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**Warhol and Nico: Negotiating Europe from Strip-Tease to Screen Test**

Warhol, as was known, liked boring things. He said as much. Nico, on the other hand, didn’t so much like boring things as performed being bored. The mutual interest in liking and being bored is one of the reasons that Warhol and Nico likely had an affinity for one another. It would bolster their mutual appeal and how they related to each other as detached, difficult and avant-garde figures of the 1960s. Warhol’s reputation was one in which he rarely gave much away. He cultivated an elusive and monosyllabic public persona, often answering questions with ‘gee’ and ‘wow’, the very opposite in fact to how he was in private, with close friends. The same may be said of Nico, who cultivated a persona that reinforced a stereotype of affectless European ennui, languorous and obscure in interviews. Nico, who was from Germany, was thrust upon the art-rock group The Velvet Underground as their chanteuse, of course at Warhol insistence as the group’s manager – a strategy that reinforced the visual and sonic dissonance between Nico and The Velvets as ‘something beautiful to counteract the screeching ugliness’ (Bockris 2014: 104). Alongside her album sleeve credit as chanteuse, Nico appeared in many Warhol films between 1966 and 1967, as did her more reluctant Velvet associates. Warhol and Nico’s story, specifically the films that emerged from that relationship, provides ample and suggestive commentary on a shared history of Europe, fashion, iconicity and boredom. In the 1950s, Warhol was drawing Parisian couture and illustrating Dior perfumes for New York department stores and Nico was living that life as a young woman modelling couture, including Dior. In the 1960s, Warhol would turn to painting and underground cinema while Nico found aspiring work in European cinema, although with little real success, or rather success in an alignment between who she perceived herself to be, intellectual and esoteric, and the films that most expressed that persona. This article elaborates upon Warhol and Nico’s relationship in creating art as ‘mutual muses’,1 and establishing an artistic friendship based on new ways of being and thinking around artistic collaboration. It also gives an account of the years before they arrived at their most iconic periods and what they created and fashioned around themselves, as well as an insight into Warhol and Nico’s formative years, before turning to their shared film work.

1. WARHOL’S EUROPE BEFORE NICO

After graduating in June 1949 from Carnegie Institute of Technology with a BA in Pictorial Design, a youthful 21-year-old Andrew Warhola moved from his hometown in Pittsburgh to begin a new life in New York at the beginning of the heyday of advertising and commercial art. That summer he was hired by Glamour magazine’s Tina Fredericks for an aptly titled magazine commission Success is a Job in New York (1955). During this pre-Pop art period Warhol established himself as one of the most sought after commercial illustrators in New York and was represented by the agent Fritzie Miller. He had a long list of clients and employers, including the New York Times (from 1955 to 1962), and work spanning newspaper ads, magazine covers for Glamour, Interiors, Charm, Seventeen, Vogue, Ladies’ Home Journal, Dance Magazine and Harper’s Bazaar, record covers and book sleeves, theatre set design, cookbook illustration, Christmas cards for Tiffany’s, in addition to small privately published books illustrated with boys, cats and shoes, and often done collaboratively with other gay men.2 Warhol’s early success, as is often repeated, was down to a hard work ethic and an ability to realize his clients’ briefs quickly and

Warhol would excel as an illustrator of fashion accessories and had a particular affinity for drawing shoes. To be a commercial illustrator in New York in the 1950s, particularly those whose work related to fashion, accessories, cosmetics and window display, was a stereotypically gay milieu (Fairbrother 1989), vis-à-vis the more ‘straight’ advertising imagined by the cable series Mad Men (2007–15). Warhol’s career in the commercial art and design culture of New York in the 1950s included many repeat commissions for fashion illustration, many of them directly related to the Paris fashion and couture houses (and their perfumes). Paris fashion was exclusive, elitist, aspirational and inaccessible to most, orbiting around a roster of key names such as Balenciaga, Dior, Chanel, Guerlain, Lanvin and Balmain. Couture was still the dominant model of the fashion industry, and ready-to-wear, as pioneered by Yves Saint-Laurent, had not yet been realized to challenge the staid structure and elitism. Thus, the names and reputations of the French fashion houses carried enormous weight of cultural prestige in establishing Paris as an epicentre and byword for modern style, luxury and sophistication.

Despite his prolific career throughout the 1950s as ‘the best-known, highest paid fashion illustrator in New York, making upwards of $100,000 a year’ (Bockris 2003: 11) it was not until 1961 that a major turning point in Warhol’s relationship with art and visual culture took place. The year 1961 marks the first of Warhol’s paintings such as Superman and Where is Your Rupture?, followed a few years later by the three-dimensional Brillo Box (Soap Pads) (1964) and Kellogg Cornflake Box (1964) sculptures that were attentive to American culture and the ‘class specificity’ of recognizable national brands (Grudin 2010: 211). Given the cultural and social elitism of Paris fashion that was the focus of Warhol’s commercial art, the new interest in brands that targeted the ‘blue collar’ woman’s world is notable (Silver 1992: 197). This was the early stages of Pop art, and those first Pop paintings by Warhol, like Superman and Dick Tracey (1961), were first exhibited in the store window of Bonwitt Teller as a backdrop for European-inspired fashions – a mischievous gesture on Warhol’s part that signals the polarities between class, culture and taste between Europe and America all unfolding in the mise-en-scène of the department store window. Warhol’s interest in both elitism and ubiquity, his ‘consistently ambivalent relationship to both mass culture and high art’ (Buchloh 1989: 55), is seemingly mapped onto the differences between Europe and America in that moment of window display as ersatz exhibition. A perusal of the many commercial contracts that Warhol undertook in this period were for European fashion, accessories, cosmetics and perfumes – for example, the illustration Great Perfumes of France (1960) for Harper’s Bazaar. Notably, Great Perfumes of France evokes the seriality that would characterize Warhol’s fine art in its repetition of perfume bottles. The illustrations from this period are apt to demonstrate Warhol’s skill to convey ideas of Europeanness, good taste, and sophistication following some of the established French fashion illustrators such as Erte, Vertes and Rene Grurau. In one advert for I. Miller in 1956, the leather shoe company Warhol began working for in 1955, he illustrated with a single ornate shoe, with the copy already assuming that the reader knows who the French couturier Paul Poiret is. It reads: We want you to meet Andre Perugia and see the shoe he made for Paul Poiret in 1918, which electrified Paris and the entire fashion world. I. Miller’s current interpretations, shown in Vogue magazine have a delicacy and elegance, flawless in the light of 1956. M. Perugia will be in the I. Miller Salon at 689 Fifth Avenue on October the 9th. Also in the Salon, our rich collection of Reay-to-put-on Perugias: beside the second descendants, our slender V-Lines and the exquisitely ornamented pumps he makes for us in Paris!

In another I. Miller ad occupying one half of a page in the New York Times (c. 1957), Warhol illustrates a black stiletto (the Perugia Pump) with a large stamp over the shoe declaring ‘Made in France’. Alongside these I. Miller shoe ads and their evocation of French fashion culture there were also ads for a range of imported products from France that Warhol illustrated: for example, Perfumes Bottles and Lipstick (1962, advertising Guerlain’s L’heure blue and Coty lipstick) and Santa Claus and Perfume Bottles (1962, with illustrations for perfumes by Chanel, Lanvin, Balmain and Guerlain). When Warhol illustrated American products, even they sought association with Europe, such as I. Miller’s European Shell shoe line (1957) with copy that reads ‘speaks authentic French with its low-cut décolletage’ cheekily hinting at a shoe that reveals more flesh than is usual.

French culture occupied an esteemed position in post-war America (Schwartz 2007) and was in some contexts deeply politicized. Jackie Kennedy’s iconic pink suit from the day of Kennedy’s assassination was a Chanel design, an official copy, but one made and attributed to an American designer to mask her ‘unhelpful attachment to Parisian couture’ (Bruzzi 2013: 235). French culture was both a tasteful and a political opposition visà-vis American mass culture and ‘blue collar tastes’ and one may thin kof the high-end department store windows on Fifth Avenue as the nexus for a form of trans-Atlantic cultural exchange between New York shopping and French luxury. A trans-Atlantic exchange managed by another gay sensibility, Gene Moore, who oversaw the windows of Tiffany’s and Bonwitt Teller, and hired a young Andy Warhol. The 1950s of Warhol and Moore is a decade marked by a French obsession from Hollywood musicals An American in Paris (Minnelli, 1951) and Funny Face (Donen, 1956) to the scandalous French imports Et dieu… crea la femme (And God Created Woman) (Vadim, 1956) and Les diaboliques (Diabolique) (Clouzot, 1955) (Schwartz 2007). The presence of French cinema, a cultural experience that was accessible to all in contradistinction to Paris couture, was chiefly promoted by the newly opened French Film Office in New York in 1956. The interest in cultures of ‘the world’ outside America, especially European cultures, marks the post-war shift towards cosmopolitanism, globalization and new sexual mores. Warhol illustrated European sophistication for American consumers but it must also be seen as contiguous with the gay sensibility of his particular commercial context (fashion magazines, window dressing, etc.) and among his like-minded peers: ‘an apparently carefree, successful gay milieu with other young illustrators, artists, photographers, and performers’ (Francis and King 1997: 67). The gay sensibility and milieu of Warhol’s working context also relates to his distinctive uneven and spidery blotted line technique. Warhol’s gayness is literally inked in to the illustrated lines as ‘faux naïveté and playful femininity’ as Mulroney has argued (2014: 559). As Warhol himself remarked in an interview from 1963: those commercial drawings would have feelings; they would have a style. The attitude of those who hired me had feeling or something to it; they knew what they wanted, they insisted; sometimes they got very emotional. The process of doing work in commercial art was machinelike, but the attitude had feeling to it. (Swenson 1963: 18) The idea of feeling, emotion and attitude in relation to commercial illustration, that there was something more to the reception of Warhol’s illustrations and graphics, might not have been as openly articulated then as it is now and one must be attuned to the coded in ways in which homosexuality manifests in post-war America. The working context for many gay commercial artists and window dressers of the period was also one that was characteristically yoked together with a taste in European culture. While not axiomatic, it does appear to be in contradistinction to the straightness and conformity of the decade’s ‘organization man’. Knowledge of Paris fashion and European high culture, a season ticket for the Metropolitan Opera,3 Ballet and modern dance, all were active means of signalling a like-mindedness and potentially offering a relatively safe cultural space for gay men’s social activities, desires and expressions in McCarthy’s America; a time in which homosexuality was defined as a national security risk (Corber 1997). The European Arts were certainly less hostile than the New York art culture of the 1950s, which was dominated by the often-told macho world of the Abstract Expressionists and their womanizing, brawling and boozing. That is not to say that there were other gay cultures in that period with no interest in fashion, Opera and Europe. Warhol was equally fascinated with Christian Dior as he was by the rough trade, hustlers, bikers and proto-pornographic physique magazines that could be found in and around Times Square. Warhol’s attraction to both the sophisticated and the sleazy, high-culture Europe and low-rent New York, Fifth Avenue and Times Square would come to fruition in the 1960s’ Factory years and its melting pot of denizens from widely different social strata. One might even suggest that this is further symbolized in the pairing of the Nico and her aura of European pretension contra Brooklyn Lou Reed’s leather-clad delinquent style. A key work that explores the relationship between Warhol and Europe is a painted folding screen for the Christian Dior perfume Miss Dior (originally launched in 1947) used as a display in the window of the Bonwit Teller department store. I focus here on Dior for its obvious connections because Nico modelled Dior couture while Warhol was illustrating Dior, and in a gesture of coming full circle Dior’s Autumn–Winter 2014 collection (designed by Raf Simons) featured Warhol’s 1950s’ commercial illustrations as prints and appliques on dresses and accessories. The Miss Dior (1957) screen comprised ten wooden panels with an escutcheon motif at the centre stretched horizontally with sections cut out of the panels to contain actual perfume bottles and not dissimilar to an advent calendar. One bottle is placed inside Dior’s head and another at his eye topped by a delicately arched painted eyebrow. All this sits on a fleur-de-lys with French flags on either side. Other bottles are offered up to window-shoppers by mermaids on either side of the escutcheon alongside whimsical illustrations of birds and gift boxes and some stockings with writing that reads ‘bon soir’.4 The screen itself was displayed for a perfume campaign in the summer of 1957, titled ‘Bonwit’s Summer Sorcery’. The Miss Dior screen may have been illustrated anywhere between 1955 and 1957 but it was not displayed in the windows until the Summer Sorcery campaign of 1957. Warhol also illustrated several other large painted folding screens of French perfumes for Bonwit’s, including Fleur De Rocaille, Replique by Raphael (1959), Shalimar de Guerlain (late 1950s), and Carnet du bal by Revilon (1959), which, as Richard Martin notes, reference European art in the screen’s nod to Matisse’s Dance (1997a: 45). Unlike the more literal or straightforward illustrations for Shalimar (text-book Orientalism) and Fleur de Rocaille (gardening tools and flowers), the Miss Dior screen incorporates several playful allusions that hint towards an admiration and artistic kinship between the gay commercial artist and the gay couturier that ‘conspires to “out” Dior’ (Martin 1997b: 74). The other screens for French perfumes are all similar in design, featuring a heraldic shield containing the ‘essence’ of the perfume’s cultural and olfactory associations with the title of the perfume below. Miss Dior, as Richard Martin observes, winks at Christian himself in the way that the Miss is both the perfume’s title and the couturier as ‘a banner made for a queen by a queen’ (1997b: 75). While Warhol was illustrating department store windows for French perfumes, a young German model across the Atlantic was modelling Dior. This other ‘Miss Dior’, originally born Christa Päffgen in Cologne, would later change her name to Nico.

2. NICO PRE-WARHOL

Christa Päffgen was ‘discovered’ as a teenager working in a high-end Berlin department store not unlike the American equivalents Warhol worked for in New York. Christa Päffgen became a successful model throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, changing her name to Nico after the filmmaker Nikos Papatakis. Nico frequently appeared in French and Italian fashion magazines such as Grazia, Gente, Jardin des Modes and Femme Chic and some European films including Federico Fellini’s La dolce vita (1960) and a less well-known film, Strip-Tease (1962), which I discuss below. Nico was in New York by 1963 but did not become associated with The Factory scene and The Velvet Underground until 1966. Warhol may have recognized her from her appearance in fashion magazines and advertising and certainly from La dolce vita. Donald Lyons, a friend of Edie Sedgwick, described Nico as:

… the most beautiful woman who ever lived. She comes out of the European avant-garde, the model world, La dolce vita. […] Nico was billed as the moon goddess. She was a remote and otherworldly creature, with that incredible voice and an incredible sensibility. She was a genuine anarchist, devoted to a kind of destruction, although she has periods of coherence, at various points. (Shore 2016: 88)

The Christa/Nico, who modelled in European fashion magazines and appeared in several iconic Dior couture photographs by Mark Shaw from 1960, is not the Nico that Lyons describes. Nico once conveyed a fashionable and happy-go-lucky sensibility that conformed to the 1950s’ conventions of modelling and fashion photography. This sharply contrasts with ‘Factory Nico’, who is characterized as severe, monosyllabic, introspective, melancholic and stereotypically Teutonic. Factory denizen Ingrid Superstar recalls Nico as ‘a cool Dietrich for a cool generation’ (Bockris and Malanga 2002: 62). Like the illustrated fantasies of European cosmopolitanism conveyed by Warhol’s New York advertising world, Nico was the embodiment of this cosmopolitanism, mobility and sophistication. Nico was the Dior woman, associated with the momentum of post-war fashion’s direction and the forward-looking ethos, the models who shuttled between Paris, London and Rome. Nico’s labour as a model captures the fashion sensibilities of the period in conveying joyful sentiment, energy and mobility. Smiling or head tilted back in a laughing gesture, and always seemingly on the move, the images are always an action in media res, a convention of many European fashion editorials of the 1950s. The sense of being on the go, of things happening at that very moment, which we, like the models, ought to reflect upon, is often a feature of editorials that emphasize the upbeat spirit and vigour. A series of images by fashion photographer Johnny Moncada from 1958 features Nico, smiling, standing in front of enlarged London tabloid newspapers, which provides a graphic backdrop. These fashion images with their mise-en-scène of ‘today’s news’ anticipate the use of tabloids and printing in Pop art, including Warhol’s own work Daily News: Eddie Fisher Breaks Down in Hospital Here; Liz in Rome (1962). However, what is striking about these Moncada photographs of Nico is the combination of mise-en-scène and modelling that produced a sense of newsworthiness and immediacy for fashion; a modelling convention here is always to be in the middle of an action. The fantasy of mobility and aspiration here is coded in the model’s ability to convey happiness and joy through posture and face. Given what emerges from Nico’s more well known later persona in the subsequent decades, a sort of glamour of anti-joy, some accounts suggest she even borders on the sociopathic; this would seem simultaneously revelatory and contradictory. Nico’s performances and presentation of herself in the Warhol films, and in her music and vocal delivery in the solo work, articulate an art of dis-engagement, a dare to consider the ‘value’ of talent beyond an idea of simply being. Factory associate and band manager Danny Fields recounts:

Nico and I were dear friends. Then she got impossible. The first time I met her, she came to my assassination party in ’63. In my loft on 23rd Street, where Edie had lived and everybody. It was one week after Kennedy’s assassination. I was giving the party, because everyone was down from Harvard. Then I thought of calling it off, then I thought I really should have it, because everyone needs a party. Nico came in with Denis Deegan and an Argentine guy and went over to the punch bowl – all I served, because all I could afford was cheap vodka and grapefruit juice. A giant punch bowl. Nico put her head back and ladled the punch right into her mouth; she didn’t even bother with a glass. People stood back: they made this ten-foot circle and asked, ‘who is this woman?’ Then it started to get around that she was the person in La dolce vita. She was very scary. She immediately picked up my friend, Seymour, who was from an Orthodox Jewish family in Brooklyn and very gay. She seduced him and became his lover. She taught him how to have sex with women. (Shore 2016: 88)

The Factory was an experimental and collaborative art and social scene that allowed Nico a new found agency to be scandalous and controversial in ways that allied her to an avant-garde receptivity, and, in doing so, work against the formative dimensions of her career in the passive labouring of fashion modelling. Thus, the stark contrast between the cheerful fashion ingénue of the 1950s and the ‘trancelike, fixated, aloof… beauty as removed from the conventional spaces of warmth as Alaska’ (Bockris 2014: 108) of the 1960s could not be more exaggerated. Nico’s Warhol years seem to be a process that she transitioned into, as one of her European films Strip-Tease (1962), the only film before Warhol in which she has a starring role, might be thought of as a key in the development of her persona that was fairly fixed from the mid-1960s onwards. Strip-Tease is a minor film in the history of French popular cinema. It was released in Europe in 1963 before Nico departed for New York and was subsequently released internationally in English-speaking territories as Sweet Skin. The film’s US release appears to have been double billed with the sexploitation film The Love Statue (Durston, 1965) and pitched with the addition of ballyhoo announcing ‘2 Daring Adult Films’. The evidence for this is a photograph from 1966 by Stephen Shore that depicts Nico, Lou Reed and others standing in front of the World Theatre Cinema in New York in which Sweet Skin and The Love Statue are billed together (Shore 2016: 107), notably the same year as Warhol’s Chelsea Girls. Strip-Tease was sold as another perceived-to-be-racy ‘Continental Film’ that capitalized on the perception that European cinema, especially French and Swedish, was more sexually liberated and clandestine. On the English poster, the original French title has that all-important ‘shot on location in Paris’ claim as an index of the film’s authenticity to deliver the libidinal goods. Strip-Tease also includes acts from well-known strip-tease artists of the time, including Poupée La Rose, Cherry Liberty, Nadia Safari and Rafa Temporel. Fictional films that incorporated real acts and shot-on-location nightclub scenes were common to popular European cinema, as were mailorder 8-mm films of French ‘beauties’. In the credits of the film Nico is billed as a neon sign as Krista Nico, having not yet dropped the Krista, although ‘C’ had been changed to ‘K’, the neon associating her with Paris at night. The name change from Christa, to Krista, to Nico is suggestive of being unsettled in the early phases of her career through the evolving and indeterminate naming of herself. Strip-Tease is the story of a provincial foreign girl Ariane (Nico’s French is spoken with a German accent) arriving in Paris with dreams of becoming a ballet dancer only to find herself in a less successful path as an erotic dancer in Pigalle. Ariane meets a rich playboy at a nightclub, whom she falls in love with, but it turns out that he was dating her only to get back at his wealthy family. Ariane is used and disappointed both in career and in love and, unlike the fantasies presented in Nico’s fashion spreads, offers the character of Ariane no real experience of post-war mobility. However, the run-of-the-mill narrative, which is merely a context for a series of strip-teases, is at odds with Nico’s actual performance in the film, a failure to be enticing and sexy that is also explained narratively but which we can also read reflexively. Strip-Tease appears to comment upon or at least capture something of the Nico that The Factory would tease out in the Warhol–Nico films – the persona Nico would establish and consolidate for the rest of her career, from chanteuse, to Chelsea girl, to moon goddess. Strip Tease presents several scenes in the film organized around how difficult Ariane/Nico finds it to be conventionally sexy and alluring and therefore she must be taught and instructed in the erotic art of strip-tease. An early scene in the film around preparation for her debut strip-tease act – billed as Trouble et Mystere – sees Ariane standing in front of a mirror being schooled by a female colleague alongside the male patron of the club as they try and teach her ‘to awaken desire’. Ariane, a double for Nico herself, forces a smile, a labour now so foreign to her body and feeling; she fails to the extent that the male patron must intervene to demonstrate how the buttons of her blouse must be undone. Ariane/Nico is unable to conform to the idea of sexiness, allure, like the strippers she is surrounded by in the club; in fact, even feigning pleasant emotion is done with great difficulty and foreignness. If anything, what Ariane/Nico is good at is appearing bored and disconnected from the efforts required of these particularly belaboured sexual acts. Despite her obvious beauty, Nico performs Ariane as a character who is constantly uncomfortable with her situation as the sexual object of others, as well as with the bitchiness of her female colleagues, and the difficulty she has is often in living up to the ideals and stereotypes of a culture of posing and pleasing. This would appear to be not dissimilar to modelling, and equally defined through the fantasy of another’s projection. The first part of Strip-Tease is about the struggle to get Ariane/Nico performance-ready as an erotic dancer. She tries on different outfits (a leopard-print cat suit – ‘that’s ridiculous’) and attempts to overcome, as one characters accuses, her ‘wooden-ness’. The novel solution to Ariane’s ‘wooden-ness’ eventually sees her performing alongside a marionette modelled on herself. Therefore, the doll as her doppelgänger, prioritizing sameness rather than erotic difference, functions to conceal the ‘woodenness’ of the ‘real woman’ who cannot seemingly fake the necessary levels of sexual allure. In the ‘marionette number’ Ariane/Nico’s failure as an erotic performer is symbolized by the wooden movements and un-emotive expression that is mirrored by the marionette who seems, in fact, to be taking the lead. When Ariane does eventually force a smile, it is when she turns to look at the marionette in a moment of mutual recognition of their shared manipulation as dolls by male puppet masters. These two scenes are justified narratively within Strip-Tease but they de facto comment on Nico’s persona, performance and history as a model and actor that, in her doll-like woodenness and refusal to be sexy, anticipates the reviews of her later career and comments made by others. Nico was often thought of as cold, the glacial beauty, and was written about as unmoving in terms physicality and emotion; in Strip-Tease one character remarks, ‘you walk like a marble statute’. In addition, Ariane finds romance difficult. When she is showered by bouquets of flowers, rather than feel flattered by her male paramour in conforming to romantic convention she remarks ‘What am I, a war memorial?’ The accusation of being like marble strikes a chord in relation to Nico’s solo album from 1968 called The Marble Index. Nico’s apparent marble-ness, as that which she is first accused of in Strip-Tease, can be understood in the two ways in which others have come to define her – first, as the ‘statuesque’ model and, second, as the stone-cold chanteuse of the Velvet Underground who lacked affective vocal modulation. Nico’s singing voice is perceived to lack any emotional resonance that is a part of its appeal of course. Her voice has been described variously in Wagnerian terms as a Gotterdammerung one (Harvard 2004: 127), Teutonic (Scherman and Dalton 2009: 310), like wind in a drainpipe, and like an IBM computer with a Garbo accent (Warhol and Hackett 1980: 145).

This self-fashioned persona that embraces the cold, emotionless and unmovable features of marble that others have identified and accused her of are keenly allied to notions of stoicism, boredom, permanence, refusal and unaffected disinterest and disconnection. A possible reaction to her early modelling career and acting? A woman initially defined by the value of beauty and appearance, it brought her work in fashion images and in La dolce vita but it did not ‘work’ in Strip-Tease, and little subsequent employment in the European film industry in the 1960s was forthcoming, bar some uncredited appearances and a small part in the Jean-Paul Belmondo gangster acting career much later in the 1970s as a muse (not mutual) for filmmaker Phillipe Garrel, appearing in several of his films, including La cicatrice intérieure (Garrel, 1972), Les hautes solitudes (Garrel, 1974) and Un ange passé (Garrel, 1975). However, in the 1960s marble-esque Nico who failed the normative expectations of erotic allure is precisely the impasse that Warhol would champion. Warhol’s interest in boredom and dis-affect is perfectly matched in Nico as a woman whose calling was to mine banality and beauty for avant-garde ends. For Nico, the appeal of Warhol’s Factory is that it offered women, though not all, an alternative space to explore themselves as individuals and artists, free from the otherwise restrictive, and very much patriarchal and sexist at the time, music, fashion and film industries. Nico would eventually arrive at The Factory late in 1965, possibly December, although she no doubt encountered Warhol and members of his entourage before through the many overlapping social scenes, such as the previously mentioned party at Danny Fields just after Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963. Nico arrived during another busy filmmaking year for Warhol and close to his recent split from Edie Sedgwick who defected to the Bob Dylan crowd. Warhol and Nico’s affinity for each other would result in several collaborations and she would fill the void, in Warhol’s life and in Warhol’s cinema, left by Sedgwick

3. WARHOL AND NICO

Warhol often brought disparate elements together, especially those entirely incongruous both in art and in the social scene he created around the Factory studio – a scene that attracted wealthy socialites, artists, poets, dancers, junkies, hustlers, curators and opera lovers into a unique milieu of near mythical status, and in the case of Nico, whose presence dominates 1966, the disparate and incongruous juxtaposition of her statuesque beauty and Europeanness against the dark proto-punk image and sound of The Velvet Underground. Many Factory superstars and acolytes were fairly disparaging of Nico. Mary Woronov writes in her Factory memoir Swimming Underground that Nico ‘was so beautiful she expected everyone to want to fuck her, even the furniture, which groaned out loud when she walked in the room. I had seen chairs creep across the carpet in the hope that she might sit down on them’ (1995: 25). Nico had turned away from her lot in fashion and popular cinema in what appears to be a reinvention of herself in the mid-1960s, a reinvention often recounted as ‘difficult’, volatile and narcissistic. Like Nico, Warhol also turned away from his formative years. As Donna De Salvo writes, Warhol ‘ultimately rejected the fashion world in favour of images taken from advertising like Coca Cola, Campbell’s soup, Del Monte Peaches’ (1992: 88). The rejection of the metier of their former selves and the fascination Warhol and Nico exhibited for each other was mutual and collaborative in as much as they both negotiated each other’s associations with clichés of American and European sensibilities in subtle and complex relational experiments beyond the self/other of artist and muse. Nico’s appeal perhaps is that her difficult persona could be distilled and mediated by Warhol as a modern art sensibility and she in turn exploited it self-consciously as if it were in itself an avant-garde practice to be difficult and detached. The story of Nico, Warhol, and the Factory is a long one, with many characters, but for the purposes of succinctly making a case for how Warhol and Nico worked together to not only make art but negotiate the meanings of ‘America’ and ‘Europe’ for each other I will limit myself to a few examples of Warhol’s filmmaking.

From 1963 to 1968 Warhol was actively involved in filmmaking alongside his fine art, resulting in a vast and complex body of work that includes more than 4000 reels of film ranging from the short four-minute Screen Tests, talky vehicles like Hedy (1965), My Hustler and Face (1965), to longer durational works like Empire (1964), and attempts at commercial filmmaking and exploitation with Nude Restaurant (1967) and Bike Boy (1967–68). The enormity of Warhol’s cinema makes it difficult to generalize; nonetheless, certain tendencies and obsessions emerge around portraiture, the technological agency of the recording apparatus, experiments in duration and temporality, and the fascination with ‘superstars’, their performances, personalities and the abstract quality of possessing ‘screen presence’. Nico appears in eleven Screen Tests, which are short four-minute twenty-second silent black and white films of which 472 were made between 1964 and 1966. Nico also appears in several films related to the Velvet Underground, including The Velvet Underground, The Velvet Underground and Nico, The Velvet Underground Tarot Cards, and the concert film The Velvet Underground in Boston (all 1966). She also appears in two reels of Chelsea Girls (1966), and the individual experimental films Ari and Mario with her son Ari, The Closet, and Nico/Antoine with the French ‘protest singer’ (all 1966). The following year Nico appeared briefly in the sexploitation film I, a Man (1967) opposite Tom Baker (because Warhol could not get Jim Morrison) and titled after the Swedish Danish film I, a Woman (Ahlberg, 1965), which was for American audiences another sexually scandalous European import. Nico was also in Imitation of Christ (1967) and the conceptual film Sunset (1967), in which she reads the same lines from a short tone poem repeatedly as the sun sets in California. She also appears in eighteen reels of Warhol’s 25-hour multi-screen \*\*\*\* (Four Stars) (1967), which includes the unedited reels used for I, a Man and Imitation of Christ. What is striking about Nico’s presence and performance in those films is that she tends to do very little of what appears to be acting in the conventional sense, and joins the company of Paul America and Edie Sedgwick who similarly do very little but ‘appear’ in Warhol’s film. In Warhol’s star system, Nico is classified as a beauty rather than a talker such as Ondine and Brigid Berlin. However, Nico does a lot of talking in The Closet (1966) in sexually intimidating her younger co-star Randy Bourscheidt.

Nico is often presented as being herself in the films that she appears in and is similar to Edie Sedgwick in that regard. Nico is fascinating by simply being on-screen. This is in keeping with Warhol’s filmmaking ethos that he ‘only wanted to find great people and let them be themselves and talk about what they usually talked about and I’d film them for a certain length of time and that would be the movie’ (Warhol and Hackett 1980: 110). Those simplistic claims and naïve statements that Warhol espoused often concealed avant-garde intentions to test the limits of, for example, acting and performance. Nico’s arrival offered Warhol a new superstar and collaborator, a European one, connected to the fashion world he once illustrated and which they both to differing degrees rejected. Audiences for Warhol’s cinema would have come to know Nico through Chelsea Girls (1966) as Warhol’s mostly widely seen 1966 film. It marks a moment when underground cinema was for a moment over ground and popular enough to receive national reviews and pique the interest of periodicals like Newsweek (Kroll 1967). Chelsea Girls was an experiment in doublescreen projection comprising twelve thirty-three-minute colour and black and white reels projected side by side with a running time of three hours and fourteen minutes. The first reel of the theatrical release features Nico in her kitchen trimming her bangs; her young son Ari is milling about, while another factory figure Eric Emerson potters in the background. The first striking feature of ‘Nico in Kitchen’ is the reel’s utter banality in depicting a domestic scene in which nothing happens unless one counts Nico cutting her hair as ‘action’. This is of course deliberate. Nico does not just cut her hair but trims herfringe with the tiniest scissors, perhaps in reference to Warhol’s earlier three Haircut films (1964), but ‘reading artfully’ one might think of this haircutting performance as a minimalist gesture. The second striking feature of the reel is Warhol’s deliberately erratic camera work. ‘Nico in Kitchen’ begins with a medium shot, the camera positioned in a hallway at once removed from the ‘action’, before zooming in rapidly, the image comes in and out of focus, and finally resolves to a tight close-up of Nico’s face. The most radical aspect of the film is not the ‘bad camerawork’ but the decision to feature a banal domestic scene in which nothing appears to happen. 5 After five minutes the left-side screen and the second reel of Chelsea Girls begins with Ondine, who does a lot of talking and a lot of drugs, offering Ingrid Superstar a mock confession of her sexual proclivities. The two reels juxtaposed offer the excitement of audience assumptions around underground cinema and its protagonists as transgressive for which Ondine’s reel does deliver but Nico’s reel is alternatively radical in its under-performance of outrageous behaviour. One is perhaps too much and the other too little but both share an ideal that the stars of Chelsea Girls appear as they are in ‘every real moment’ as Warhol writes in PoPism (Warhol and Hackett 1980: 136). How to make sense of Nico’s and others’ screen performances in Warhol’s films is something that comes to the fore in reviews of Chelsea Girls (1966) as film critics’ first encounter with underground cinema and the screen life of Warhol’s Factory people. What seemed to provoke them most was not the transgressive content of Ondine and Brigid Berlin shooting up, which was perhaps expected, as much as the need to try and make sense of the banality presented by Nico’s reels and whether there was anything that might be considered ‘actual’ acting in what she does on-screen. In two reviews of Chelsea Girls, the critics write:

I am told, the film was partially ‘acted,’ but to experience it all is cinema verite. Conscious of the camera, the ‘actors’ play their assigned ‘roles’ (which, it must be said, are well-suited for them). All three become a part of the ritual: actor, role, camera. But when, through boredom or confusion or anger, the actor falters, and the roll falls, and the now forgotten camera still rolls, the real person shows through, as angry, as bored, as lost as the role he plays, but more human. (Ronder 1966)

The ‘acting’ further assaults the viewer’s cool because no one seems to be acing at all. They just seem to be portraying themselves, in a turned on way. The level of competence is never less than professional, and is reinforced by a striking, ardent amateurism. A man who has just taken dope, for instance, stares at the audience with a contempt that could never be mustered by someone who had to earn a living by acting. (Monaghan 1967)

Even Warhol’s critical champion Jonas Mekas reviewing Chelsea Girls for Village Voice writes and one if the amazing things about this film is that the people in it are not really actors; or if they are acting, their acting becomes unimportant, it becomes of their personalities, and there they are, totally real, with their transformed, intensified selves. (1966) It is Warhol’s genius to make one assume that he simply films Nico as she really is.

**4. SCREEN TESTS**

Between 1964 and 1966, one of Warhol’s film projects was a series of short film portraits called the Screen Tests. They were not testing for any future film in the conventional sense of the screen test; rather they were portraits of the many different people acquainted with Warhol, including those passing through the Factory, other artists and collaborators from a range of practices such as dance and poetry, beautiful people especially handsome boys, and some well-known sixties’ figures from the art, literature and music world, like Bob Dylan and Susan Sontag. Nico was one of the few women along with Jane Holzer and Edie Sedgwick for whom Warhol took several Screen Tests; most subjects were filmed once or twice at the most with the exception of members of the Velvet Underground and Warhol’s studio assistant, the poet Gerard Malanga. Like Nico, a small number of Screen Tests are of Europeans, such as the artists Salvador Dali (1966), Marcel Duchamp (1966) and Arman (1964), musicians like the French Antoine (1966), known then as the ‘French Dylan’ and in Nico/Antoine filmed the same day, and the British pop star Donovan (1966). The Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli (1966) features in a Screen Test, as does the Italian fashion model Benadetta Barzini (1966), who has three Screen Tests and was romantically involved with Gerard Malanga. There is a European presence among the Screen Tests but of the 472 that were shot across the two years they are vastly outnumbered by Americans. Nico, on the other hand, is one of those exceptional subjects, and a European, who is represented by eleven individual Screen Tests.

The Screen Tests were in keeping with Warhol’s conceptual exploration of portraiture as a historical art convention. There is no editing in the Screen Tests, and in Warhol’s cinema as a whole before 1967, with the exception of Sleep (1963), and what comes out of the camera at the end of the filming is the completed film. Warhol did experiment in the Screen Tests using different backdrops and in-camera techniques such as zooming as well as turning the camera off and on to create disruptive ‘strobe cuts’, but in principle Screen Tests are minimalist silent works. Warhol projected Screen Tests at the silent speed of 16fps as his temporal signature so that each Screen Test lasts around four minutes and twenty seconds rather that the three minutes it takes for the 100’ film to run through the camera at sound speed. The Screen Tests, as Angell suggests, solicit an ‘existential dilemma of performing’ (2006: 14), and they do elicit different responses from the subjects. The reaction to being filmed makes the work, Callie Angell argues, collaborative, and, perhaps intentionally, they are a revelation of one’s personality as they sit in front of Warhol’s camera, contemplating what it means to be filmed, to be on film. Nico was no stranger to being on film but the underground cinema Warhol represented was far removed from the conventions of popular cinema, especially at the level of production and exhibition as Chelsea Girls attests. Nico’s first Screen Tests would have been made very close to her arrival at The Factory with the later Screen Tests filmed for use as background and projection during Warhol’s multi-media EPI (Exploding Plastic Inevitable) with The Velvet Underground and Nico.

My final example here is the Screen Test catalogued as ST238 (they are arranged alphabetically by name rather than date of filming), the third one of Nico’s eleven, with a note on the Kodak box that it is ‘best orig. of Nico for show’ (Angell, ST 142), thus indicating it was most definitely used for Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable multimedia shows. ST238 begins with Nico holding her hand up to her mouth, which is a recurring gesture throughout that marks her performance as pensive and introspective as if caught in a moment of self-analysing. Nico is aware of how to manipulate the single bright source of light suggesting this is not her first Screen Test since she clearly knows the aesthetic effect of the camera’s proximity and lighting set-up. Nico goes through a series of subtle poses that evoke the model’s labour before raising up a magazine she has been holding out of frame. Nico begins to read the magazine momentarily before going back to holding her hand up to her mouth and moving her head so that most of her face is obscured by shadow. Deliberately appearing pensive, resistant, she usurps the camera and the light’s unchanging fixity, moving almost completely out of frame and then back in again toying with the light source as it produces stark zones of contrasting light and shadow until she finds an angle that almost completely hides her face in the dimness. Is it a wrestle with being filmed or a wrestle with Warhol? She refuses being made the other of Warhol’s camera. Nico asserts her agency, reinforcing the technological passivity of the apparatus, and the opposite of the passive fashion model and the fictional stripper since ST283 is about her agency and control, yet under the controlled condition of Warhol’s set-up. ST283 recalls the play of chiaroscuro in Warhol’s longer portrait film Blow Job (Warhol, 1964) and Paul America’s Screen Test (ST 1965) and Nico may have seen these portrait films and had it in mind in her toying with light and shadow. Nevertheless, Nico is not the passive felatee of Blow Job in that she is collaboratively exploiting the Screen Test format to articulate in the film’s silence, the temporality, the gestures, and the minimalist form, a reflection on her early working life. Her mugging, lolling and tilting head, the looking up as if utterly bored, swaying momentarily out of screen, searching for the darkest of shadows, the brief ersatz modelling poses, the appearance to be self-analysing, in which she frames herself within Warhol’s frame, that she is thinking about every conceited movement and micro-gesture in the Screen Test’s short, minimal, durational format appears to be communicating an idea. An idea that modelling was trivial and easy or dark, depressing, uncomfortable and artificial? That, like the character of Ariane in Strip-Tease, she would rather remain hidden in the dark than be exposed by the light of another man’s gaze? Nico clearly demonstrates an awareness and understanding of the tight framing and manipulation of the single bright light source. Nico uses her learned gestural skills from modelling to look for the tenebrous shadows, posing as if deep in thought, she works it so that she appears slightly miserable and definitely bored not as a performance of her present Factory moment, since this is a new outlet of personal self-fashioning, but as a statement of her early career in fashion and film and the tendency for others to simply see her as a statuesque beauty. What statement on her prior life emerges in those four minutes of screen performance? Is it an expression of her new agency to reflect on who Nico was and what she has become, from C to K to Nico? Her Screen Tests seemingly allows for a mutually collaborative exploration of her evolving persona through Warhol’s experimental film techniques. If Nico is telling us something about her formative career in ST238, then some of the later Screen Tests appear to tell us something about her new found relationship with America or what she, as a European, thinks, albeit in moving image art media, about American culture. Along with Lou Reed, Nico features in several Screen Tests alongside consumable props – for example, ST269 (1966) is Lou Reed with a bottle of Coca Cola and ST244 (1966) is Nico with a bottle of Coca Cola. This is also in thematic keeping with several earlier paintings by Warhol of coke bottles between 1961 and 1962. The other two ‘pseudo commercials’ (Angell 161) among the Screen Tests are those of Reed and Nico posing with or consuming Hershey chocolate bars; Nico appears in two (ST245 and ST246) and Reed in another two (ST270 and ST271). The first of the Hershey Screen Tests (ST245 and ST270) is fairly static with Nico and Reed holding the chocolate bars up to their face, whereas the second of the Screen Tests (ST246 and ST271) involves Warhol’s deliberately ‘bad camerawork’ (Needham 2013) – wildly zooming and panning with the camera. These ‘pseudo commercial’ Screen Tests were intended as background projections for The Velvet Underground but Nico’s second Hershey bar test reveals itself to be a further commentary on the subject of Euro-American relations. In ST44 Nico takes the smallest nibble from the corner of a large Hershey bar. Her reluctance to eat much more seems to speak of a distaste for the chocolate itself, since we already know the cliché that European chocolate is superior to American chocolate, but in a grander way it suggests a distaste for American culture. Nico cannot stand much more of American culture than a nibble at its edges. America, like the chocolate she barely consumes, is boring and fails to sustain her interest and appetite. Warhol, of course, would secretly consume luxurious European chocolates while appearing to promote in his art the most American of brands. In the eighties he even painted, or rather smeared, chocolate and gesso across canvas to create a series of Chocolate Paintings (1983).

**5. CONCLUSION**

Europe was something Nico escaped from in the 1960s and returned to in the 1970s for most of her late career, flitting throughout Europe and with lovers in various key European cities. She was also a heroin addict and later died in 1988, sadly while she was ‘clean’, from a fatal head injury falling off a bicycle in Ibiza. Warhol had many European exhibitions but always downplayed his own European heritage as belonging to an Eastern European immigrant family in Pittsburgh. For both Nico and Warhol Europe was something that they both negotiated, reinforced, even erased in their identities. Nico’s European-ness was certainly exaggerated in the United States with avant-garde intentions both of her own self-fashioning as difficult and aloof but keenly exploited by others like Warhol who celebrated her ‘cool’ and indifference. Warhol downplayed his European-ness, more a heritage and upbringing than a life ever lived in Europe; he quickly dropped the ‘a’ in Warhola. Nonetheless, the adoration and iconography in some of his painting and his fondness for using gold materials in his art recall his religious Byzantine childhood: a childhood shaped equally by Hollywood cinema and American consumer culture. Warhol’s resplendent and saintly Gold Marilyn (1962) is as close as one gets to exposing Warhol’s otherwise repressed Rusyn family history. The film work stemming from Warhol and Nico’s relationship, but especially the Screen Tests, seems to allow each of them to explore and invest in ideas, however tenuous, of what Europe might mean for them as it brushes against America and in between the popular and the avant-garde. Perhaps they use each other to connect and disconnect from the ways in which Europe has shaped them formatively in their early careers (investigating, rejecting, uncovering) and in doing so create new ways of relating to each other as artist and muse, not as an inequality of subject/object artist/ lover but as a equality of collaboration and mutual interest in which Warhol would also be Nico’s muse, a friendship as much as productive source of his own repressed Europe.

**NOTES**

1. I borrow the term ‘mutual muses’ here from Chris Holmlund (2016) to refer to particular creative pairings that are clearly collaborative and equal though each person has a different role in the collaboration. It also marks a difference from artistic couplings for example, Gilbert and George, while eschewing the convention of the muse as the object of fascination and admiration of a male artist.

2. Some of this early collaborative work includes Love is a Pink Cake (1952), A is an Alphabet. (1953), Holy Cats (1960), In the Bottom of My Garden (1956), and A Gold Book (1957) some of which were shown in small gallery exhibitions in New York (Hugo Gallery, Bodley Gallery and Loft Gallery).

3. Warhol also illustrated covers for Opera News and created Opera themed drawings such as Daphnis and Chloe (1954) (based on the Ravell Ballet).

4. Warhol began working for Gene Moore in 1955 and may have executed an earlier version of

Miss Dior around that time as there is an illustration often dated to 1955 that has only minor differences. The three-dimensional display screen has additional illustration and is much wider than the original work on paper.

5. For a detailed account and history of Warhol’s ‘bad camerawork’ as an avant-garde strategy see Needham (2013).

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