

the Rolling Stones album “Sticky Fingers.”

However, many of us were living in homosexual subcultures at the same time—including myself—so why couldn’t we accomplish what some of Andy’s subcultural cohort did? Perhaps it is this mystery that helps qualify him as a genius. What is unfair, or merely too bad, is that some of the antics of the Factory people were not revealed as a sensibility that was sweeping large portions of our generation. So many of us memorized Kim Novak’s lines in *Jeanne Eagels*. But one—the inimitable Candy Darling—was given the opportunity to recite them under the spotlight and did it better than anyone else could. I only wish it could have been pointed out that, at the time, she stood for so many of us.

Andy didn’t leave us a legacy like other artists before him had. He left behind stale blood, sucked from popular culture. The tragedy of the current generation is their gradual discovery that there is no meta-dimension to perspectives on culture any more. (I wish they’d hurry up and find that out.) They look for exploitive traditions to subvert and parody, without realizing that they are only the products of that subversion and postdate that parody by too many years. It saddens me to some degree to witness them searching for a complex cynicism. Cynicism is a creative resource that can be used up. Since Warhol, there isn’t any available, unless you’re content with being Jayne Mansfield to his Marilyn Monroe. We could go back into history and try to force a comparison with the Weimer Republic, but the devastation that was to come after that period can’t seriously be compared to the cultural sterility we are already facing. Describing the “Regarding Warhol: Sixty Artists, Fifty Years” exhibition at the Met, Roberta Smith remarked in the *New York Times*, “That it can seem that just about any artist from the last three decades could have been included testifies either to Warhol’s influence or the show’s shapelessness (14).”

Almost. But perhaps Roberts should have also added that “shapelessness” also characterizes Warhol’s gargantuan output. Like the hoarder he was, he has crowded our world with so many repetitive instances of his work that the individual examples have rudely begun to elbow one another, necessitating, at least until recently, aggressive price-control measures on the part of the Warhol Foundation.

One of several things about the show at the Met that puzzled me was the curators’ decision to juxtapose the rude apocalyptic violence of a Neo-Expressionist Jean-Michel Basquiat painting, wonderfully crammed with Expressionist detail, to an orange Warhol silkscreen of predictably repeated electric chairs. Certainly any relationship between the two is better expressed in Basquiat’s own words, uttered at the time of his joint show with Warhol at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery:

“I think I helped Andy more than he helped me (15).”

Are we living today the fears expressed by critic Calvin Tomkins way back in 1970 when he contributed to the monograph *Andy Warhol* (16) and discussed the apolitical nature of Andy’s world:

“Will his face inhabit the Seventies as it has the Sixties? ... At the moment, though, what we seem to see reflected in that strange face is a sickness for which there may be no cure. This is the new shudder brought by Warhol’s art. Andy, in what one fervently hopes is just another put-on, begins to look more and more like the angel of death.”

**ENDNOTES** (1) *Andy Warhol and the Can That Sold the World*, Gary Indiana, p. 92-9. (2) Bruce Benderson, “John Giorno and the Half-full Glass,” *Vogue Homme International*, Spring Summer, No. 11, p.137 - 139. (3) Bantam, 1989, p. 57. (4) *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol* by Victor Bockris, Bantam, 1989, p. 96. (5) *Loner at the Ball: The Life of Andy Warhol* by Fred Lawrence Guiles, Bantam Press, 1989, p. 79. (6) Bockris, p. 73. (7) 1972, directed by Paul Morissey, with Joe Dallesandro, Sylvia Miles and Andrea Feldman. (8) Bockris, p. 72-3. (9) Bockris, p. 53. (10) Roberta Smith, “The In-Crowd Is All Here: ‘Regarding Warhol’ at the Metropolitan Museum,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 2012, online edition. (11) *Pop: The Genius of Andy Warhol* by Tony Scherman and David Salton, p. 29. (12) *Andy Warhol, Prince of Pop* by Jan Greenberg, Sandra Jordan, Laurel Leaf, 2007, p. 33. (13) Bockris, p. 195. (14) Smith, September 13, 2012, online edition. (15) Bockris, photo insert after p. 84, caption for invitation to Palladium, Tony Shafrazi Gallery. (16) *Andy Warhol* by John Coplans, Jonas Mekas, Calvin Tomkins, New York Graphic Society, 1979, p. 14.

My father used to buy up the losers, even though he never watched any of the fights himself. Instead he’d creep around back after the spectators and gamblers dispersed, and quietly make the losing dogs’ owners offers they’d be fools to refuse. Most of those guys were secretly happy not to have to kill their own dogs, so I suppose the re-introduction of money into the post-competition equation was a welcome culmination of those furtive, adrenaline-and blood-filled nights.

From as early as I can remember there were infirm and mangled pits in my father’s house. Missing limbs, eyes, ears, an entire half of a jaw in one case, blown apart by an errant bullet in a botched assassination attempt. But I never really thought about the source of all the walking wounded until the first time Papá took me along with him on a sweep after the fights. I was about ten when he looked at his watch one hot and quiet August night, switched off the TV, and then silently walked me a few blocks over to the boarded up house my mother had always warned me to avoid. It was slightly raised from the rest of the houses on the block, two-stories high with arched windows almost like an elegant lady’s eyes, a big backyard with a ten-foot wooden fence that had been haphazardly added only recently in light of the illicit activities being conducted there. The house looked old (even for Los Angeles), and there were always thugs and wannabe thugs hanging out on the dilapidated front porch. Slinging dope, and—according to my mother, who shuddered theatrically when she said it—women.

Papá rarely touched me the way you see a lot of parents do, but that night he gripped my hand firmly and in a decidedly fatherly way as we waded against the current of people pouring out of the house—many drunk and energized, a few solemn. Others’ pockets bulging with rolled bills, advertising their good luck. A lot of these latter guys’ arms, I noticed, were slung around heavily made-up, pretty girls who looked mostly bored, but also vaguely optimistic that the best part of the evening might still be to come.

When we reached the walkway alongside the house, my father suddenly dropped my hand and turned to me: “Don’t move from this spot,” he said softly in Spanish. “Right *here*.” He pointed to the buckled concrete between us, some weeds pushing shin-high through a

substantial crack. I heard a man's voice holler something I couldn't understand, followed by yelps from what sounded like two different dogs.

I tried to see around my father into the backyard, but he grabbed my chin and forced me to look into his eyes for a few uncomfortable seconds, something I generally avoided during the couple years since my mother left. Regardless, I knew what this look meant. So I stayed there in the dark and narrow space between the old house's paint-stripped wood on one side, and the neighboring property's shoulder-high chain-link fence on the other.

My father disappeared down the path and casually turned the corner into the yard, and I heard the same dude's voice saying in a jokey way, "St. Francis!" upon his arrival. And then an incredibly loud gunshot, probably a nine-millimeter, followed by two low woofs.

I was certain my father had just been killed by that bullet, and I must confess my first thoughts were not of fear nor sadness, but instead involved visions of the foster family I would eventually end up living with (when my mother couldn't be located), perhaps in the hills above Hollywood, or maybe even somewhere over those hills in Sherman Oaks or Encino, where my half-brother Tino worked nights at his parole job cleaning toilets at a Jewish kids school. But that was not to be, as I soon caught my father's voice speaking calmly in broken English, playing up the language barrier to his advantage by being the stupid old man, a threat to nobody. I couldn't stand being unable to see what was going on back there, so I squatted down to check whether there was a view through the crawl space. But there wasn't any room for me to slide under.

I could hear more random laughter, and sporadic ribbons of conversation, but mostly it was indecipherable. There was another gunshot then, which again didn't seem to alarm anybody. Well, besides me: I reached down to touch myself, and when I brought my fingers back up to my nose, I realized I'd pissed the front of my shorts a little.

I knew I'd pay if Papá caught me, but I couldn't stand not seeing what was going on any longer, so I crept up the pathway and peeked around the back of the house into the yard. There were rows of beat-up and rusty kennels, stacked two and three high. Some old tires, kicked over dog bowls, a thick rope hanging from a tree, a hose dripping into a dirty kiddie pool, blood smeared across the plastic. About seven or eight guys stood around my father, some of them linked to dogs with chains, some smoking. A couple of the dogs were standing, but most were lying panting in the dirt. One or two mauled half-to-death, it seemed. Both the impulse and command to fight vanished, almost like no savagery had ever erupted between them in the first place.

In the far corner of the yard was the guy with the gun. He stood over five dead dogs, their barrel-chests heaped atop one another: two black and whites, one blue, one brown. I couldn't make out the color of the dog on the bottom. Or maybe there were two.

I noticed my father's posture, the stiffness; it seemed apart from any other time I'd seen him interacting with people. He was formal and detached in his quiet negotiations, taking a small wad of twenties from his pocket and counting out the bills in front of the guy with the sickest-looking dog. Everybody of course knew of my father by then, but there were always new dogs from different neighborhoods brought in for fights. And, as I later learned when my father came back pistol-whipped over an ear one night, some owners didn't like the old guy trying to take out their garbage before they were ready to toss it.

My father handed over the money then, and in exchange was passed the end of a heavy chain. I strained to see what it was connected to, sticking my head farther out into the yard than it had been. This attracted the attention of the guy with the pistol, who looked in my direction. But before I could duck back behind the house, he caught my eye, smil-

ing lazily, lips sealed. I don't know whether it was really the case, but in my mind now—through what feels like a century of hindsight—he looks like Eazy-E, short and compact as one of those dogs, Jheri-curl tucked into a snap-back L.A. Kings cap, and an oversized black Raiders jacket. He kept staring at me, and I wondered whether he intended to let my father know I was there, or alert the other guys. But instead he calmly chambered another bullet, lowered it, and—never taking his eyes away from mine—squeezed the trigger again into the lifeless pile of dogs beneath him.

Back at the house, panting and sweaty from the three-block, full-on sprint, it felt like my entire body would revolt. Tears, vomit, spit, shit—I tried to hold it all down. Some of our dogs rushed me with tails wagging, jumping up to lick my face when I entered the living room. The little one-eyed one, Paco, sniffed forcibly at my crotch as I slipped by him, and I shoved his nose away from my dick repeatedly until I could shut the door to my bedroom. I peeled off my underwear and shorts and stuffed them under the bed, then changed into cleaner clothes, and by the time I made it back out to the living room, I could hear my father coming into the kitchen through the back door.

"Jose Carlos!" he yelled. Angry as shit. "Put everyone outside."

I looked into the kitchen. He was carrying a slick, jet-black dog, about fifty solid pounds of dead, limp weight in his arms. His shirt was covered in blood, feces, urine. Through a gash two of the dog's white ribs were visible, as well as the pink meat in between, like he had just been hanging at the butcher's or something.

I stared. "Do it!" he hissed, and I started grabbing up dogs and funneling them out into our backyard. They were excited, anxious, sniffing at the air. Some were whining, others barking, but after a few minutes, I managed to wrangle all of them—must've been about eight or ten at the time—and then the house was still and silent but for the new dog's panting and wheezing.

When I came back into the kitchen, my father had already laid a clean sheet over the dining table and placed the black dog on top, and I could see that his wounds were far more extensive than just the hole on his side. His face and ears were torn apart, bite wounds all over, and it looked like the flesh and fur around his neck had grown around a thick chain collar that had been slowly embedding for years. Pus and blood oozed around the chain in the places it surfaced through the skin. The thing was terrified, so dark and matted with blood, the only flash of

white from the corners of his eyes as he strained to look up at my father for a clue as to what might be coming next.

My father didn't speak to me, just pointed at various items he required as he methodically cleaned and shaved the dog, injected some Novocain and got to stitching him up in spots where there was enough skin to sew. I sat beside the dog's face while my father worked on its side. I couldn't look, still trying to hold it all in. The dog watched me while I stroked the only place on his head that was not cut up or stitched, an unbelievably soft and warm spot behind his left ear.

He did not require a muzzle, not even a loose cloth reminder tied around his snout to keep it shut. I tried not to conjure in my head any of the things that had been done to him, as recently as an hour before, much less for the few prior years he was in circulation, likely bait. He wasn't afraid though. His breaths steadied, and he tried lifting his head a couple times to lick my father's busy hands.

"He needs a name," Papá said quietly, as I gently eased the dog's head back down onto a towel. He let out a long sigh.

I had named almost all of the beasts that Papá brought into our house, in fact I'd always eagerly done so, thinking of each one as if it were a new mall-bought, pure-bred puppy jumping out of a box under the Christmas tree. But I didn't know what to call this one.

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