Throughout his career, Andy Warhol made frequent reference to his general tendency toward liking. “I like everything,” he liked to say.1 In response to questions about his favorite movie star or artist, he would say things such as, “I just like everyone,” or, “I like them all.”2 This unusual aptitude for liking did not go unnoticed by his friends and associates. For instance, in recalling his collaborations with Warhol, Ronald Tavel (who wrote the scenarios for several Warhol films, including Vinyl [1965], Horse [1965], Kitchen [1965] and The Life of Juanita Castro [1965]) remembered that he always fought with Warhol about whether the films had to be boring or not. The problem, Tavel suggested, was that Warhol just didn’t

* The author would like to thank Douglas Crimp for any number of thought-clarifying and insight-generating conversations, and also for his acute feedback and generous encouragement. Conversations with Callie Angell, Neil Printz, Carrie Noland, Don Pease, and especially Tan Lin were also very helpful. Audiences for earlier versions of this paper given at the “Andy Eighty?” conference at Harvard University, the Dartmouth College English Department, the Twentieth Century Colloquium at Yale University and the “Visual and Cultural Studies: The Next Twenty Years” Conference at the University of Rochester offered helpful feedback and advice. Many thanks also to Matthew Wrbican at the Warhol Museum and Sally King-Nero at the Warhol Foundation for sharing their time, expertise, knowledge, and resources.

2. Andy Warhol, interview by Glenn O’Brien, High Times, August 24, 1977, repr. in I’ll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews, ed. Kenny Goldsmith (New York: Carrol and Graf, 2004). On painters, p. 238; on movie stars, p. 254: “I like them all—I mean anyone who’s in a movie.” Other examples abound. In the often-cited 1966 interview with Gretchen Berg, Warhol says, “The world fascinates me. It’s so nice, whatever it is. I approve of what everybody does: it must be right because somebody said it was right” (I’ll Be Your Mirror, p. 93). In a 1970 interview with Leticia Kent, he asserted that “everyone and everything is interesting” (I’ll Be Your Mirror, p. 187). Asked in 1986 if he collected art, his response was “I like everybody’s art” (I’ll Be Your Mirror, p. 358).

"Pop art is liking things."

—Andy Warhol

"The like is not the same."

—Jean-Luc Nancy
get bored like everyone else; he always found something to like.\textsuperscript{3} In another vein, former Warhol studio assistant and antique dealer Vito Giallo remembered that Warhol “was interested in everything and I was just floored by the amount of things that he bought and the diversity of his interests.”\textsuperscript{4}

I like the idea of liking as a project or practice that one might actively pursue, a talent that could be developed, learned, and practiced, and I want to see Warhol’s Pop as at once a series of illustrations of Warhol’s own talent for liking and a pedagogical effort to help us expand our own capacities for liking. To be sure, liking things, indeed liking everything, is a somewhat surprising project to set for oneself, one with, I think, interesting and potentially far-reaching aesthetic and political implications. It certainly represents a departure from scholarly skepticism, and it is directly opposed to what we usually think of as the exercise of critical taste or political judgment. Yet I do not think Warhol’s self-avowed aim of liking things represents the complacency or simple affirmation of which Warhol has sometimes been accused. Instead, Warhol’s practice has its own utopian impulse; it is an attempt to imagine new, queer forms of emotional attachment and affiliation, and to transform the world into a place where these forms could find a home. Thus, rather than viewing Pop as a defense against affect, I see in Warhol’s promiscuous liking a set of attempts to figure out how to emotionally engage the world in a context where, as he said, “it would be so much easier not to care.”\textsuperscript{5}

How such liking happens, however, is less than clear. How, after all, does one come to like the things and people that one ends up liking? Can one simply decide to like something? How might one exert agency in one’s likes? That such an agency may indeed be exerted, albeit in an indirect and tactical way, and that this agency might rest upon the capacity for perceiving and producing likenesses, is one of the several lessons Warhol’s Pop has to teach us about the possibilities of affectivity in late capitalist society. After introducing some of the issues raised by Warhol’s connection of liking to likeness, I will offer Warhol’s collecting practices as one particularly vivid illustration of his liking things, and of the centrality of likeness to that liking.\textsuperscript{6} Finally, I will consider Warhol’s Screen Tests, the short portrait films

\begin{enumerate}
\item Personal communication during “Warhol Week in Moscow” conference and film festival, Moscow, 2001.
\end{enumerate}
he made between 1964 and 1966, as one of Warhol’s collections, and a collection that represents a particular and in some ways an idealized or utopian version of the collectivity that took shape in Warhol’s Factory in the 1960s.

The indispensable reference point for an inquiry into Warhol’s liking is of course his well-known 1963 interview with Gene Swenson.

Warhol: Someone said that Brecht wanted everybody to think alike. I want everybody to think alike. But Brecht wanted to do it through Communism, in a way. Russia is doing it under government. It’s happening here all by itself without being under a strict government; so, if it’s working without trying, why can’t it work without being Communist? Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we’re getting more and more that way.

I think everybody should be a machine.

I think everybody should like everybody.

Swenson: Is that what Pop Art is all about?

Warhol: Yes. It’s liking things.

Swenson: And liking things is like being a machine?

Warhol: Yes, because you do the same thing every time. You do it over and over again.

Here, Warhol (with Swenson’s help) plays with the multiple meanings of “like,” “alike,” and “liking.” They move from the adjectival or adverbial “like” or “alike” that means that one thing is similar to, resembles, or imitates another and the verbal form of “like” that can denote forms of positive emotional engagement, including interest, excitement, and taking pleasure. Although Warhol does not explain the connection between being-like and liking, the narrative logic of the interview implies that the appreciation of likeness, of people thinking, acting, and looking alike, sets the stage for liking. Warhol appears to be suggesting that the apprehension of similarity—the work of what Walter Benjamin called the mimetic faculty—is the condition of possibility for affective affiliation.

Such a likeness or similarity, it is worth emphasizing, is distinct both conceptually and experientially from sameness. Or, as Jean Luc Nancy put it: “the like is not the same [le semblable n’est pas le pareil].” To be similar to something is precisely to not be the same as it. Neither incommensurate nor identical—related, but distinct—similarity is a third term aside the same-different binary. The “like-being” (or “semblable”) Nancy writes, “resembles me in that I myself ‘resemble’ him: we

resemble together, if you will.” Resemblance, or “acting alike,” that is, implies a relation of mutuality and enacts a shared being-in-common, a “we-centricity” that has been seen as the basic element of emotional connection, even affectivity itself, more generally. In his work on mirror neurons, which speaks directly to the issues Warhol raises here, Vittorio Gallese argues that we understand the emotions and actions of others not through analogy or a theory of the mind, but through an automatic, internal, embodied simulation of them, a common experience of them.9 In other words, we are constantly and automatically acting like other people; affectivity would be impossible without this basic capacity for sharing.10

With his emphasis on being alike, we might say that Warhol replaces the opposition between capitalism and communism with a commitment to “commonism,” a short-lived neologism for what would become known as Pop Art that Warhol reportedly favored.11 At the time, it referred to Warhol’s and other artists’ representation of common objects, the “comics, picnic tables, men’s trousers, celebrities, shower curtains, refrigerators, Coke bottles—all the great modern things that the abstract expressionists tried so hard not to notice at all.”12 But, as a term, commonism also aptly captures Warhol’s broadly pursued interest in creating spheres of likeness, realms of practice, perception, and affect that can be held in common.

It makes a certain sense then, that Warhol begins his statement about Pop


10. When our own capacities for such simulation are damaged or inhibited, we may lose our capacity to recognize the emotions of other people. In one experiment, for example, people were asked to identify the emotions displayed by other people in photos while they clenched pencils between their teeth, thereby inhibiting their capacity to imitate the facial expressions. “Participants holding the pencils between their teeth were much less efficient in detecting changes in emotional facial expressions than were participants who were free to mimic the facial expressions observed.” This experiment, conducted by Paula Niedenthal, is recounted in Marco Iacobini, Mirroring People: The Science of Empathy and How We Connect With Others (New York: Picador, 2008), p. 111. Original research published in Niedenthal, Barsalou, Winkielman, et. al., “Embodiment in Attitudes, Social Perception, and Emotion,” Personality and Social Psychology Reviews 9 (2005), pp. 184–211. Similarly, patients who have suffered brain damage and have lost the ability to have certain emotions, find that their ability to recognize that emotion in others is substantially diminished. See Gallese, “The manifold nature of interpersonal relations,” p. 174.

11. See Nathan Gluck in Warhol: Conversations about the Artist, ed. Patrick S. Smith (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), p. 67: “You know, at one time, when the movement first got started, he wanted to call his stuff ‘commonist Painting.’ Meaning, it was common . . . . I know there was this plug about ‘commonist art’ because they were going to paint common things, but ‘Pop’ stuck and it never got off the ground, and of course it sounded like ‘Communist.” Brief discussions of the term can also be found in Wayne Koestenbaum, Andy Warhol (New York: Viking, 2001), p. 63; Blake Stimson, “Andy Warhol’s Red Beard,” The Art Bulletin 83, no. 3 (Sept., 2001), pp. 527–47; and Caroline Jones, The Machine in the Studio (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), esp. pp. 204–05.

here by being-like, by thinking like, Brecht, inasmuch as he shares Brecht’s desire for people to think alike. Then Warhol observes that, well, everybody already looks and acts alike here and in Russia. Which makes Russia and the US more like each other than Cold War discourse—at a peak in 1963—would suggest, inasmuch as they both promote likeness (which also makes them like Brecht and Warhol). At this point he moves from the descriptive to the declarative: I think everybody should be a machine, I think everybody should like everybody, and: Pop art is liking things. This liking things, Warhol continues, is like being a machine, because it involves repetition, doing the same thing over and over again. Liking for Warhol takes a necessarily serial form, thereby not only taking advantage of an already existing similarity, but proliferating it, reproducing it, performing it.

Before considering how that process might work, it is worth noting that what Warhol takes here as the kind of self-evident or given historical fact of similarity (that we are all already thinking and acting alike, that imitation and likeness already abound) was, at best, underappreciated at the moment Warhol was speaking (in the context of the Cold War and the Civil Rights movement) and at worst actively discouraged or ignored. If similarity abounded, it was not exactly being appreciated. If the imitation of others and the experience of a mimetic “we-centric” space of affective attunement is in some sense automatic, the basic faculty that allows us to understand other people and relate to them, it is nonetheless the case that the space of what we share with others can be negated. 13

In fact, we need not look far to see ways that modernity on the whole has not been kind to the mimetic faculty, and how this suppression of the mimetic faculty could have negative implications for the possibilities of emotional attachment and engagement. Walter Benjamin, who, as we know, was preoccupied with the decline and possible renewal of the mimetic faculty throughout his career, argued that in response to the emotionally jarring situations that characterize modernity (war, crowds, the daily news, the mechanization of work and entertainment) the modern subject’s mimetic relation to the world and to other people has been withdrawn. 14 It would, for instance, be emotionally draining to the point of paralysis if we were affectively open to all the people we encounter on city streets or public transportation, never mind the deaths, disasters, terror alerts,


and bombings we see on the nightly news. On another level, we might note that the capitalist system of universal equivalence—in which anything can be made to be equivalent to anything else through the medium of money—has dulled the finer antennae of the mimetic faculty. In a world where we move instantly from the incommensurate to the equivalent, likenesses are obscured.

We might also observe how the opposition between the same and the different is written into our conceptions of desire—or at least into some dominant ones. When Warhol writes in his Philosophy that he thinks that “when you want to be like something, it means you really love it” he is in part refusing to accept the distinction between desire (having the other) and identification (being the other), a distinction central, for example, to Freud’s understanding of sexuality, in which, as Diana Fuss writes, “desire for one sex is always secured through identification with the other sex; to desire and identify with the same person at the same time is, in this model, a theoretical impossibility.” By contrast, Warhol’s emphasis on the connection between being alike and liking can be understood as an effort to make room for a conception of queer sexual attraction in which, as Leo Bersani writes, “the antagonisms between the different and the same no longer exist”—that is, one that tries to move beyond the homosexual (love of the same) heterosexual (love of the different) distinction itself.

The discourses, institutions, and norms regarding gender, sexual, and racial identity are of course crucial sites where, as we grow up, we are schooled quite carefully and deliberately concerning the proper objects of imitation. Children, Benjamin observed, are not yet “diseducated,” and thus are more attuned to similarity, which one can see in their penchant for creating collections and their promiscuous affinity for varied imitations. “The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher, but also a windmill and a train.” This open and expansive imitative relation to the world, one filled with different identity games, is discour-


17. This, continues Fuss, “allows him to theorize homosexual desire as inherently contradictory, since desire can only be for the other and never for the same.” Diana Fuss, Identification Papers (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 11.

18. Leo Bersani, Homos (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 59. However, where for Bersani it is the homoness of homosexuality, the love of the same, that can “free us from an oppressive psychology of desire as lack,” and move us beyond the opposition between the same and the different, I am arguing here that it is Warhol’s promotion of similarity, precisely as distinct from sameness, that displaces the discourses and institutions supporting the same-different binary and the logic of identity.

aged by any number of institutions and discourses that push us to think and feel in
terms of either identity or difference. Even logic itself, as Nietzsche wrote, suppresses
similarity because it requires that we “treat as equal what is merely similar” (a move,
he reminds us, that is “an illogical tendency, for nothing is really equal”).

The universal standard of equivalence established by money is then only “logical,” as is the
compensatory valorization of the “genuine” and “authentic.” And then there are all
the everyday contexts in which a fixed and verifiable personal identity is compulsory,
such as signing and cashing checks, crossing the border, driving a car, filing taxes,
reporting to work, signing a work of art, or authoring a text. In these contexts, there
is to be no confusing you and your likeness; playing someone you are not can pro-
duce all kinds of trouble. Or, as Warhol said about getting caught sending Allen
Midgette out to college campuses to lecture as him (without, of course, telling the
colleges), what for him had been a classic Pop “put on” was “what some people would
call fraud.”

Warhol did not really understand what the big deal was, since, as he
noted, “we’d been playing switch-the-celebrity at parties and openings around New
York for years, telling people that Viva was Ultra and Edie was me and I was Gerard—
sometimes people would get all mixed up by themselves and we wouldn’t bother to
correct them, it was too much fun to let them go on getting it all wrong—it seemed
like a joke to us.” But, on the phone with an irate university official, Warhol realized
how quickly one’s sense of identity could unravel. When the official asked, “How can
I even be sure this is really you on the phone right now?” Warhol had to admit that
he didn’t know. He was compelled to refund the lecture fees. Seeing that his childlike
affinity for improper imitations could get him into trouble, he realized that it might
be a good idea to stop playing his “anti-star identity games,” at least where money and
contractual obligations were involved, “and start acting more grown-up,” even if for
Warhol the “grown-up” remains just another kind of performance or role.

Here, as elsewhere, Warhol is not only taking likeness for granted, he is
engaged in its active production, a pointed and persistent attempt to stimulate and
awaken a slumbering mimetic faculty and to find the sites in contemporary culture
where it might be nourished. As part of this project, Warhol sought to disrupt, short-
circuit, and otherwise circumvent the discourses, institutions, and practices that
discouraged or inhibited our mimetic faculties and our imitative behaviors. In this
way, he did his part to bring about a future where “everybody will think just what they
want to think, and then everybody will probably be thinking alike.”

This interest in and promotion of similarity runs through his career and can

171. On the suppression of similarity in logic, and on identity and non-identity also see sections 510-
512 and 515–17 of Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York:

21. Warhol was found out when someone at one of the colleges compared a photo he had taken
of who he thought had been Warhol with a photo of Warhol in the *Village Voice*. Warhol recounts the


be seen in any number of his aesthetic commitments, from his affection for bad acting and his fascination with drag queens to his promotion of boredom, his imitation of the machine, and his late camouflage paintings. Each opens onto its own set of insights into the possibilities for affective attachment and affiliation that inhere within the various cultural forms of late modernity.

I want to mention just briefly that one clear indication of Warhol’s interest in likeness precisely as distinct from sameness can be seen in his turn to silkscreening as his artistic mode of production in the early 1960s. In 1962, as Georg Frei and Neil Printz document in the Andy Warhol catalogue raisonné, Warhol moved away from the hand-drawn line and turned instead toward painting with mechanical forms of reproduction such as stencils and stamps before settling on the silkscreen with the Dollar-Bill paintings. Warhol favored silkscreening technology precisely because, in contrast to the stamp or stencil, similarity-producing mistakes and irregularities were built into the process. Warhol: “With silkscreening, you pick a photograph, blow it up, transfer it in glue onto silk, and then roll ink across so the ink goes through the silk but not through the glue. That way, you get the same image, slightly different, each time.” Thus, while Warhol knew that repetition itself degrades or undoes identity—remarking, for example, that he “liked the way the repetition changed the same image”—his choice of the silkscreening process clearly indicates that he wished to foreground a mechanically produced “slightly different” similar.

There may be no more dramatic illustration of Warhol’s talent for “liking things” than his energetic and far-ranging collecting practices. Even a cursory look at the six-volume Sotheby’s “The Andy Warhol Collection” reveals an astounding array of collections. One finds large collections of Art Deco furniture and silver; Native American blankets, rugs, and baskets; nineteenth-century Americana and folk art (some of which had been exhibited in the 1977 “Folk and Funk” exhibition); jewels, jewelry, and watches; and an art collection that included, for example, works by European modernists such as Duchamp, Klee, and Man Ray, as well as Warhol’s

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24. Somewhat ironically, because photographs of money cannot be legally reproduced, these first silkscreens were based on Warhol’s drawings of money. Shortly thereafter, having settled on the silkscreen method, Warhol began to work mainly with photo-based silkscreens. On the various twists and turns of Warhol’s production methods during this period, see the fascinating discussion in Georg Frei and Neil Printz, eds., The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Sculpture 1961–1963 (New York: Phaidon, 2002), especially pp. 131–50 on the Dollar Bills, and pp. 205–06 on the first photo-silkscreened paintings.

25. Warhol, POPism, p. 22.

26. Warhol, I’ll Be Your Mirror, p. 193. This is a point that Foucault also made at the end of This Is Not a Pipe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 54.

contemporaries Arman, Johns, Lichtenstein, Twombly, and Rauschenberg. As one looks through the 3,436 lots and sees the hundreds of watches and hundreds of chairs, the cookie jars, and the busts of Benjamin Franklin and Napoleon, the ray-gun toys, sets of furniture designed by Josef Hoffmann and Puiforcat tea sets, the Russel Wright dishes and Navajo turquoise bracelets, it is not hard to believe that, as several accounts attest, Warhol went shopping for items to add to his collections every day. He was, as his friend Henry Geldzahler put it, an “indefatigable accumulator.” While his energy for collecting increased as he got older (and had more money to spend), it appears that collecting was a lifelong passion, a habit that Warhol developed in childhood, probably with film magazines and celebrity memorabilia.

Unlike many collectors, Warhol was not interested in the display of his col-

28. On Warhol’s collecting practices, see Jed Johnson, “Inconspicuous Consumption,” in The Andy Warhol Collection, vol. V: “He shopped for two or three hours a day for as many years as I can remember.” Fred Hughes notes that in the last several years of his life, Warhol spent a million dollars a year just at auctions (See Hughes, “Preface,” in The Andy Warhol Collection).


30. There are many references to Warhol’s childhood collecting. He kept a photo album with celebrity photos, including a signed photo of Shirley Temple he had written away for and received when he was eleven, alongside a photo of Mae West. See John Smith, “Hollywood Stars and Noble Savages: Andy Warhol’s Photography Collection,” in Andy Warhol Photography (Zurich: Edition Stemmle, 1999), pp. 27–30. Apparently, after Warhol was shot, John and Marge Warhola brought Warhol a blue Shirley Temple glass he had owned since he was eight; see Victor Bockris, Andy Warhol, p. 338. In The Philosophy, “B” (Brigid Berlin) remembers how his family and the nuns got Warhol interested in collecting again when he was in
lections. He kept his collecting private; it was, as his boyfriend Jed Johnson pointed out, “inconspicuous consumption.” In fact, his purchases eventually transformed his townhouse, which had been carefully and beautifully designed by Johnson, into storage space for unopened boxes and unemptied shopping bags. He reportedly regretted the display of his collection of folk art in the Folk and Funk show, and seemed to stop collecting in this area after the exhibition. And although Warhol excelled at finding bargains or “sleepers,” and took pleasure in speculating about the future value of purchases, it seems clear that he had no intention of ever “cashing in” on his purchases. Suzie Frankfurt, a friend of Warhol’s since the 1950s, remarked, “as for trading or selling—never, never, never. He believed in holding onto everything, squirreling it all away.”

Just as Warhol’s exceptionally energetic liking is nowhere more evident than in his collecting practices, so too the coincidence of liking and likeness is especially apparent here. Indeed, I think the primary attraction of collecting for Warhol was the way that it attuned his everyday experience to the perception of similarity. For collections are, almost by definition, organized along lines of likeness. The basic move for the collector, as Walter Benjamin reminds us, is “detach[ing] the object from its original functional relations” and placing it into a “magic circle” where it can mingle with other things that it resembles. By placing the mimetic faculty at the center of one’s everyday practice, collecting promotes a particular affective openness to the world. For the collector, as Benjamin notes, “the rhythm of perception and experience is altered in such a way that everything—even the seemingly most neutral—comes to strike us; everything concerns us.” That is, figuring out how to like everything and everybody is a question of establishing a collector’s relationship to the world.

the hospital: “The nuns got you interested in collecting stamps, like you did when you were a kid or something. They got you interested in coins again too” (Warhol, Philosophy, p. 11).
32. See Jed Johnson, “Inconspicuous Consumption,” The Andy Warhol Collection. After Jed Johnson broke up with Warhol in 1980 the filling up of rooms with purchases seems to have increased. Bockris suggested that Warhol was trying to compensate for the loss of Jed by filling the rooms with stuff; it could also be seen as an effacement of Jed’s decorating.
35. See Walter Benjamin, “The Collector,” in The Arcades Project, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 205. Collecting, as Benjamin and others have noted, is a common practice among children, a simple way to renew things by taking them out of one sphere and placing them into another where they become like-beings. “Among children, collecting is only one process of renewal; other processes are the painting of objects, the cutting out of figures, the application of stickers—the whole range of childlike modes of acquisition, from touching things to giving them names.” See “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Collecting,” in Selected Writings, vol. 2, p. 487.
It makes sense then that Warhol’s collecting practices far exceeded the realm of purchases. For Warhol, a particular medium was frequently the basis for establishing a collection. He understood, as Benjamin wrote, that it is “another nature which speaks to the camera rather than to the eye,” and that “other nature” is itself enough to create the common space necessary for a collection. In a basic sense, for Warhol, all photographs are similar to each other, as are all paintings, all films, and all audiotapes. So, for instance, the celebrity photos Warhol collected as a child were only the beginning of what would become a massive collection of all kinds of photos. These included not only publicity stills and news clippings, but also the photos he snapped with the small SLR camera he carried around with him for the last fifteen years of his life, which numbered around 66,000 by the time he died. The variety and everydayness of these photographs make it clear that Warhol photographed scenes of even minor visual interest—frequently themselves highlighting visual similarities and series—almost everywhere he went, as if he were trying to live a maximally photographically mediated life.

This principle extended to the other senses as well, and Warhol appeared to seek as many recording devices as possible so that he could, in effect, mediate each of his senses by likeness-generating recorder/collectors. Thus Warhol also assembled an astonishing number of audiotapes of conversations, made with his tape recorder, which he referred to as his “wife,” beginning in 1964 and continuing until his death, producing well over ten thousand hours of audio recording. And then there are the more than six hundred “Time Capsules,” the boxes that Warhol filled with the things that passed through his hands on a daily basis, from receipts and invitations to source material for his work, original drawings, magazines, porn, and clothes. The one sense that was a problem in this regard, of course, was smell, since we do not have a smell-recorder. In the Philosophy, Warhol offers a page-long list of some of the smells he wishes he could have recorded, from Souvlaki and the rubber mats in office buildings to the “good cheap candy smell in the front of Woolworth’s.” His response to this deficit was to collect perfumes, so that he could catalogue various moments of his life by way of the perfume that he was wearing during a given period. In short, it appears as if Warhol strove to have a collector’s relationship to every object of per-

41. Warhol, Philosophy, p. 152.
42. A related point, which I cannot take up here, concerns the collection as a way of managing one’s memories and thus one’s experience of moods, and is most concretely illustrated in Warhol’s collection of perfumes:

I switch perfumes all the time. If I’ve been wearing one perfume for three months,
ception, across the senses, that he possibly could, as a matter of general principle or
daily habit.

If this collector’s approach to the world is attractive primarily as a way to alter
the rhythm of perception and experience so that Warhol can be more attuned to
similarity and thus more capable of liking things, then the moment of acquisition is
when that similarity is actualized. In that instant, the collected object is transformed
from an object of use, one with a clear identity, into a like-being, a semblable. Thus, on
a daily basis, as Rupert Smith observes, the “pleasure of collecting was the act of
acquisition,” the thrill of witnessing the translation of an object into the realm of
resemblances that happens at this moment.  

And within this realm, the collected object is involved in a process of varied and variable belonging and becoming. Not only is each new acquisition itself transformed as it achieves its new significance in
relation to the collection, the new item also slightly reorders the collection as a
whole, thereby transforming every other item by changing the composition of the
group to which it belongs. Therefore, even though collections are organized by a
category or period or type of some sort—the chair, Art Deco style, things I have
touched, photos of celebrities, things designed by Russel Wright, and so on—it is not
quite right to say that a Platonic category or type hovers over the collection.

Because the totality defined by the collection changes with each new item added to it
(like T.S. Eliot’s “tradition” that is altered by the addition of each new work of litera-
ture to it) there is no single model, no ideal chair or ideal teapot hovering over the
various collections and bringing them to coherence. Instead, we might say that col-
lecting is a practice for creating a constantly changing space of commonality shared
by all the objects in the collection.

The actual presence or existence of the collection is thus important as the
device without which there is no realm of similarities for objects to be translated
into. The significance of this resource is indicated by the following story
recounted by Jed Johnson: “He kept most of the rooms locked. He had a routine.
He’d walk through the house every morning before he left, open the door of each
room with a key, peer in, and then relock it. Then at night when he came home

I force myself to give it up, even if I still like wearing it, so whenever I smell it again
it will always remind of those three months. I never go back to wearing it again; it
becomes part of my permanent smell collection . . . of the five senses, smell has the
closest thing to the full power of the past. Smell really is transporting. Seeing hear-
ing touching tasting are just not as powerful as smelling if you want your whole
being to go back to something. Usually, I don’t want to, but by having smells
stopped up in bottles, I can be in control and can only smell the smells I want to,
when I want to, to get the memories I’m in the mood to have. Just for a second.
(Warhol, Philosophy, pp. 150–51.)

44. It also means that the items in a collection are not “examples” (as Susan Stewart has suggest-
45. Wayne Koestenbaum makes the case that Warhol “pursued Platonic forms” in Andy Warhol, p.
160. On the collector working with Platonic forms also see Benjamin, “The Collector,” p. 205.
he would unlock each door, turn the light on, peer in, lock up, and go to bed." 46

This ritual tour through the house was not so that Warhol could pore over his collections, or organize or sort them; nor, I think, was it about the pleasure of possession or ownership as such. Rather, this routine reminded Warhol of his collections’ function as a vital and renewable resource for access to the tremors of becoming and belonging that accompany each new acquisition, a belonging and becoming all the more attractive to the extent that Warhol could also imagine his own participation in it. As Benjamin notes, “our gift for seeing similarity is nothing but a weak rudiment of the once powerful compulsion to become similar and also to behave mimetically.” 47 Warhol’s collecting was also a way for him to imagine being-similar, to imagine himself belonging to a community of semblables.

In this imaginative identificatory process, it is possible that Warhol’s preference for the flawed object, the one with signs of use, was an aid. Such a preference, unusual for collectors, can be seen clearly in the show of Warhol’s folk art, Folk and Funk, and his famous exhibition Raid the Icebox, culled from the storage of the Rhode Island School of Design’s Museum of Art, where to the puzzlement of the museum staff, Warhol sought to exhibit flawed or otherwise overlooked items such as a warped table and Windsor chairs that had been kept for spare parts. 48 Such traces of use, along with the effort to predict an object’s future value, are aspects of the object that draw what Benjamin calls the collector’s “physiognomonic” interest. 49 Such an interest, which may motivate the effort to “read into” the object, can also thereby facilitate a mimetic attempt to get inside or behind it. Moreover, signs of wear or flaws, like the mistakes that were part of the silkscreen process, indicate a way in which these objects fail to be self-identical—in which they do not manage to successfully match up to their type or ideal—which as I will discuss in more detail below, is, for Warhol, one of the most powerful ways that people can experience their being-in-common.

This is to say that the collector’s approach to daily experience not only structured Warhol’s experience of objects, but also of persons. As Gerard Malanga noted, Warhol was “a people collector.” 50 This collecting could take many forms. For instance, Warhol here describes one of his many photographic practices: “During

46. Quoted in Bockris, Andy Warhol, p. 395.
48. See Brant and Cullman, Andy Warhol’s Folk and Funk; there the curators take note of Warhol’s preference for the worn, used object, noting, for example, “When Andy shops for American quilts, he chooses strongly stylistic examples, but always ones that show wear. ‘I actually like them the best,’ he declares. ‘They look old—they are secondhand,’” p. 12. Also see Raid the Icebox 1, with Andy Warhol (Providence: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1969), especially Daniel Robbins, “Confessions of Museum Director,” pp. 8–15, and David Bourdon, “Andy’s Dish,” pp. 17–24.
49. Benjamin calls collectors the “physiognomists in the world of things” in “Unpacking My Library,” p. 487.
this period [1969] I took thousands of Polaroids of genitals. Whenever somebody came up to the Factory, no matter how straight-looking he was, I’d ask him to take his pants off so I could photograph his cock and balls. It was surprising who’d let me and who wouldn’t.” In the 1970s, he continued and expanded his photography of male genitals to include sessions of men having sex, some of which became the basis for two series of paintings, *Torsos* and *Sex Parts*. In these instances, the camera, and

51. Warhol and Hackett, *POPism*, p. 294. Ultra Violet remembers: “Especially to the boys, Andy says, ‘Bend down. I’d like to Polaroid your ass.’ The kids are either embarrassed or amused. They have never had such an open proposition. If they are embarrassed they are shown Polaroids of other kids.” See Ultra Violet (Isabelle Collin Dufresne), *Famous for 15 Minutes: My Years with Andy Warhol* (New York: Avon Books, 1988), p. 157, pp. 155–56. While it seems unlikely that both Warhol and Ultra Violet would have invented this story, neither the Andy Warhol Foundation nor the Andy Warhol Museum can confirm the existence of these Polaroids. Sally King-Nero, Executive Editor of the Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné at the Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts writes that “there are only roughly 200 Polaroids in the collection with a film date of 1969 and the subject matter varies considerably. It is not until 1972 when Polaroid introduced the SX-70 land camera, replacing the wet peel-apart development process with dry films able to develop in light, that a real spike in Warhol’s Polaroid productivity occurs. Even in 1972, there are few examples of male genitals in the collection. It is not until 1977, when Warhol begins to work on the *Torsos* series, that the number of Polaroids of genitals reaches the ‘thousands’ mark.” Email communication, Jan. 22, 2010. Matt Wrbican, archivist at the Andy Warhol Museum, confirms that it is possible, however, that these Polaroids, or some of them, may yet be found in one of the so-far unarchived Time Capsules.

52. See Bob Colacello’s recollections of these series, in *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), especially pp. 337–38. Some of these images are reproduced in *Andy
then later (with the Polaroids for *Torsos* and *Sex Parts*) painting and “art” itself, are the props that permit Warhol to ask men to drop their pants for him.53 Earlier in his life, the sketch pad had done the trick. Of course, being drawn and being photographed are not the same, and they each alter “the rhythm of perception and experience” in their own striking way for model and artist alike. But in each instance, by way of a repetitive, accumulative pattern that suggests the practice had been incorporated at the level of habit, Warhol was able to assemble very large collections of images of male genitalia. Nathan Gluck recalls seeing “pads and pads and pads” of cock drawings in Warhol’s apartment in the 1950s.54 Ted Carey remembers how Warhol would go about soliciting models: “Like if he met somebody at a party or

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53. When Bob Colacello complained about Warhol leaving the prints from these sessions all over the office, wondering what other people in the office might think, Warhol replied, “Just tell them it’s *art* Bob. They’re landscapes.” Colacello, *Holy Terror*, p. 337.

54. Gluck: “Andy had this great passion for drawing people’s cocks and he had pads and pads and pads of drawings of people’s lower regions. They’re drawings of the penis, the balls and everything, and there’d be a little heart on them or tied with a little ribbon. And they’re—if he still has them—they’re in pads just sitting around . . . every time he got to know somebody, even as a friend sometimes, he’d say ‘Let me draw your cock.’ Smith: And they would volunteer? Gluck: Yeah, they’d drop their pants, and Andy would make a drawing. That was it. And then he’d say, ‘thank you.’” Patrick Smith, *Conversations*, pp. 62–3.
something, and he thought they were fascinating or interesting, he’d say, ‘Oh, ah, let me draw your cock. I’m doing a cock book.’ And surprising enough, most people were flattered when asked to be drawn. So he had no trouble getting people to draw, and he did a lot of beautiful drawings.”

Although Warhol’s invitation to model as a mode of seduction is not new, the additional enticement of becoming part of a collection, one of many, rather than the one, special beauty is distinctly Warholian. For the men being drawn or photographed, entering into the artist’s collection allows them to see themselves—or more precisely, their genitals—becoming “a Warhol,” and thereby to be initiated into a special realm of similars, at once identified with Warhol and liked by him. They become “wanted men,” a being-wanted constituted, as Richard Meyer put it, “collectively rather than monogamously.” At the moment of this transition, these men, wanted in their being-similar and similar in their being-wanted, become like-beings, resemblers. By way of this Warholian “identity game,” as their cocks are initiated into this common space of belonging and becoming where they can mingle with all the other cocks in Warhol’s ever expanding collection, the men Warhol photographs and draws are momentarily freed from the requirements

55. Cited in Patrick Smith, Conversations, p. 94.
of everyday, “straight” identity (of “acting grown up”). And, once thus released, these men might be surprised by the emergence of their own unexpected likes.

Of course, the creation of a collection here is not just a prop for those who decide to take off their pants, it is also a way for Warhol to embolden himself—“no matter how straight looking” the potential model was—where he might otherwise be shy or ashamed. Here we have another striking instance where occupying the role of collector recast Warhol’s mode of attunement to the world, altering the rhythm and perception of experience so that his liking can come out. This liking, it should be noted, is distinct from what is usually called desire. Whereas desire suggests lack, since one desires what one does not have, in this case Warhol likes precisely what he already has, and has lots of. He can like acquiring new drawings or photos only because he already has a collection of them. This is an erotic economy based on already having, on non-utilitarian accumulation, not on identity, difference, or absence.

“Liking things is like being a machine,” Warhol remarks in the Swenson interview, because “you do it over and over again.” Each act of liking repeats an earlier one. To put it in psychoanalytic terms, we might say that Warhol understood and took full advantage of the fact that liking, like all affects, operates by “transferring” from old objects onto new ones along paths determined by likeness.57 In this under-

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57. See also Sigmund Freud, “The Dynamics of the Transference” (1912) and “Further
standing, each like is always a “new edition or facsimile,” as Freud puts it, of earlier likes; we never like anything for the first time.⁵⁸ Indeed, if liking works along paths of likeness, from one similarity to the next, then the very act of liking assembles, as it moves through the world, a series of similar objects, a collection.

Warhol’s emphasis on likeness and on commonality does not mean, however, that singularity is here unvalued. Indeed, the field of similarity established by the collected creates a uniquely ideal site for appreciating specificity. Former Warhol Superstar Ultra Violet describes Warhol’s interest in his photo collection. “He has an extensive collection of photographs of naked people. He delights in the fact that every organ of the body varies immensely in shape, form and color from one individual to the next. Just as one torso or one face tells a different story from another, so, to Andy, one penis or one ass tells a different story from another.”⁵⁹ Outside of the space of likeness, as, for example, on the pages of an academic journal, the image of a penis signifies first of all as “a penis,” i.e., not something else. But alongside other penises, the specificity, the “story” of each one emerges. In other words, specificity or singularity, as distinct from what we might call “identity,” emerges only in a field of similarity, a being-in-common.⁶⁰ In Warhol’s cock collections we have a queer erotic economy based on a society of similarities and singularities, the more the merrier.

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In a less obvious way the Screen Tests also originate in a homoerotic context. As Callie Angell documents, the first Screen Tests were filmed for the film series Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys, which was inspired by the New York Police Department’s Thirteen Most Wanted pamphlet that had also been the basis for Warhol’s censored Thirteen Most Wanted Men mural at the 1964 World’s Fair.⁶¹ This replacement of a

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⁵⁸ Freud writes: “What are transferences? They are new editions or facsimiles of the tendencies and fantasies which are aroused and made conscious during the progress of the analysis; but they have this peculiarity, which is characteristic for their species, that they replace some earlier person by the person of the physician.” He also refers to transfersances as “new impressions or reprints,” noting that in some cases there are “revised editions.” Dora—An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 138.


juridical with a homoerotic “wanting” not only plays with and points up the fact that same-sex desire was itself criminal, as Richard Meyer has argued,\(^62\) it also exemplifies Warhol’s persistent capacity for finding series of likenesses as potential sites for enacting his own liking—even, or especially, if the original series needed to be transferred to another context, or perverted by a prurient point of view.\(^63\)

*Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys* generated a companion series, *Thirteen Most Beautiful Women*, each of which came to include many more than thirteen members, suggesting that the initial premise of the exclusivity of a limited series was not taken especially seriously by Warhol, even if it may have been appealing to his sitters.\(^64\) Moreover, as he remarks in his *Philosophy*, he had a principled opposition to singling out some beauties as opposed to others, remarking that “I’ve never met a person that I couldn’t call a beauty” and if “everybody’s not a beauty then nobody is.”\(^65\) And, as with Warhol’s collecting more generally, once he got going on a collection, he found it difficult to stop, and so the project far exceeded these initial series. He ended up producing 472 of these individual short portrait films between 1964 and 1966, filming a range of poets, artists, writers, filmmakers, musicians, dancers, models, speed freaks, opera queens, Harvard students, hustlers, wealthy art collectors, art dealers, a few celebrities, and several of Warhol’s friends, collaborators, and assistants.\(^66\)

As the project expanded in scope, it may have also been attractive to Warhol as an aid in a task that he found particularly challenging: representing the Factory and the people who passed through there. In *POPism*, Warhol remarks that journalists often were puzzled by their attempts to write about the Factory and that he himself was no help because “I never knew what was going on myself.”\(^67\) Here, he describes one particular effort to apprehend the Factory during the summer of 1966:

> The Factory felt more strange to me than ever that summer. I loved it,

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\(^62\) Meyer writes: “The title of the mural—initially known as *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* but often referred to more simply, as the *Most Wanted Men*—turns on a double entendre: it is not only that these men are wanted by the FBI, but that the very act of ‘wanting men’ constitutes a form of criminality if the wanter is also male, if, say, the wanter is Warhol.” See Meyer, “Warhol’s Clones,” p. 98.

\(^63\) Billy Name on *Thirteen Most Beautiful*: “Rather than the ‘Thirteen Most Wanted Men,’ what you should really do is “Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys,” and “The Thirteen Most Beautiful Girls,” and that’s what everybody would like. This is Andy’s overt reasoning; this is how he would talk to you.” From Billy Name, interview by Mirra Bank Brockman, December 17, 1991, Andy Warhol Foundation; cited by Angell, *Andy Warhol Screen Tests*, p. 244.

\(^64\) There are forty-two Screen Tests of thirty-five men, and forty-seven Screen Tests of thirty different women. See Angell, *Andy Warhol Screen Tests*, pp. 243–59.

\(^65\) Warhol, *The Philosophy*, p. 61–2. The full passage is pertinent here: “For a year once it was in all the magazines that my next movie was going to be *The Beauties*. The publicity for it was great, but then I could never decide who should be in it. If everybody’s not a beauty, then nobody is, so I didn’t want to imply that the kids in *The Beauties* were beauties but the kids in my other movies weren’t so I had to back out on the basis of the title. It was all wrong.”

\(^66\) For detailed information about the Screen Tests, including who is depicted in each test, how they knew Warhol or came to the Factory, see Angell’s *Andy Warhol Screen Tests*.

\(^67\) Warhol, *POPism*, p. 130.
I thrived there, but the atmosphere was totally impenetrable—even when you were in the middle of it, you didn’t know what was going on.

The air didn’t really move. I would sit in a corner for hours, watching people come and go and stay, not moving myself, trying to get a complete idea, but everything stayed fragmentary; I never knew what was really happening. I’d sit there and listen to every sound: the freight elevator moving in the shaft, the sound of the grate opening and closing when people got in and went out, the steady traffic all the way downstairs on 47th Street, the projector running, a camera shutter clicking, a magazine page turning, somebody lighting a match, the colored sheets of gelatin and sheets of silver paper moving when the fan hit them, the high school typists hitting a key every couple of seconds, the scissors shearing as Paul cut out E.P.I. clippings and posted them into scrapbooks, the water running over the prints in Billy’s darkroom, the timer going off, the dryer operating, someone trying to make the toilet work, men having sex in the back room, girls closing compacts and makeup cases. The mixture of the mechanical sounds and the people sounds made everything seem unreal and if you heard a projector going while you were watching somebody, you felt that they must be a part of the movie, too.68

While Warhol loved the Factory and thrived in it, he found its atmosphere to be “impenetrable;” it did not present itself for knowledge or representation. Despite his efforts to get a “complete idea” by watching people come and go, “everything stayed fragmentary.” In response to this difficulty, Warhol’s tactic for apprehending the Factory is deceptively simple: he shifts his mode of perception from watching to listening. There is a great deal to say, I think, about this almost Whitmanesque list of sounds, not least that it itself immediately gives us fairly precise knowledge of “what was going on” in the Factory. Most relevant to my concerns here is the way that, in listening instead of watching, it is as if Warhol becomes a tape recorder, in complete identification with his “wife.” By recording all the sounds like a machine, he transforms a simultaneously fragmentary and impenetrable body of information into a manageable medium-based series.69 That is, instead of getting a “complete idea,” he assembles a collection, a collection of “every sound” in the Factory, achieving an overall perspective and producing a commons for all the activities taking place.

68. Ibid., pp. 171–72.
69. On the fantasy of being a tape recorder, see Warhol, Philosophy, p. 199, where he remarks, “My mind is like a tape recorder with one button—Erase.” The relationship between memory and collecting in Warhol is a related, complex topic in its own right.
in the Factory, a commons that appeared impossible on the perspectival, fragmentary level of vision. And within this common space, “the people sounds” and “the mechanical sounds” are mixed together in a way that made everything seem “unreal,” which is for Warhol a tricky, well-nigh dialectical word.

One thing he means here and elsewhere is that when something becomes “unreal” it becomes precisely more emotionally compelling. Consider, for instance, a related passage in *POPism*, where Warhol is discussing his viewing of his twenty-five-hour film **** in 1967, a compilation of many of the reels of film Warhol had shot over the past year. He writes, “Seeing it all together that night somehow made it seem more real to me (I mean more unreal, which was actually more real) than it had when it was happening.”

I take Warhol to mean that only when his experiences from the last year had been translated into the “unreal” field of cinematic mediation, out of the (“real”) means-ends rationality of everyday life, where any number of obligations and demands, anxieties, and desires might require the mimetic faculty to be somewhat dulled, only there can the mimetic faculty roam free, and emotions from the past, indeed from the very event being filmed, can finally travel along the paths of similarity they need to make it out into the world, enabling them to become “real.”

Perhaps, then, like the trip around his townhouse to peer in at his collections, Warhol’s listing of every-sound-in-the-Factory re-attunes him to similarity and its production and in so doing allows him to apprehend the Factory as “unreal.” In this common space of sound semblables, what might in other contexts be a target for attack, such as “men having sex in the back room,” enter the scene without the need for special notice or identification. Yet, as part of what defines the collection of “things-heard-at-the-Factory,” the singularity of this sound forms part of the “magic circle” in relation to which all the other sounds acquire their own significance as well. Warhol can then “see” the visual realm from the point of view of this newly likeable, emotionally compelling “unreal” sound collection he has assembled: if you heard a projector going while you were watching somebody, you felt that they must be a part of the movie, too.” Warhol returns to the visual, then, by way of sound, permitting it also to enter a space of thoroughgoing mediation, the unreal-more-real. The ambient quality of sound, of the camera running, has the additional value of penetrating the entire Factory, which means that Warhol could, when looking around the Factory imagine that whomever he was looking at “must be part of the movie too,” even if (or especially when) the person he was looking at was not being filmed at all.

If Warhol’s aim was to relate to everyone in the Factory as if they were “part of the movie, too,” then it is not difficult to see the appeal of the Screen Tests. Without the need for a scenario or a cast, the Screen Tests gave Warhol a pretext for asking anyone at all if they wanted to be filmed. Moreover, unlike **** or other of Warhol’s films, and like his cock book or audiotapes, the Screen Tests

transfer the Factory’s residents and visitors out of the everyday realm of identity into a specific cinematic world where their participation in an assembly of likenesses is quite easy to apprehend, in almost pedagogical fashion, readily available for contemplation as such.

In this instance, the similarity is established not only by the nature of the medium itself and the three-minute reels on which each Screen Test was recorded, but also by the specific formal principles shaping them. As Callie Angell notes, the Screen Tests were based on standard forms of photo portraiture—the ID photo, or photo-booth portrait—and as such followed a similar set of basic rules: the camera should not move, the background should be plain, subjects well-lit and centered, and the sitter should remain face forward, stay as still as possible, and refrain from talking, smiling, and even blinking for the three minutes it takes the reel to finish. 71 This means that many, though by no means all, of the Screen Tests capture faces trying to stay motionless or at least maintain a pose. Everyone responds differently to the situation (some disregarding Warhol’s directions entirely), but no person remains entirely still for three minutes. In one spectacular test, Anne Buchanan does succeed in not blinking, which leads her eyes to start producing tears about halfway through. That is, even when one is determined to hold a pose, the face is physiologically incapable of it, even over this relatively short duration. As I have argued in another essay, the Screen Tests are dramas of self-presentation, and what they dramatize above all is the singularity of each sitter’s failure to hold onto an identity, the singular way that each person comes together and falls apart. 72 In their display of faces composing and uncomposing, the Screen Tests present the self as a series of imperfect imitations, an accumulation of likenesses. 73 Thus, in effect, Warhol stages a situation in which everyone can succeed in failing, offering, as Whitman put it, “vivas to those who have fail’d.”

Such failures, as I mentioned earlier, may, for Warhol, be the experiences most likely to produce a feeling of sharing, to enact a sense of being-in-common,

71. Angell, Andy Warhol Screen Tests, p. 14. As Angell points out, the later Screen Tests were sometimes more experimental, less rule-bound, sometimes involving more movement on the part of the sitter, or camera movement including close-ups. Some of these were projected behind the Velvet Underground, during the famous “Exploding Plastic Inevitable.” On the use of film in the EPI, see Branden Joseph, “My Mind Split Open: Andy Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable,” Grey Room 08 (Summer 2002), pp. 80–107.
73. The Screen Test series called Six Months illustrates this idea even more concretely. The idea behind Six Months was to do daily screen tests of his boyfriend at the time, Philip Fagan, thereby registering the passage of time. Unfortunately, they broke up after three months, so the project is truncated. Like a celebrity silkscreen, Six Months multiplies Fagan, not through paint smudges or blurred edges but through changes in lighting, hairstyle, and pose. What emerges is the production of a series of likenesses of a single person, highlighting this sense of the “individual” subject also as a collection, one who does not contain multitudes but is himself multitudinous. At the same time it creates a certain “star effect” for his boyfriend, reproducing his many star roles, the different versions of him that various fans have incorporated. The series thus suggests that for Warhol the principle of liking, being based on a collection of likenesses, extends to the individual person as well. On Six Months, see Angell, pp. 217–42.
and they are, in any event, the experiences with which he has the most evident sympathy. For instance, Warhol suggests that the best thing that can happen on a date is that you wait in line for a movie and fail to get in: “never getting in is the most exciting,” he remarks, “but after that waiting to get in is the most exciting.”74 Here, waiting in a line which fails to achieve its apparent purpose of guiding you toward a goal, and thus not getting what you thought you wanted, is not only not something to be disappointed about, it is the most exciting thing that can happen because it produces intimacy; it means you have “shared a whole experience.”75

Warhol seemed to see the Factory as a place where certain failures to fit in or act grown-up could be the basis for just such a potentially exciting or at least comforting experience of commonality. In POPism, Warhol reflected on the aggressive attacks on homosexuality directed at the Factory and speculated that it was not homosexuality as such that was being attacked so much as the way that gays in the Factory were “strong enough to say you were different and actually have fun with it” instead of being “hypocritical and covert.” That, Warhol thought, “incensed a lot of people who wanted old stereotypes to stay around.” Why, he wondered, don’t these people attacking the Factory “care about all the miserable people in the world who just can’t fit into stock roles”?76 Not fitting into a stock role is a particular experience of failure, distinct from waiting in line and failing to get into the movie. In line, there are other persons present, indeed they are constitutive of the situation. Not fitting into a stock role, by contrast, is generally experienced as an isolating and alienating phenomenon, as if everyone has gotten into the movie except you.77 Warhol’s fantasy about the Factory, it would seem, is that it could be a place where a range of misfits might find a place to experience their mis-fitting in common. And it may have been not only a fantasy. As Warhol commented, “The Factory brought out strange things in people. By strange I don’t necessarily mean ‘wild! Uninhibited!’ I mean atypical—it could even bring out, say, a puritanism that a person didn’t know he had.”78

74. Warhol, Philosophy, p. 115.
77. Along similar lines, Warhol writes about his interest in leftovers, “things that were discarded, that everybody knew were no good.” He writes, “when I see an old Esther Williams movie and a hundred girls are jumping off their swings, I think of what the auditions must have been like and about all the takes where maybe one girl didn’t have the nerve to jump when she was supposed to, and I think about her left over on the swing. So that take of the scene was a leftover on the editing room floor—an out-take—and the girl was probably a leftover at that point—she was probably fired—so the whole scene is much funnier than the real scene where everything went right, and the girl who didn’t jump is the star of the out-take.” Warhol, Philosophy, p. 93.
78. Warhol, POPism, p. 130. For anecdotal accounts of the Factory atmosphere, see especially the collection of photographs and interviews The Velvet Years: Warhol’s Factory 1965–1967. Here are a few
common space provided by the Factory, and modeled in various of Warhol’s practices, singularities could be discovered and even flourish.

In this production of a common and the promotion of its pleasures, collecting practices assist in several regards. For instance, Warhol here talks about the emotional impact that his tape recording could have.

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 any more if they were really having the problems or if they were just performing.79

When a problem becomes a tape, it stops being a problem, not only for those listening, but also for those performing for the tape. Not unlike many of Warhol’s films (and the Screen Tests in particular), Warhol’s tape-recording, in the words of David James, “makes performance inevitable” and “constitutes being as performance.”80 In so doing, a problem loses its depressing “reality” and moves from the realm of the isolated individual, the interior or alienated space of emotional problems, into a common place where it dwells alongside all the other tapes. It is pluralized, publicized, and shared. Other people get interested in it, and indeed the person with the problem may become interested in it as well, instead of depressed by it. By way of transference into the common space of the collection, what had been alienating or depressing becomes the source of a connection to other people.

In Warhol, the practice of collecting, facilitated in the instance of the audiotapes and the Screen Tests by technology, in its ability to produce assemblages of likenesses, does the work of exteriorizing and representing the collectivity at the Factory that Lenin described the party doing for the proletariat.81

81. In “What Is to be Done?,” Lenin presents the party as a solution to the theoretical and tactical problem within Marx’s work concerning how a class-in-itself can become a class-for-itself. The Lenin Anthology, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1975), pp. 12–114. The problem is formulated most famously in the Eighteenth Brumaire, where Marx lamented that while a class (in this case the small peasants) may be formed by a group of persons who live in similar conditions and share a set of economic interests (interests opposed to those of another group of persons), such a class may nonetheless have no way of communicating among themselves and representing themselves to themselves, and may therefore have no awareness that their interests are shared by others, which makes it impossible for the class to defend those
In so doing, Warhol’s project manages to skirt some of the difficulties associated with representing a collectivity, namely the reduction of an essentially diverse or plural group to a unity, such as “the people” or “the nation,” or to an undifferentiated “masses.” Warhol preserves singularity and multiplicity, indeed actively promotes and emphasizes it. He represents in the Screen Tests a “plurality which persists as such,” Paolo Virno’s gloss for “the multitude,” the very plurality of which can make representation and togetherness a challenge. 82 We might say, to borrow from Jean-Luc Nancy, that the Screen Tests present a collective of “singulars singularly together, where the togetherness is neither the sum, nor the incorporation, nor the ‘society,’ nor the ‘community,’ The togetherness of singularities is singularity ‘itself.’ It ‘assembles’ them insofar as it spaces them; they are ‘linked’ insofar as they are not unified.”83

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interests. Thus, as Marx writes, “they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.” See Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), pp. 123–24. For Lenin, the way to move this “class-in-itself,” one that is not conscious of itself and is thus without agency, to a “class-for-itself,” a self-conscious class capable of acting in its interest, was by way of the party, through which political professionals would do the work of representing the working class to itself from outside the space of economic struggle. Here, the newspaper is a key device for enabling workers in different factories to realize the similarities of their situations. See “What Is to be Done?,” esp. pp. 43–44 on newspapers.


On the local level, individual Screen Tests solicit an aesthetic experience that corresponds to the relations of resemblance that the series as a whole represents. They do this, in part, by shifting us out of our habitual ways of looking at faces, recalling us to the early childhood moment when our entire world is composed of the other’s face, a moment before the self, as it were, before we have learned to be an identity.

The Screen Tests most obviously recall an infant’s mode of looking in the way that they encourage sustained, close gazing at another’s face. One of the first things one may realize in watching a Screen Test, is how rarely, as adults, we spend even four uninterrupted minutes freely, openly, gazing at another’s more or less stationary face. Such interocular gazing is the very mark of the closest intimacy; only when in love, or about to fight, or on drugs (as Warhol notes about kids on acid at the Easter Sunday Central Park Be-In)\(^{84}\) are we likely to engage in this kind of looking. However, for infants, as Daniel Stern notes, “the face is the most attractive and fascinating object that exists.”\(^{85}\) Consequently, as infants, the time we

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84. “They could stand there staring at each other for hours without moving.” Warhol, *POPi sm*, p. 207.
spend looking at faces, proportionally, is greater than at any other time in our lives. Indeed, because infant vision is involuntarily attracted to precisely the visual elements that compose the face, this looking, which can go on for long periods, is a kind of “obligatory attention.”

One of the interesting potential effects of such durational looking, Stern suggests, is a split between the focus of vision and the focus of attention.\(^{86}\) That is, after looking at the same spot for a few moments, one’s attention tends to drift away from that spot even as one’s eyes remained focused on it. As our attention and focus split off from one another, visual distortions are produced. We are all familiar with this phenomenon: stare at a spot on the wall, a leaf, a word on the page for long enough and its starts to shift and shimmer, the space around collapses and folds, colors seem to hover where they had not been.\(^{87}\) The Screen Tests (along with other of his minimal films, and, in a different way, his double-screen films) promote this split between vision and attention and its hallucinatory side effects, effects that are heightened by the frequent use of lighting to produce high contrasts in the contours of the face, and the fact that the films were filmed at sound speed (24 frames per second) and shown at silent

\(^{86}\) Ibid., pp. 17–22.

\(^{87}\) Because this hallucinatory effect is a basic feature of infant vision, for infants “there are no ‘dead’ inanimate objects out there . . . only different forces at play.” Ibid., p. 21.
speed (16 frames per second), which makes the movements of the face seem slightly “off.”

But in mimicking the durational attention to a face characteristic of infant looking, the Screen Tests eliminate the essential feature of that looking, its mutuality, the communication and attunement that occurs between the faces of infants and their caretakers. Yet, paradoxically, it is precisely this subtraction of the possibility of response that makes the experience compelling, indeed infant-like. Only because the other’s face is not mimetically open to us can we be mimetically open to it. For, it is only minus the concern with the other’s reaction to us, when we are free from any number of our everyday face-looking habits, that we can actually engage in the sustained, dreamy, emotionally open, intensely interested looking that characterizes infant experience. We do not need to look with sympathy or smile in return at the friend, nor must we look away with a yawn or shy distraction if caught looking at a stranger. Perhaps most significantly, we are freed not to seek to see in the eyes and expressions of the other signs of our own being loved and desired. Nor, for that matter, do we need to keep a composed face, or indeed be or have an identity at all. We are returned to an unself-conscious state, where perhaps we can forget to “act grown-up” and set aside the need to police our capacity and attraction for being alike. In so doing, then, we are actually returned to that mode of attunement where, as Merleau-Ponty remarks, “I live in the facial expression of the other, as I feel him living in mine.”

Yet, we cannot feel Freddy Herko or Rufus Collins or Ann Buchanan or Allen Ginsberg living in our face. Moreover, we have this experience in relation to a face whose own status as a singular collection of likeness is being dramatized. Thus, if, as Vittorio Gallese suggests, perceiving the movement in another’s face results in an internal, embodied simulation of it, then when we watch the Screen Tests we simulate, or co-experience, our own loss of identity. And we become aware, instead, of ourselves as accumulations of likenesses, at least for a moment.

In the Screen Tests, then, we are recalled to the myriad pleasures and confusions of being-like and at the same time reminded of their absence. We get up from the experience of watching, say, a collection of ten Screen Tests a bit dazed, in a perceptual world distorted by resemblances, but wondering where and how we might have this experience not only with a filmed face, but with other persons in our everyday lives, and why we do not. We find ourselves in the mood for being-like. Perhaps, to this end, we will have picked up Warhol’s trick for relating to the people he saw as if they “were in the movie, too,” and then we may wish that we were as well.