

JAIL

Shot on location: The Filmmakers' Archive and Cinematheque
Summer 1967

Color, 16mm sound, 24 fps, 70 minutes

Sharp focus, with moving camera

with:

Gerard Malanga, Ronald Tavel, etc.

Camera: Andy Warhol

There is an old jailhouse on the corner of Second Avenue and 2nd Street, said to have been a nightly lockup in its last years of service, but which was standing vacant and boarded up for as long back as I can remember. Jonas Mekas, the somewhat shady journalistic promoter of underground indies and founding manager of the Filmmaker's Cinematheque, prevailed upon the city to turn it into a sound studio, film archive, and new headquarters for his Cinematheque. Jonas let moviemakers he favored use its facilities gratis for editing and/or lensing, and in the summer of 1967, though it struck me as bringing coals to Newcastle or dolts to L.A., Andy was availing himself of the still-intact cell blocks to shoot an improvised color feature called, in the clipped Warholian tradition, JAIL.

I was making an appearance there on some business and discovered him almost buried in a bevy of chic male coattail-hangers, cover boys lost somewhere between Vanity Fair and Better Body Power mags. In a situation reminiscent of BITCH, the improv was faltering and he asked me to step in and move it along. I was not very much in the mood, seeing myself at the moment as a wryly distant dignitary revisiting the scene of his 'umble origin, but did some through-the-bars dialoguing to the boys in the cell adjoining the one I was filmed in.

The occasion stays with me less for the day's dubious, recorded theatrics, than for the strange and compromising liberty that a tall, strapping fellow, resembling a farmhand, took in manhandling Andy. They may or may not have been sharing a brief, socially-misceginatious affair, but I found having to stand next to these roughhouse intimacies downright embarrassing.

I sometimes visited Andy's spanking new, high tech office down on Union Square in 1968, but things were just not the same. "Factory" seemed to the then current entourage too corny a collar for the premises, and now it would be a very plain "Studio." And the entourage would office workers. The great and wild filmmaking people of his lensing heyday were gone, and after he was shot by

Valerie Solanas on June 3rd, with few exceptions an altered Andy retired personally from his cottage industry but bartered away his good name as executive producer to those subsequent "Warhol" efforts so clearly not Warhol. By then I was established as a playwright myself and, omitting SECRETS OF THE CITIZENS' CORRECTION COMMITTEE which I created for Richard McGuinness and James Stoller, my own occasional forays into film work were limited to treatments and sketches for daytime TV and mainstream movies.

In recent years, however, I've come back to indie screenwriting, one hopes with some evidence of a lifetime's reflecting on it.

Edie Sedgwick, leaving little for the grave, choked on the vomit of her OD'ing one night in Santa Barbara and died there in November 1971. Marie Menken and Willard Maas, while they were still in their fifties, collapsed after bingeing and died within three days of each other. I lost track of Buddy Wirtschafter, Gregory Battcock, and Aniram Anipso, but in time learned that they too had passed away.

Ingrid Superstar became a bag lady during the eighties, and was picked up by the police half frozen one morning out in Jersey. She was working in an upstate mill in 1988 and leaving her post for an apparent break, her cigarettes and purse in place on her desk, she wandered down to a river beside the workhouse and was never seen again. Years of drug and alcohol abuse had damaged Ondine's liver beyond regeneration and though he went clean in 1975, he never fully regained his health, strength, or remarkable wit, and died of liver failure in his mother's home out in Queens in 1990.

Eric Emerson brought suit against Andy in the early seventies for non-payment on all the long films in which he'd acted, but Andy's lawyers stalled the trial until Eric went to Italy, then scheduled it and in his absence had the case voided for the plaintiff's failure to appear in court. In May 1975 he either OD'ed on heroin or was murdered, his body carelessly tossed into the street and his bicycle broken and thrown beside it to simulate a traffic accident. Couldn't have fooled a rookie nark, but there was no investigation.

Following several admittances to Beth Israel on Stuyvesant Park and E.15th, the lifelong semi-celibate Jack Smith startled everyone by revealing that he was suffering from complications related to AIDS, and succumbed there in September 1989.

I brought suit against Andy myself for back payments in 1971, but eventually dropped the litigation when I realized his need to dominate and outdo would sooner see his attorneys bleed him blue to the cleaners than square off with me. Convinced I detested him, he found it hard to swallow his pride, but suggested we do some Hollywood movies together rather than continue disputing. I felt he was dreaming qua usual re Hollywood, but was altogether too emotional by then, in light of what I considered to be his ingratitude, to entertain collaborating any further. In a remarkable gesture of competitiveness, he withdrew from circulation all of the films that I'd written and directed myself and secreted them away under lock and key for the remainder of his life - and then some, via his estate.

Around 1980, Professor Bertram attempted to affect a reconciliation between us, more related to my initially modeling for Andy as had been my first standing with him, rather than writing again. He reports that Andy was interested, but I remained inflexible, which I relate knowing how unforgiveable that now must sound. In my defense, I believed one's mutualities survive no hiatus.

Andy, of course, went on to become the most famous artist of the century: and, unattended, despite his estimated worth of two-thirds of a billion dollars, after being administered a dose of Cefoxitin following routine gallbladder surgery - Cefoxitin, to which he was allergic - bled to death on February 22, 1987.

There is in snow or rain a conduct as strong as voices. Once in a wood by a stream in Pennsylvania, on a blind and moonless night I stopped by a thick stand of birch and felt I couldn't move. A presence was holding me there. Though I could see no thing or no one, a person I knew then who held my life in his close and unargued jurisdiction, not daring to exhale, was inches away from me.