

RONALD TAVEL: THE COMPLETE IN-FACSIMILE  
WARHOL SHOOTING SCRIPTS

With the Author's Introduction to Each  
Shooting Script and His Factory Memoirs

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**FIFTY FANTASTICKS**

Shot at the Factory

(Tavel sequence) on December 20, 1964

Black and white, silent, 150 minutes, using a Bolex 8mm camera

Partially restored

Sharp focus, stationary camera: close-shots.

Unscripted



Ronald Tavel in FIFTY FANTASTICKS

Andy rented the large New Yorker Theatre on upper Broadway for an hour and a half early on the morning of December 20th for a private screening of HARLOT. That way we could see what we had, or if we had anything, to spring on the public. On that house's state of the art equipment, the film looked fine and the sound track was perfectly audible. -Too audible, for my taste.

I squinted in the bright sunlight of the world's most famous artery when we emerged from the pitch black cinema, a blinking few seconds in which people always feel, and perhaps are, vulnerable. Waiting for that moment, Andy turned to me suddenly and said, "Come back to the Factory now, I want to take a roll of you."

"But I - I'm not prepared - I look like hell!" I stammered.

"No, it's O.K.," he returned, "you look great."

The Warhol Living Portraits got off the ground almost as soon as Andy started filming. They were done on three-minute silent reels. The subject was seated between the camera which squatted on a tripod and a blank, open projection screen. Andy would click on the camera and walk off. The portraits always were telling, in their way as much as or more so than ones on canvas. In the end, over five hundred such reels accumulated. Mine was slated for inclusion in a feature called, FIFTY FANTASTICKS: as the title implies, a collection of fifty of these breathing portraits.

Gerard made double-frame stills from a number of these rolls, with the preceding frame above the slightly cropped second, wrote a lyric to go with each, and published them in a huge and heavy softback called SCREEN TESTS. As a result, film historians today call the five hundred living portraits screen tests. They should not: they were far more final than that.

People always ask what it was like to sit for one of these.

In a word, as you can imagine, uncomfortable. But since I had watched a number of other subjects go through the ordeal, I had a plan. Subjects advised each other, it was best to have a plan. Otherwise, the camera would "take over and get you." The extent to which the relentlessly grinding little eye was identified as an adversary is evident in actress Mary Woronov's portrait (1966). She relates to it with the uneasy hostility one normally reserves for an enemy in whose ugly corner sits all the advantage.

I decided to see that Bolex as the implacable Out-There in the form of a succulent hottie one had nevertheless to vamp. I lit a Pall Mall, relaxed, and came on to it with an understated twinkle, which understatement I gauged appropriate to a close shot. Factory pundits Danny Fields and Don Lyons, viewing the smoke-filled rush and laughing at its haute insolence and low humor, agreed: "Oh, yeah! it's you!"

Healthy, with even a touch of baby fat, the portrait presents me at my Factory happiest, a look that would not last long, but is flattering to say the least.

Drafted now into what Camille Paglia today calls The Royal House of Warhol, it was protocol for me to accompany Andy when he appeared in public: occasionally for brunch at Serendipity's, then in the East 60s - where we shortly discovered a blond, teenaged waiter, Rene Ricard, nowadays a well-known poet and art critic, "Oh, how cute!" Andy enthused - but more often, in the evenings, at exclusive parties. Nights at the jammed, place-to-hold-court, back room of Max's Kansas City on Park Avenue South and evenings at shindigs all over Manhattan are among my most persistent impressions of that era.

Most of all, there was the great and famous open-house that Andy himself threw at the Factory. The crowded affair boasted attendance by Judy Garland, Zachary Scott, and Freddie and Isabelle Eberstadt; and Montgomery Clift, whom I told I thought was "seasoned enough and ready now" to appear in a Warhol Flick (out of it, he said, blankly, "Thank you"); and stunning Rudy Nureyev, at the peak of his popularity, who danced feverishly with his male lover. Then he shattered the equipment of the paparazzo who snapped them

in the act. I spoke to most everyone at that gala, for in the flushed expression of all present you could read their belief that they partied that moment not only in the center of New York's art life, but the world. Still, as a writer, I devoted the lion's share of my time to observing from the sidelines, and spent a lot of it in the company of the willowy, wide-eyed Mrs. Eberstadt, the daughter of Ogden Nash and patron of Jack Smith, a partner of mine in modeling at several of Smith's lengthy and legendary still-photography sessions. She was leaning against a major support post and couldn't move very far - having been "sewn" into her gorgeous gown for the evening, carried to the gala, then propped up against the pillar, and left there. "One must suffer for fashion," she instructed me gently, and I flashed that it was probably by just such public imprisonment that the lame Lord Byron had made his early rep in the Waltz Balls of 1812.

Yet despite the hectic hobnobs, whose frequency grew to six or seven a week, my strongest image of Andy in 1964 is the one he settled for on Christmas Eve, because I spent that night alone with him at the Factory. He worked through the long hours, crouching over sets of his Marilyn and Jackie silk screens, spraying each with different primary colors and commenting to me the while on his choices. Then he moved some large Elvis Presley black and white double-images to a better stacking spot elsewhere in the studio, washed up and dried his hands. It was past midnight and he would be spending what remained of the hours till dawn with his aged mother, and be taking her to services in the morning.

It was quiet while he worked, I remember listening to the sound of the light, spaced traffic on 47th Street. He spoke straight, he made no jokes, he asked my opinion of the finished silk screens and some people coming and going in the loft at the time. He told me that alone amongst them, he found me always calm and oddly self-possessed. He inquired, expecting no answer, as to why that was.

He cabbed me to where I wanted to be, then instructed the driver to go on up Third and take him home.





**Ronald Tavel in FIFTY FANTASTICKS. (The Museum of Modern Art lists this 3-minute film as THE RONALD TAVEL SCREEN TEST; or Screen Tests Code: S1; or 19 No. 1**