, and cuts to new camera set-ups, he never cuts from one view of something to another view of the same thing seen from a different angle. When he cuts, he cuts to something different from the thing we have just seen. The effect of seeing each location from only one angle (plus the flattening effect of his lighting and his zooms) is to eliminate the idea of perspective entirely, and leave us stuck in a two-dimensional world.

Notes by Peter Coonradt

(Excerpts from a review of "Blue Movie" to be published in ON FILM, used by permission.)

ANDY WARHOL FILMOGRAPHY.

1963 Tarzan and Jane Regained...	Vinyl
Sort Of	Butch
1963-4 Sleep	Beauty Number Two
Kiss	1966 Outer and Inner Space
1964 Haircut	Face
Eat	Kitchen
Blowjob	Lupe
Roller Skate	My Hustler
Empire	Prison
The End of Dawn	Hedy
Messy Lives	The Closet
Salome and Delilah	More Milk, Evette
The Lester Persky Story -	Restaurant
A Soap Opera	Afternoon
Mario Banana	Their Town
1965 Harlot	Eating Too Fast
Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys	Velvet Underground and Nico
Shoulder	The Chelsea Girls
Poor Little Rich Girl	1967 I, a Man
Drunk	Bike Boy
Couch	Nude Restaurant
Henry Geldzahler	**** (Four Star)
Thirteen Most Beautiful Women	1968 Imitation of Christ
Camp	The Loves of Ondine
Batman Dracula	Lonesome Cowboys
Screen Test Number Two	Surf
The Life of Juanita Castro	Blue Movie
Horse	
Suicide	